

The Destruction and Rebuilding of



the Afghan Air Force, 1989-2009



Forrest L. Marion

(Overleaf) U.S. Army Col. John Hansen (in middle, right knee on ground) poses with Air Corps Advisory Group (ACAG) members and interpreter-translators (ITs) in front of an Afghan National Army Air Corps Mi-35 helicopter. (All photos courtesy of the author.)

(Right) In Zahir's words, "in 1960 taken in a truck when I was moving to the F-86 aircraft with my instructor and my two other friends." (Translation provided by Mohammed Yousef Afzali, Cultural Advisor to Brig. Gen. Givhan, May 2009.)

BRIG. GEN. MOHAMMAD ZAHIR, RECALLED IN HIS RETIREMENT THAT THE AIR FORCE HAD DOUBLED IN SIZE UNDER DAUOD, FROM 200 TO 400 AIRCRAFT

In May 1919, during the brief Third Anglo-Afghan War, the Royal Air Force (RAF) employed a lone Handley Page V/1500 to bomb the palace in Kabul. Although little physical damage resulted, the bombing caused great distress among the city's residents. One author noted that "the women of the royal harem rushed on to the streets in terror." Within days, Afghanistan's King Amanullah Khan had called for a truce. Moreover, he also began planning to create his own air force. In the 1920s, Amanullah accepted a small number of aircraft from the Soviets, Italians, and British and sent Afghan pilot candidates to the Soviet Union and Italy for training.¹

A rebellion in 1928-1929, proved nearly catastrophic for the young Afghan air force and led to Amanullah's abdication. When order was restored, only a few Soviet-built biplanes remained serviceable, and the majority of pilots in Afghanistan—actually Soviet airmen—had departed Kabul. For most of the 1930s, the Afghan air arm remained on its own and managed to maintain only a few aircraft in flying condition.²

In the late 1930s, the Afghan government purchased new aircraft, mostly light bombers, from the British and Italians. In 1939, the air force maintained thirty-four flyable aircraft, mostly British Hawker Hinds and Italian IMAM Ro.37s. Despite Afghanistan's neutrality, World War II took a toll on the Afghan air force. Logistical issues became insurmountable, and foreign support dropped off.³

By 1947, the Royal Afghan Air Force's main role was internal policing, that is, counterinsurgency; the air arm remained small, flying largely obsolete aircraft. In 1955, a renewed relationship with the Soviet Union brought newer aircraft and reflected Soviet influence on the Afghans' air organization, materiel, and base infrastructure. Among the Soviet aircraft obtained were MiG-17 fighters, Il-28 bombers, and Il-14 and An-2 transports, plus trainers and helicopters. By 1960, the air force boasted at least 100 combat aircraft, including transports and helicopters. Afghan air force personnel attended Soviet schools and training courses.⁴

From the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, the Afghan air force increased its inventory of MiG-21s and Mi-8 helicopters, in particular. For at least the next two decades the MiG-21s, of which the Afghans received several models, served as Afghanistan's frontline fighters. The Mi-8 "Hip" helicopters also performed yeoman duty for decades. The air force's major airfields were at Kabul, Bagram, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar.⁵

In 1973, former prime minister Mohammad Daoud took control of the government in a blood-



less coup, ending the monarchy. Daoud's tenure lasted five years, ending in his death in 1978, in the coup that established the communist "Democratic Republic of Afghanistan." One of Afghanistan's leading airmen, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Zahir, recalled in his retirement that the air force had doubled in size under Daoud, from 200 to 400 aircraft.⁶ The increase included several newer aircraft types: several models of the MiG-21; and the Su-7 fighter, An-26 transport, and Mil Mi-8 helicopter. For the most part, while the more modern fighters replaced the older MiG-17s and earlier MiG-21 models, the An-26s replaced older An-2s and Mi-8s replaced the 1950s-era Mi-4s.⁷

By the end of 1978, Afghans increasingly were in rebellion against the reforms the new communist regime intended to impose. In March 1979, during an uprising in the western city of Herat, Afghan Il-28 bombers were called upon to attack the rebels. Although the Il-28s were antiquated aircraft, their performance proved to be the deadliest of Afghan air power in the country's history to that time.⁸

The decade that began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, witnessed the increase of the Afghan air force to an unprecedented size in the country's history, by some estimates upwards of 500 aircraft. At its peak, the service possessed between 230 to 250 combat fixed-wing aircraft, including ninety MiG-17s, forty-five MiG-21s, and at least sixty Su-7s, 150 Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters, plus an unknown number of transports and trainers.⁹

The introduction of the Stinger anti-aircraft missile marked a turning point in the Soviet-Afghan war. On a September afternoon in 1986, *mujahideen* fighters downed three of eight unsuspecting Soviet Mi-24 Hind helicopters, as they approached the airfield at Jalalabad. The Soviets soon changed their tactics, in most cases choosing to operate their ground attack aircraft at higher

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Afghan Air Force Brig. Gen. Mohammad Zahir (retired), with Col. Forrest L. Marion, USAFR, at North KAIA, May 2009; Marion holds a photo of Zahir as a young officer

altitudes so as to remain less susceptible to the Stingers. By 1987, it was clear the Soviets intended to withdraw from Afghanistan, and in February 1989, the last Soviet forces left the country. In their preparation for withdrawal, the Soviets built up the Afghan air force in the hopes that it could help sustain the compliant communist regime of Dr. Mohammad Najibullah.¹⁰

After the Soviet withdrawal, many observers were surprised when Najibullah's regime lasted—largely due to factionalism among the several mujahideen militias—until April 1992. Burhanuddin Rabbani then formed a new Afghan government, and named as his defense minister Ahmed Shah Massoud, the “Lion of Panjshir”—so called for having survived numerous Soviet operations directed against him in the Panjshir Valley during the 1980s. Later, Massoud selected Mohammad Dawran—a handsome former MiG-21 test pilot, cosmonaut-trained, and with extensive command experience during the 1980s—to be his air defense and air force commander.¹¹

Throughout the 1990s, Afghanistan, and especially Kabul, suffered from the ongoing fighting between *mujahideen* groups and the government in Kabul (first, Rabbani-Massoud, later, the Taliban). There was also fighting between (and within) the groups not in control of the capital. Militia leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was responsible for much of the city's devastation. Thousands of civilians died in and around Kabul; most of the city's infrastructure was crippled or destroyed. The once-large Afghan air force was reduced drastically in numbers and capability.¹²

For a time, the Rabbani government controlled most Afghan military aircraft. The Air Corps commander, Major General Dawran, estimated that the Afghan air force possessed 350 aircraft when Najibullah lost power in 1992. By 1994, after a major split within the Rabbani-Massoud government, Dawran recalled his air force maintained control of some 200 aircraft. Well-known for switching allegiances, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the

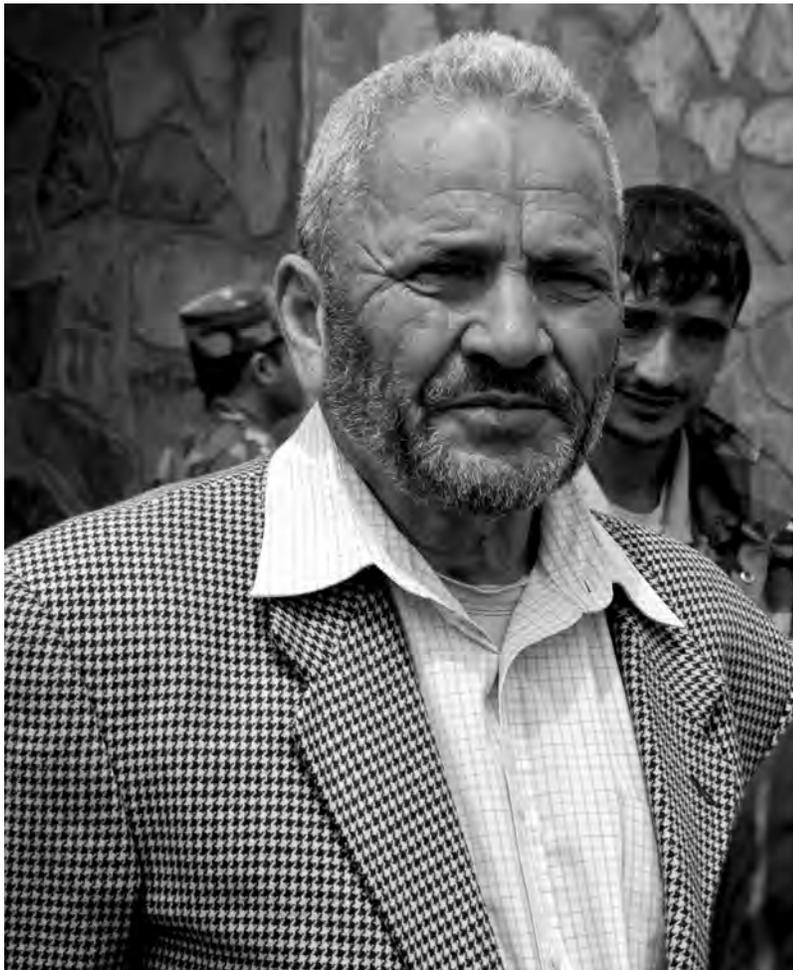
leading warlord in the region around Mazar-i-Sharif—the base for most air force aircraft in north-central Afghanistan had defected to Hekmatyar's side. Dawran estimated that Dostum's defection secured some 120 aircraft for the Uzbek leader's air force, including MiG-21s, Sukhoi fighter-bombers, fixed-wing transports such as An-12/32, and Mi-8/17 helicopters. Dostum's strength was in the north-central region of Afghanistan (near Uzbekistan) which included the airfields at Mazar-i-Sharif—where the vast majority of his air force was based—and Sherbegan. In three aerial engagements in January 1994, Massoud's MiG-21s downed two Su-22s and one MiG-21 operating under control of the combined Dostum-Hekmatyar militia, known as DGMAF.¹³

The Afghan Air Corps' senior enlisted man recalled that in the 1990s Dostum's aircraft periodically flew from Mazar-i-Sharif in attacks against Kabul. Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Abdul Malik had been a colonel in the mid-1990s serving as chief of staff of the Kabul-based 77th Air Defense Brigade. When the Air Corps was organized in 2005, as one of the six corps under the Afghan Ministry of Defense—the five others were ground forces—its manning document provided for only a limited number of officer positions, which went mainly to pilots or technical specialists; Malik accepted the CSM position. In that role, he worked hard to improve the training, quality of life, and pay for the enlisted force. He also personally designed both the Afghan Air Corps' patch worn on the flight suit as well as the insignia currently worn by all Air Corps and Afghan National Army NCOs.¹⁴

The year 1994, saw not only Dostum's defection, but also the rise of the Taliban in the southern part of the country. The Taliban soon captured Kandahar, including at least two dozen MiG-21s at Kandahar International Airport. Col. Abdul Shafi Noori, the highly-respected commander of the Kabul Air Wing Maintenance Group, later noted that in the mid-1990s all the Taliban's fighter aircraft—perhaps thirty—were based at Kandahar. Probably the majority were no longer flyable due to years of neglect and lack of spare parts, despite the best efforts of Shafi and his maintenance crews, who had little choice but to work for the Taliban.¹⁵

In 1995, the Taliban took Herat and western Afghanistan. In September 1996, assisted by Su-22 air-ground strikes, Kabul fell to the Taliban. The country's new rulers were aided by another defection of militia forces previously loyal to the government. Major General Dawran, formerly Massoud's air force commander, recalled that when he and other senior leaders evacuated Kabul, they flew out by night on an An-32, their destination unknown. Massoud was not with his air chiefs at that moment, having been evacuated to the Panjshir on a helicopter flown by “Massoud's pilot,” Brig. Gen. Mohammad Barat. Barat was the country's foremost helicopter pilot, twice decorated for valor by different regimes, Najibullah's and Rabbani-Massoud's. Blending a warrior's spirit, wit, and a winsome smile, he commanded the

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(Above) Afghan Air Force Col. Mustafa Tayer, retired, after speaking to the Afghan pilots and pilot-candidates soon to depart for the United States for training, April 23, 2009, North KAIA.

(Above right) Lt. Mustafa Tayer of the Royal Afghan Air Force, solo T-34 flight, March 5, 1958.

WHEN THE TALIBAN WAS FORCED OUT OF KABUL IN 2001, HE WORKED AS A SHOP-KEEPER FOR FIVE YEARS BEFORE RETURNING TO MILITARY DUTY

Kabul Air Wing in 2009. During the evacuation in 1996, Massoud had intended for his air leaders to fly to Takhar province, but the airfields there were not equipped for night landings. The An-32 pilot decided upon Termez, Uzbekistan, as the best suitable airfield. Refused permission to land, he landed there after declaring an emergency. The Uzbek government, however, supportive of General Dostum, took the aircraft and turned it over to Dostum, the militia leader. Ironically, as of 2009, An-32 tail number 350—the very aircraft on which Dawran had evacuated—was one of the six An-32s in the Afghan Air Corps inventory.¹⁶

Due to the political turmoil since the 1970s, many Afghan pilots have flown under several different regimes and militias. At the Air Corps' highest echelon, both Major General Dawran and Brigadier General Barat entered the air force under the government of King Zahir Shah. Brig. Gen. Abdul Wahab entered the service not long after the king's cousin, Mohammad Daoud, seized power in 1973; while both Colonel Shafi and Command Sergeant Major Malik began their military careers under the Soviet-installed government of the mid-1980s. While Dawran and Barat went on to serve under the Rabbani-Massoud government in the 1990s, Wahab served in Dostum's air force after being a businessman for a couple of years. Prior to that, he had been in prison for his part in a failed coup attempt against Najibullah in 1990. In the late 1990s, the Taliban



“recruited” Shafi to repair their aircraft, first at Kandahar and later at Kabul. A colonel in the 1990s, Malik remained with Massoud's forces until the Northern Alliance/ Coalition forces pushed the Taliban out of Kabul in late 2001. Tragically, the Lion of Panjshir, Ahmed Shah Massoud, had been assassinated by two al Qaeda agents, posing as journalists and seeking an interview with the Tajik leader, on September 9, two days before al Qaeda attacked the United States.¹⁷

As of 2009, a number of younger pilots among the less than one hundred “active” Air Corps fliers, have similar backgrounds. Many attended military high school in Kabul and then the aviation university there. One still-active An-26 pilot, began his operational flying under the pro-Soviet regime in Su-7 and Su-22 fighter-bombers at Bagram. Later, he flew the An-32 under the Taliban government. When the Taliban was forced out of Kabul in 2001, he worked as a shopkeeper for five years before returning to military duty. Based at Kabul once again, he has served in the Afghan Air Corps as an An-26 pilot. Another current pilot flew the Su-22 in the 1980s followed by the An-26, then the An-32. He flew Massoud in the 1990s. At that time, Khwaja Muhammad Yasin recalled that Massoud's air force consisted of about twenty aircraft: seven An-26 and An-32 transports, ten or twelve helicopters, and two L-39s. As of 2009, the Air Corps still flew the two L-39 jets for ceremonial purposes. A third current pilot, Saleh Mohamad, was diverted during the mid-1980s from a MiG-21 assignment and reassigned to fly An-26s at Kabul during a period of heavy fighting around the capital. He recalled the Najibullah government's air force kept about fifty transports at Kabul International Airport, most of which were An-26s. In the early 1990s, Saleh Mohamad flew as an An-26 instructor pilot for the Rabbani-Massoud Government and later flew An-32s for the Taliban. After the Taliban's exodus in 2001, he remained in the reserve for several years before returning to active flying, in 2009 serving as a lieutenant colonel in the Air Corps. Another Air Corps aviator, Mohammad Esa, learned to fly the Su-7 and served at Shindand under Najibullah's air force. Reassigned to Kabul, he transitioned to the An-26. He recalled that Khowst Province was a dangerous area in those days and that about one transport per month was lost there. In what was perhaps his



One of the six Afghan Mi-35 Hinds, firing rockets for training, the first known use of rockets by an Afghan helicopter since October 2001.

RELEASED IN A PRISONER EXCHANGE, HE LATER FLEW FOR THE TALIBAN AFTER THEY CAPTURED HIS HOMETOWN AREA, MAZAR-I-SHARIF

most dangerous sortie, he was fired upon, probably by a Stinger, near Herat, but survived. Under the Rabbani-Massoud air force, he flew An-32s as well as An-26s before flying for the Taliban for three years in the mid-to late 1990s. He recalled that at one time the Taliban's financial problems required them to "lay off" some fifty pilots. As of 2009, Mohammad Esa served as a captain in the Air Corps. A fifth pilot, Qabil Khan, originally expected to go to the Soviet Union for flight training, but family needs led him to remain in Afghanistan. For that reason, he trained in L-39s at Mazar-i-Sharif, near his home. For most of the next twenty years, he flew as an L-39 instructor pilot under the governments of Najibullah, Dostum, the Taliban, and under the Karzai administration, as of 2009. He recalled that at one point in the 1990s under General Dostum, Mazar-i-Sharif was the base for about twelve L-39, six Su-22, three MiG-21, one An-32, and one An-12 aircraft. Qabil Khan endured the experience of being shot down by Taliban ground fire and imprisoned for nearly six months. Released in a prisoner exchange, he later flew for the Taliban after they captured his hometown area, Mazar-i-Sharif. After 2001, three L-39s eventually were flown from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul, two of which still flew as of 2009.¹⁸

By the end of the 1990s, years of warfare had reduced the once-large Afghan air force to a shadow of its former self. The Taliban, which controlled all except the far northern portions of the country, still maintained a small air force, including approximately twenty MiG-21/ Su-22s. Massoud's Northern Alliance forces, supported mainly by neighboring Tajikistan, operated at least one An-12 transport, and eleven Mi-8/17 and six Mi-35 helicopters mostly in the northern reaches of the Panjshir Valley and Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. In what may have been the last major air operation conducted by Massoud's Northern Coalition prior to his assassination, two of his Mi-35 helicopters assisted in halting a Taliban offensive in Badakhshan, in September 2000.¹⁹

In fall 2001, the U.S./Coalition air strikes that

followed al Qaeda's attack on the United States destroyed nearly all of what remained of the Taliban air force. In a rare incident prior to the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, Brigadier General Barat flew a Taliban Mi-17 from Kabul to a mountain hideout and covered it so as to prevent its detection by reconnaissance assets. It survived the air campaign intact and in late 2009 Mi-17 tail number 514 was returned to the Air Corps' inventory following extensive refurbishment.²⁰

In 2005, the Americans took the first tentative steps to reestablishing an Afghan presidential airlift capability in keeping with a directive from U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. In May 2005, Afghan officials named Major General Dawran the commander of the new Afghan Air Corps. Later that year, a small team led by Col. John Hansen, U.S. Army, began working with Afghan airmen at Kabul International Airport. By mid-2006, Colonel Hansen had developed a plan for the Air Corps that became the basis for the Combined Air Power Transition Force (CAPTF) that began work the following year. Meanwhile, in early 2006 a London meeting known as "Bonn II" produced an "Afghanistan Compact" that called for an Afghan national army of 70,000 personnel by the year 2010. From that number, Afghan and Coalition air leaders planned to carve an Air Corps of more than 7,000 members. Also during 2006, Air Corps pilots began flying training missions with their American/Coalition counterparts.²¹

A commercial airline pilot and U.S. Air Force Reserve officer, Brig. Gen. Frank Padilla, had led an aerial survey team in late 2006 that developed an "air campaign plan" similar to what Colonel Hansen had envisioned for the Air Corps. In May 2007, Padilla became the first CAPTF commander. The CAPTF's mission was to "set the conditions for a fully independent and operationally capable Afghan National Army Air Corps to meet the security requirements of Afghanistan." The term "independent" did not refer to the air arm as a separate service but rather to the capability of the Air Corps to conduct operations independently, that is, without outside assistance. The plan, revised and approved in 2007, called for a helicopter/transport/light-attack-based Air Corps of approximately two hundred aircraft organized into three air wings—one each for presidential airlift, rotary-wing, and fixed-wing operations. Padilla ably led the CAPTF until he turned over the reins to USAF Brig. Gen. Jay Lindell, in September 2007.²²

Lindell led the CAPTF until September 2008. During that period, the Air Corps increased modestly in size, largely the result of aircraft donations by Coalition partners. In July 2007, the Air Corps had possessed twenty-two aircraft. Within approximately fifteen months, the donations of seven Mi-17s from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), six more from the Czech Republic, and one from Slovakia helped increase the Afghan inventory, despite several training losses, to thirty-one aircraft. While the UAE funded its own donations, the Czech and Slovakian aircraft were refurbished

One of the six Afghan Mi-35 Hinds, flying near snow-capped mountains in northeastern Afghanistan.



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with American financial aid. Also during 2008, the Presidential Airlift Squadron (PAS) became operational. By the close of the year, the squadron had flown President Hamid Karzai several times in and around Kabul and on one occasion to the vicinity of Khowst. Other Air Corps accomplishments included helicopter support for the Afghan Army's 209th Corps near Mazar-i-Sharif in May 2008 and, one month later, its first operational mission in support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at Kandahar. In terms of the fixed-wing inventory, Ukraine donated three An-32s, refurbished with U.S. funding.²³

By October 2008, the Air Corps inventory included twenty-one rotary-wing and ten fixed-wing aircraft, consisting of eighteen Mi-17s, three Mi-35s, six An-32s, two An-26s, and two L-39s.²⁴ A

(Below) Brig Gen Walter D. Givhan, Commanding General, Combined Air Power Transition Force (CAPTF), speaks to an Afghan-American audience at North KAIA, April 23, 2009.



month earlier, USAF Brig. Gen. Walter Givhan had assumed command of the CAPTF. Givhan spoke Dari even before arriving in Afghanistan, giving him instant credibility and greatly enhancing his rapport with every Afghan he met, regardless of status. Under his capable leadership during the next year, the organization grew modestly in size and scope while laying the groundwork for further expansion. Moreover, the U.S. Air Force institutionalized the CAPTF's mission by activating the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing (438 AEW) as U.S. Air Forces Central's unit under the CAPTF. Indeed, for most of Brigadier General Givhan's tour, the only non-USAF members of CAPTF were the eight to ten members of the Czech Republic's Military Training Team who trained the Afghan Mi-35 crews. From the 438th wing's activation on November 1, 2008 until September 2009, Givhan was dual-hatted as commander, 438 AEW, and commanding general, CAPTF. During winter 2008-2009, the North Kabul International Airport cantonment area, the newly-constructed home of the Afghan Air Corps, opened. Just two years earlier, the entire area had been covered with several thousand pieces of unexploded ordnance, much of it from the 1980s. When it opened early in 2009, it was the premier facility of any kind in the country.²⁵

In spring and summer 2009, three significant developments affected the Air Corps. First, the CAPTF increased the availability of technical training courses for the Afghans in a variety of subjects, among them communications, electronics, and maintenance. Students attended classes at the Kabul Air Corps Training Center adjacent to Kabul's airport. Interpreter-translators represented a critical link in the training process. One of

Wreckage of a Soviet An-12 transport north side of Kabul Int'l Airport (KAIA), spring 2007 – as the construction of the new compound for the Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) was beginning.

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the most uniquely qualified interpreters was an Afghan aviator of Indian descent who had flown for Ariana Afghan Airlines in the 1980s. The second development was that CAPTF began training Afghan Mi-35 crews with live rockets for the first time since the Taliban's exit from Kabul in 2001. By the end of the summer, the Mi-35s were flying operational missions. And, third, for the first time in over three decades, a sizeable group of Afghan pilot candidates traveled to the U.S., to San Antonio, Texas, to begin English language, to be fol-

lowed by undergraduate pilot, training. At the same time, a group of rated Air Corps pilots also went to the U.S. to improve their English after which they would undergo instrument flying training. While the latter group was to return to Afghanistan to fly the new C-27A Spartan fixed-wing transports—twenty were expected—the former group would return home as newly-minted pilots to form the backbone of the Air Corps for the next generation of Afghan aviators.²⁶

Today, as American and Coalition members

Final phase of construction of main buildings for the ANAAC, north compound of KAIA (North KAIA).



Security Police facility on ANAAC compound, North KAIA, October, 2008.



THE FORBIDDING TERRAIN OF AFGHANISTAN, THE THREAT FROM ROADSIDE BOMBS, AND THE NEARLY TOTAL LACK OF RAIL TRANSPORTATION MAKE AIR POWER ESSENTIAL

continue working with Afghan airmen to rebuild their country's air arm, a similar effort is ongoing in Iraq. On the same day the 438 AEW was activated in 2008, the 321st Air Expeditionary Wing was also activated, with the mission of rebuilding the Iraqi Air Force. In both cases, the objective was to restore the air capabilities of a former adversary whose air service had been modeled after the Soviets and for whom air mobility was particularly needed. Learning how to "do it right" is critically important, in part because there may be other "Afghanistans and Iraqs" in the future. In June 2009, the chief of both the 438th and CAPTF, Brigadier General Givhan, observed that probably the closest the USAF has come to the current Afghan air power mission was the one in Southeast

Asia, forty years ago, involving South Vietnamese and Cambodian airmen. But for the most part, as Givhan stated, "It's been left to us to figure out how to do this." The forbidding terrain of Afghanistan, the threat from roadside bombs, and the nearly total lack of rail transportation make air power essential, he added. As the general often noted, "This country begs for air power," not only for security but also for "governance," as it provides the best means by which the government may touch the lives in a positive way of many Afghans in remote and inaccessible villages. Learning how to rebuild air power in the right way in Afghanistan (and Iraq) may well prove to be of strategic significance to the United States in the ongoing conflict; time will tell.²⁷

Power generation plant on ANAAC compound, North KAIA, October, 2008.



NOTES

1. Ali Jan, "Few Snapshots from our Aviation History," publication data unknown; Lance R. Blyth, "The Royal Air Force and Air Control: Historical Air Operations in the CENTCOM AOR, 1919-1939," ms. dated 15 Apr. 2006,

- publication data unknown. Blyth served as historian for US Central Command Air Forces-Forward.
2. Lennart Andersson, "The First 30 Years of Aviation in Afghanistan," (2 parts), part 1, at www.z-bok.se/Afghanistan.html; biography of Amir Amanullah Khan at www.afghanan.net/afghanistan/amanullahkhan.htm. During the rebellion the Royal Air Force carried out the first mass airlift in history, transporting British citizens from Kabul to safety in Peshawar.
 3. Andersson, "The First 30 Years," part 1; Andrea Vento, "The strange story of Zahir Shah's Italian Aircrafts," [original in Italian] *Romba il motore* ["Roars the engine"], place and date of publication unknown.
 4. Author's discussion with retired Col. Ghulam Mustafa Tayer, Apr. 8, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan; Notes pertaining to discussions cited herein are at AFHRA/OH, Maxwell AFB, Ala.; various issues, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*; Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History From Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (Da Capo Press: n.p., 2002), pp. 225-26; Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History of its People and Politics* (Harper Perennial: New York and London, 2002), pp. 154-58; Adamec, *Historical Dictionary of Afghan Wars*, (Scarecrow Press, 1996), p. 50.
 5. *Ibid.*; Zahir discussion. For MiG-21 information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikoyan-Gurevich_MiG-21.
 6. Zahir discussion. Possibly, a significant portion of this increase in inventory occurred shortly after Daoud's death in 1978, when the Soviets began building up the Afghan air force to combat the growing insurgency.
 7. Zahir discussion; "List of Afghan Air Force Aircraft."
 8. Girardet, *Afghanistan, The Soviet War*, (St. Martins, 1985), pp. 23, 115-16; Tanner, *Afghanistan*, pp. 231-32; Ewans, *Afghanistan, A Short History*, p. 197.
 9. Estimate in 1985 by Stalder, "Air War in Afghanistan." Estimates of Afghan "combat aircraft" typically seemed to omit helicopters and transports, despite the fact that those aircraft often conducted "combat" missions, at least by American standards.
 10. Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, The Defeat of a Superpower* (Havertown, Pa.:Casemate, 2001 [1992]), pp. 174-77.
 11. Dawran discussion. Apparently, Dawran was preceded for a time by Col. Mir Anjamuddin, formerly of Najibullah's air force; see article, "Minister Names Air Force Chief," *Asian Defence Journal*, Sep. 1992, p. 106.
 12. "Radical Hekmatyar is Afghan Premier," *Asian Defence Journal*, Apr. 1993, p. 87; "Afghan General, Troops Escape to Tajikistan," *Asian Defence Journal*, Dec. 1993, p. 118; Michelle Tan, "From the ground up," *Air Force Times*, Oct. 6, 2008, pp. 16, 18. An article in January 1994 stated, "Some 18-months after the mujahideen threw out the communist regime, the country seems to be heading towards division along ethnic lines. The northern Afghanistan is dominated by ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks who resent control by the majority group the Pashtoons who live mainly in the south of the country"; see "Hikmatyar Offers to Resign with Rabbani," *Asian Defence Journal*, Jan. 1994, p. 98.
 13. Dawran discussion; Tom Cooper, "Afghanistan, 1979-2001; Part 3," Oct. 29, 2003, at www.acig.org/artman/publish/article_339.shtml.
 14. Malik discussion. The revitalized Afghan air arm was known as the Afghan Air "Corps" because it comprised one of the six corps established under the Afghan Ministry of Defense following the Bonn-II meetings. As of 2009, there was some interest among both Afghan and American officials in restoring the air service as an independent air force.
 15. "Fighting Intensifies in Afghanistan," *Asian Defence Journal*, Feb. 1994, p. 120; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (Penguin Press: New York, 2004); Shafi discussion. As there were probably a number of MiG-21s at Kandahar that were not flyable at the time, varying definitions of "intact" may account for differences in the numbers of aircraft reportedly captured by the Taliban. Cooper stated that when the Taliban captured Kandahar, they obtained "six intact MiG-21 fighters"; Coll stated six MiG-21 fighters and four Mi-17 helicopters were captured. Whether or not they included other aircraft in various stages of disrepair was unclear. See Cooper, "Afghanistan, 1979-2001; Part 3"; Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p. 291.
 16. Dawran discussion; CAPTF/438 AEW aircraft maintenance data, Mar.-Jun. 2009.
 17. Dawran, Barat, Wahab, Shafi, Malik discussions.
 18. "Air Corps Pilot" discussions, May 13, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan. All "Air Corps Pilot" discussions conducted by Col. Forrest L. Marion, USAF, 438 AEW Historian.
 19. Tom Cooper, "Afghanistan, 1979-2001; Part 3." Cooper indicated that in mid-2001 the Taliban air force operated the following aircraft: eight MiG-21s, eight Su-22s, an unknown number of transports, and about a dozen helicopters. The Mi-35 was a modified version of the Mi-24 Hind.
 20. Barat discussion; 438 AEW historian's notes, Mar.-Jun. 2009; information on tail number 514's return to the Air Corps was provided to author by Dr. James A. Malachowski, 438 AEW historian, April 2010.
 21. Dawran discussion; oral history interview (OHI), Col. Daniel R. Miller (USAF) with author, Mar. 27 and 29, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan; OHI, Mr. Richard C. "Nick" Nickerson and Mr. Laney M. Pankey with author, Mar. 25, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan; and OHI, Mr. George S. "Jim" Ferrell with author, Mar. 31, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan; note that Nickerson, Pankey, and Ferrell were all of MPRI (contractor). E-mails, Col. John Hansen, USA, (Ret.) to author, May 2009. For details of the "Afghanistan Compact," agreed upon at London Jan. 31- Feb. 1, 2006, see www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf. The projected size of the Afghan Army was later increased.
 22. Discussion, Maj. Gen. Frank J. Padilla, USAF, with author, Jan. 29-30, notes maintained at AFHRA/OH; CAPTF mission statement, Hq, CAPTF/438 AEW, Kabul; Slides, "Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC), Combined Air Power Transition Force (CAPTF), 438th Air Expeditionary Wing (438 AEW), March 2009," informally referred to as the "air campaign brief/slides," in 438 AEW/HO files, Kabul, Afghanistan, and at AFCENT/HO, Shaw AFB, S.C..
 23. Miller discussion; Slides, ANAAC, CAPTF, 438 AEW, Mar. 2009 (air campaign slides). The Mi-17 was a modified version of the Mi-8 Hip.
 24. Because the L-39s flew mainly for ceremonial purposes, the U.S. provided no assistance for those aircraft. One L-39 pilot was among the group of Afghans that traveled to San Antonio, Texas, for English language training to be followed by instrument flying training. He expected to transition to fly the C-27A Spartan.
 25. History, 438 AEW, Mar.-Apr. 2009, May 2009; 438 AEW/HO files, Kabul, Afghanistan; author's personal observations, Mar.-Jun. 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan.
 26. Author's discussion with Mr. "K" (name omitted for security purposes), May 20 and 26, 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan; History, 438 AEW, Mar.-Apr. 2009, May 2009; 438 AEW/HO files, Kabul, Afghanistan; author's personal observations, Mar.-Jun. 2009, Kabul, Afghanistan.
 27. Discussion, Brig. Gen. Walter D. Givhan, USAF, with author, Jun. 8, 2009, Camp Eggers, Kabul, Afghanistan; John House, "General Cites Importance of Air Power for Afghanistan," *DefenseLINK*, Jun. 3, 2009; for 321 AEW, see Jarrod R. Chavana, "New 321st AEW commander sees promising future for Iraqi Air Forces, at www.centaf.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123184521.