

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL MICHAEL BOERA, COMMANDER, COMBINED AIR POWER TRANSITION FORCE, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN SUBJECTS: TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES WITH AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY AIR CORPS COMMANDER GENERAL MOHAMMAD DAWRAN; ADVANCES IN EFFORTS TO BUILD A PROFESSIONAL, INDEPENDENT AND CAPABLE AIR FORCE ABLE TO MEET AFGHANISTAN'S SECURITY NEEDS TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): (In progress) -- welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, June 10th, 2010. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to the bloggers and online journalists on the call today. Please clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking your questions. And also, if possible, please place your phone on mute during the discussion so we can make sure that we hear the general during the roundtable today. As you all know, our guest is Brigadier General Michael Boera. He's the commander of the Combined Air Power Transition Force, the organization that was charged with developing military and power -- air power, rather -- in Afghanistan.

So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to the general so he can start with an opening statement, and then we'll go into questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. BOERA: All right, Jennifer, thank you very much.

And to all those that have called in, thank you very much for taking the time to learn a little bit more about what's going on over here in Afghanistan, probably more so than what you may be usually reading in the papers about the Army ground forces and the police ground forces.

As Jennifer said, I do have the mission and oversight of the Afghan National Security Force aviation. And so I'll talk about what I

mean by that in a second. But our mission, our CAPTF, the Combined Air Power Transition Force mission, is to set the conditions for professional, fully independent and operationally capable Afghan air force that's ready to meet the security requirements of Afghanistan today and tomorrow.

And I say -- you know, I put air forces, the little A, the little F there, because there's a couple of entities here. You have the minister of Defense air forces, which are the Air Corps, the Afghan Army National Air Corps, and they are comprised of MI-17s, MI-35s, Antonov airlift aircraft and C-27s, the first modern Western aircraft introduced into Afghanistan.

There are also, on the minister of Interior side, an air interdiction unit that, in essence, teams with the U.S. on counternarcotics missions and then also supports the Afghan National Police for general support aviation for the many missions that the police have.

So I have oversight of both MOD and MOI aviation assets, and the reason being that we didn't want to create really two air forces. We wanted to find the efficiencies that could be had with one oversight -- one-person oversight of it, so that we can maximize infrastructure build, facility build, and for myself, trainers, if you will, that are very challenging to come by.

We do our mission with about 450 soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, contractors, as well as some NATO partners. And I have -- all of them are spread out across the country, currently at four locations. We do plan to have more at more locations throughout the country, but this allows us to support operations in the north, south, east and west while also taking care of my primary mission, which is the growth and development of that air force into a professional force.

Right now the Air Corps itself has about 48 -- has 48 aircraft and almost 3,300 soldiers, NCOs and officers. And we're growing it at 146 aircraft and over 8,000 airmen, I'll say.

On the air interdiction side, we have nine aircraft and 129 mentors, and we'll build them to about 19 aircraft and 282 Afghan airmen. So that gives you the scope of the build. But you need to realize that that build goes out to about 2016. Our effort here has always been a long-term effort, always been an embedded partnership with the Afghans to build their professional forces here.

You cannot build an air force overnight. It takes anywhere from two to five years to develop the air crew, and especially when you have English-language training involved. And it takes up to three and a half years to train a maintainer, or what they would call engineers, from scratch; i.e., starting someone new and getting them up to the top level of their profession so, in essence, they may become instructors for the Afghans.

Ideally, my job is to put ourselves out of a job. My job is to set the conditions for a transition, a transition that allows the Afghans to teach Afghans. And we're seeing that in some of the areas today already.

So, in essence, I have some realistic optimism. And, in fact, I have some great hope, after my recent visit to the United States with Major General Dawran -- D-A-W-R-A-N -- and he is the commander of the Air Corps. And we took a trip back to the States that was many-fold in nature, if you will.

We went to Montgomery, Alabama and visited Air University. We went to San Antonio to visit with Air Education and Training Command and the Defense Language Institute English Language Center. And we went to Air Combat Command to visit with -- both with General Fraser and ACC as well as taking some briefs down at Joint Forces Command.

And I looked at it as a trip for me to provide General Dawran with some senior-level advising and exposure, if you will, some of the professionalism that our Air Force, our own Air Force, brings to the fight today. But it also was an opportunity to brief the many audiences, especially at Air University, the many audiences about building partnership capacity and what we're actually doing here.

And then finally, the three-fold, third-fold intent of the trip was so that General Dawran could visit with the many Afghans that are training in the U.S., both at the schools, at Maxwell, at the Defense Language Institute English Language Training, out at Lackland Air Force Base with the students that are in instrument training out at Stinson Air Field outside of San Antonio. And so that was -- and then -- and when we were in Alabama with the student pilots out at Fort Rucker in Alabama.

So it was critical for the young new eagles for Afghanistan to see one of the senior leaders in Afghanistan and talk to him and find out what's going on in their country, because for many of them, they hadn't been here for one or two years while they do their training, but also for General Dawran to hear from them.

And for me, it really charged me up and gave me great hope for this country when I sat around, was able to talk to them, have lunch with them; you know, just find out how they're doing, hear them, and hear them speak English very well, see them in simulators, see how they're doing.

And I can tell you, it's night and day what our western-trained -- what western-trained forces are able to do versus what forces that, for the last 20 or 30 years, have been trained in a Soviet-type system are able to do. And I've personally flown with different -- the full spectrum of Afghan aviators here, both the western-trained as well as the previous Soviet-trained, and it is night and day in the cockpit with them about -- all about capability. And I can answer some questions on that if you have some in the Q&A period.

Our two most critical areas that we're working is both towards the institutional development of the Afghan air forces. So that comes in

with their schooling, both their technical training as well as their professional military education. And we're doing that here in Kabul at the big air school, if you will, for Afghanistan, out at the airport.

And then we're doing -- the second piece of it (will be ?) out at Shindand Air Base out to the west, which is going to be their primary indigenous pilot-training base. So in a couple of years, we hope to have that up and running for both the fixed wing and rotary wing, so then we no longer have to send Afghans out of country for pilot training.

So that's all part of building that intellectual infrastructure, if you will, that will tie in with the facility infrastructure that we're doing for them across the country. And that'll help them move beyond the former Soviet impact, a very rigid type of training and conduct of operations.

Our commitment is signaled by the arrival of the C-27 aircraft, the first modern western aircraft introduced into their system for decades. And we now have five on the ramp, building to 20 eventually. And that is an airlift aircraft -- (inaudible). Right now they have six Antonov -- Russian Antonov aircraft. We're replacing them with 20 C-27 aircraft, a refurbished aircraft. They come out of the factory at Alenia. But all of them have many parts that have been built in the United States.

All the builds that we're doing as we go up to 146 or so aircraft is all with a COIN emphasis, a counterinsurgency emphasis, but also gives them a bridge to the future; so how can they do ops, close air support, the ISR. We'll even try to upgrade a little bit of their -- refurbish some of their L-39 jet aircraft so that, in the future, if those aircraft should be part of their inventory, they will have already had a bridge to get there.

So it's been -- again, that's my quick opening statement. I look forward to your questions. Again, thank you for being online with me this evening. And I'll let you know that I've had the best airman's job in Afghanistan, because I get to be a little bit like -- (inaudible) -- chief of staff or a numbered Air Force commander and a wing commander all kind of mixed into one as we help the Afghans build their air force.

So with that, I'll open up the floor to questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

And if possible, during the discussion, if you all can make sure to place your phone on mute after you've asked your questions, I want to make sure that we hear the general's responses.

So with that, Michael, you were first. Let's go -- go ahead.

Q Thank you.

Good morning, General. This is Michael Sirak with Air Force Magazine.

And I believe you said that apparently your organization has about 450 personnel operating from four locations. I'm wondering how large your organization is expected to become and how many locations you think you'll ultimately be operating out of, and kind of if you can talk about the interplay between the drawdown of trainers in Iraq and those that may be coming to Afghanistan. Thank you.

GEN. BOERA: You bet, Michael.

First -- I'm going to answer the location question first. Right now I have the many -- the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, the contractors, all working either in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Shindand. Those are the four locations they currently are located at. The plan is to have air advisers at Jalalabad, at Mazar-e Sharif. And I think that would be it where I have -- I may have them flying in and out of Gardez. But as far as actually being on the ground and living there and working out of there, those are the locations. So right now I have four locations, and that will build to six locations that we'll have airmen. That's where they'll be based out of. They'll fly all over the country. So that's -- that answers your one question.

We have 450 personnel -- (inaudible) -- personnel. I'm about 74 spaces short from where I would like to be. And eventually I hope -- probably the max I'd see is around another 200, you know, including that 74 that I'm probably short now.

It depends a lot on the -- sometimes we get some emergent operational, you know, growth; i.e., for instance, a number of months ago we really didn't have in mind how we're going to do air-base management. All the places that the Afghans are right now -- are located are essentially old civilian airfields, and they will again be civilian airfields that will have Afghan military type of presence there. So you really would have airfields that are controlled more so by MOTCA, Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, and then the Air Corps would just have a presence there, very similar to what our guard units-- air guard units do in the United States.

So one airbase that will be here is Shindand airbase, and so once we started developing that them -- because that was their traditional training base, and a lot has gone back and forth over the years. Okay. It was going to be Kandahar. Then it was going to be Shindand and Kanarsh (ph) and then -- and depending on funding availability and actual -- the facts of life that come with, you know, a buildup of coalition forces here, we ended up settling on Shindand. And the Afghans had a big say in that because that was their final -- that was where they used to train all the time.

So with that came a mission to actually train airbase management, the support functions, if you will, because MATCA was not going to do that. So that added to our need for operational capability.

So really, when all is said and done, I probably will go up to about, I'll say, 450 advisors that I'd like. I'm not going to be at this

450 for very long, though, I think. What's going to happen here, as I work -- and remember I want to set the conditions. So, when I do so, Kabul air advisors are getting -- or the Afghans here in Kabul are starting to get, you know, pretty good, and so eventually I can take some of air advisors here, and I'm going to push them down to Kandahar or I'm going to push them out to Shindand or I'm going to push them up to Jalalabad or Mazar-i-Sharif. So I really will top out at about 450, and soon therefore, I'll start ramping down, as I transition, and the last place I plan to be and have airmen is at Shindand Airbase out to the west.

Over. Q Okay. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Michael.

Chuck, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Yes. General, good to talk with you again. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

(Cross talk.)

Q Changing the perspective for a minute, can we look at Afghan National Army Air Corps in combat? How are they doing? Have they suffered any mechanical casualties or personnel casualties? I mean, how are things going for them on the combat side?

GEN. BOERA: Okay. So, if I got that right, Chuck -- it's a little warbly there -- you're just looking for how are the aircrew -- how is the ANAAC going in ops overall.

Q Right.

GEN. BOERA: Yeah. They are -- they are -- in some ways, they are doing very well. In some others, their capability is still -- there are still challenges.

They are very good at, you know, getting from here to there, making the mission happen, and making it happen safely right now. We have done -- it really turned it around in safety. When I first -- since I have been here, I'll say there's been -- and that was since last November or last September -- so I've been here for nine months now, and in those nine months while I've been here, they've had what I would say are three significant safety incidents.

One involved the AN-32, and although there were no casualties, the plane was a loss. One involved MI-17, and it had to do with no ground -- it was on the ground, again no injuries, no fatalities, but we lost a back boom of an MI-17 and we're replacing that. So the aircraft wasn't totally lost.

Another case, again lack of ground clearance on the ground, and the blades on an MI-17 hit some trees, and so we had to replace five blades on that, no fatalities, no injuries.

There was one -- I'll bring up a fourth. There was one incident -- and this really wasn't necessarily the aircrews' fault. It was an incident where we lost security -- a ground security person because they ran out of the helicopter when they landed, despite being briefed. They were trying to do their job for a high-ranking official here in Afghanistan, and they ran right into the back tail rudder, so they killed themselves. So really that-- that's not an aircrew thing, but it's an incident.

And one of the -- and one of the reasons I bring it up with the MI-17 is the fact that when I first got here and still almost -- and I still don't have this in house, but I've done a workaround. I haven't had any advisors that I've been able to put in the back end of MI-17s so that we can train the crew chiefs in the back there on how to be crew chiefs, how to check the (six ?), how to work the clearance through the back doors of a helicopter, and communicate to the aircrew that, you know, they're in danger.

Remember the old Soviet regime was, you know, that -- very rank heavy, few enlisted -- the enlisted didn't speak to the officers. They were there to get their job done, and the officers basically discounted everything they said, totally different than our Western forces with their -- the non-commissioned officers that are very professional and that we delegate a lot of authority to them really to get a job done.

But that -- all of -- most of that happened all within the first month or two of my arrival here, and we've really worked hard with the Afghans to put an emphasis on safety, emphasize the amount of, you know, the money that's being invested for them on their behalf, and they've really taken to heart -- I've been a part of safety days here at Kabul, and I've done safety days down in Kandahar, and they've really turned that program around for the better, and so I'm very pleased with how that has gone.

Their operations -- again, they're working now and flying in an English-speaking environment, and there is our greatest challenge. So, when the -- when the heat's on and there's a bunch of English speaking going on in the cockpits, they're challenged to react and be flexible, and so that's where I have many worries still as far as, hey, they can be given a mission and go from here to -- Point A to Point B, you know, get it done, but if we throw, you know, a curve ball at them, they have a hard time reacting to that curve ball. So that -- that's -- if we throw a curve ball at them.

Now, it's one thing they -- that frustrates or is a challenge in me somewhat is the command and control of the aircraft as well. Again, under the old system, they're very used to -- their leadership -- just calling straight down to a flight line -- I mean highest level of leadership, minister of defense -- (inaudible) -- calling down to their friend down on the flight line and saying I need you to go do this, and

while I'm trying to manage the fleet and help them with training and growth and development and how many they can send out on operations, it is -- they are their aircraft, so sometimes they just kind of go do the mission that they've been asked to do by their boss and their -- you know, a former -- someone that they fought with yesteryear. So the -- the alliances there are strong, and we have -- we work hard to break through that, and, most importantly, the command and control and transparency of operations across the whole coalition is important, and sometimes that doesn't happen. Sometimes the air corps is out doing the -- a mission, and IJC, the ISAF Joint Command, had no idea that they're out doing a mission and vice versa. The Afghans will be out, and they'll have no idea that there's an IJC, you know, mission that's going on. We'll all scramble and make things, you know, better, but -- so, in so many ways, they are -- they are -- they're wanting in the area of flexible operational capability, if you will, and true transparency with command and control.

Q Okay. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Chuck.

Tech Sergeant Veckerline (ph), please go ahead.

Q Yes, thank you. Hello, sir. As Lieutenant Cragg mentioned, I'm Tech Sergeant Julie Veckerline (ph) from the Air Force Public Affairs Agency.

My question's sort of twofold. One, what is the biggest challenge you see facing the Afghan troops as they're building up their air force? And on the flip side of that, what is one of their biggest strengths?

GEN. BOERA: The biggest -- the biggest challenge is really getting over that -- you know, truly getting over that paradigm shift of 20 to 30 years of Soviet think, but not only that, they've been in this void of -- from the -- from the outside world really, and so my -- I don't have the leadership that is needed that you and I have come to take for granted. I don't have it -- you know, at the flight commander level, your squadron commander level, your group commander level, and if I do, there's -- it's still wanting for much. So leadership development is a key -- a challenge for us, and we work hard on providing that advising and leadership development for them, especially at camp.

But some are just not going to get there, and what I want to do -- what I'm trying to have our whole team do -- is make sure we recognize the young Afghans -- or even if they're a little bit older -- that are -- that are accepting it, that get it, that want to get it, that want to do good for Afghanistan, and that's where we want to spend a lot of time. You know, five years from now, the architecture of the senior leadership here, the landscape of the senior leadership here, will be totally different. I mean, if a retirement system comes into play for Afghanistan, we are going to see a lot of the older Afghans actually

retire, get out of the forces, because now they have a way to put, you know, food on the table for their families. So that will be a -- that will be a good thing. So that's -- but that's the challenge, leadership development, and on my aircrew side a challenge is always English language training and that takes -- that takes time. I just -- I try to always keep my sense of -- my patience with it by reminding myself if I had to learn Dari and then go into battle and go fly in combat and be able to communicate in Dari and it -- you know, a year from now or six months from now, whatever, how would I do? I probably wouldn't do so great. But the -- the fact is that the global community of airmen use English as their standard. So in Afghan -- I've tried to make sure the Afghans understand this isn't a United States thing. This is the -- this is the global community of airmen.

As far as what they do well, if there is a mission and it's really important to them, they will do it very well. For instance, they did -- there was Mujaheddin Victory Day. April 28 is when they had their victory basically over the Soviet Union, and they put together, you know, a big parade here in Afghanistan and in Kabul and probably many other places around the country, but the air corps put together, you know, a -- (inaudible) -- for that parade that was phenomenal, and they did it. You know, I let the leadership know that was their victory day, if they really wanted to do this, they've got to plan it, they've got to do it, and they did it well. So I really know -- I mean, when there's a mission they really want to do, they do it very well.

And I think as the second piece, the second -- the real strength that's going to come with -- in Afghanistan is their youth. Again, the hope that I have coming out of my conversations with the young Afghans that are in training in the United States or some of the young Afghans that are in training here -- I mean, we've put together like an immersion camp. It's an immersion camp, but we have Afghans living with the Americans, and all they're allowed to do is speak English so that they can get that and they're immersed in the Western way of thinking from 5:00 in the morning, from physical fitness, all the way to 10:00 at night when they finish off with an American movie on TV. But, in between, they're in school. They're in classes. They're flying the sim. They're doing things. And there's so much hope and there's so much excitement in their eyes that that is -- the real strength of the Afghan air corps are the new ocabs (ph) and the new eagles for Afghanistan.

Over.

Q Thank you, sir.

OPERATOR: Thank you, sir.

Sharon (sp), please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. Thanks for speaking with us again.

I wanted to ask about the C-27s. You mentioned that you have five on the ramp now. How often are they flying, and what are the readiness rates for them? I've heard from different people that -- I

mean, maybe not huge issues, but there have been issues with spare parts and then just general making sure that they're up in the air and flying. Do you kind of have any numbers behind that?

GEN. BOERA: I sure do. I've got -- first off -- first off, overall, the C-27 has been a success story. It would -- the right aircraft for Afghanistan. It's simple enough that the Afghans can make a transition to it. It's rugged enough to handle flying in Afghanistan. It brings a capability that the Antonov aircrafts don't have, like roll-on, roll-off type of palletized cargo capability. It will have an electrical suite on it when we get the medical kits to put on it. That gives it greater medevac capability. It will have a paratroop drop capability, a tactical assault capability.

So it really -- when we get the GPS Garmin wired in to the avionics -- the instrument avionics -- it will have the all-weather instrument approach capability, GPS approach capability, that the Antonovs just do not have. It just brings a whole different level of capability to the air corps.

Now, with that said -- and really with any new program that's come on board for the United States Air Force if you look back to C-5s, B-1s and such, you know, pick an airframe, and when it comes on board, there's always challenges.

The challenge with the C-27 has been that it is a refurbished program. So the aircraft, in essence, are, you know, they're 20-year-old aircraft that are refurbished that, you know, give them -- it's like a mid-life service upgrade, if you will, to these aircraft.

And so Alenia Company in Italy has got that contract. Although, again, many of the parts within the C-27 come from companies in the U.S. But Alenia has got it, and I think they've run into a little bit more challenges than they thought they were going to run into. And so we've been putting some pressure on them to keep after it.

There's probably some of these older C-27s, some of the corrosion that comes into play with them. It's been a little bit more challenging for the company to overcome. And then, there's some -- when a refurbish the aircraft like a C-27A, which is an A model, you have a lot of the parts that just are no longer in stock.

So many times, the company has to go out and they'll have to have these parts manufactured. So that takes time to manufacture these parts. And then they have to be manufactured to the aircraft standards -- air worthiness standards, if you will. So it's a challenge. It's a little bit more of a challenge than I thought.

So I think that timeline wise I'm probably about six to eight weeks behind the timeline I'd like to be with the C-27 deliveries. But I've actually -- I haven't got the Afghan aircrew through English language or pilot training as fast as we thought either. So it's actually worked out okay. And we started out really challenged on the supply -- the parts side of the house. Since then, we've had three major

parts shipments come in, and now I'm up to about 75 percent of adequate supplies on the shelf. And it's really turned out around a mission-capable rate for the C-27.

I've been consistently more of -- at least four of the five I have on the ramp here, you know, are flying. And so that's critical because we're doing all the Afghan training for the C-27 in country. They're not elsewhere at some other -- outside the country learning to fly the C-27. We're teaching them to fly the C-27 right here in Afghanistan.

So I have -- now that I have five of them, I can dedicate three of them to training. And I've got one to two of them in operational flights throughout the week.

So we've turned it around from the slow start with parts, but I think, down the road, I'm going to be challenged again with the parts issue. So the jury is out, but I think over the course of the next three quarters of a year, you know, I feel pretty confident to getting up to 10 to 15 aircraft which is three times the size that they have now for airlift capability.

So, again, the C-27 has been an overall success story, and that's how we're making the paradigm shift with the Afghans to the western way of thinking, of flying, of training, of operating airframes. Over.

Q Thank you, General. Just to follow up very briefly, do you have specific mission-readiness rates? Either where you hope to be versus where you are now for the ones that are flying?

GEN. BOERA: Yeah. First, I'm going to give you a good-news story again in that overall mission-capable ready rates for all of the Afghan air corps fleet -- all of it -- has been consistently above 75 percent, at 75 percent or above. And the standard in many of our airframes back in the U.S. has been 70 percent. So they have done very well, and a lot of that has to do with MI-17. It's a very reliable and dependable aircraft.

And now, as the C-27 rates come up, that's actually helping with the overall fleet FMC rates. Right now, I'm sitting at about consistently for the last you know -- well, if I put it across overall what I've been, it comes out to about 60 percent mission-capable rates for the C-27.

But that's after a very rocky start. And so the trend is upward there. And my trend for non-mission-capable for supply is going down. That's a good trend. So, again, the trending is going up, in one case, going down. Both are good trends, and it's a great recovery from the kind of flow out of the chalk's start, if you will.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Sharon. Sandra?

Q Hi. Thank you. This is Sandra Erwin with National Defense.

General, I wanted to ask you about the timeline for what you're doing. What you're doing is a very labor-intensive and very time-consuming project and, yet, there's the political schedule to get forces out of Afghanistan -- U.S. forces out of Afghanistan in the next year or two.

Can you tell us maybe specifically when the Afghan air force will be able to operate autonomously without the U.S. help? Or do you foresee that it will need the U.S. help for an unforeseeable amount of time?

GEN. BOERA: Sandra, first of all, I'll again mention what I mentioned at the beginning. Our plan to build the Afghan air force -- our development plan has always gone out to 2016. We came in with that building partnership capacity mind-set to this mission.

We started building the air corps in 2005, not 2002-2003 like some of the ground forces did. So we've always had a long-term perspective on this.

I'll try not to confuse what I think are troops that are supporting a kinetic fight with troops that are here supporting the growth and development of Afghan forces. And I'm going stay in my lane, for sure here, but for the air corps, you know, really even though I'm -- our advisers are actually flying the airlift missions with them, we have always had -- I believe that airmen will be here at least to 2014 and probably most definitely to 2016.

And I give that window because I never say "never." So I don't really know if our full, you know -- what will happen with the full plan. I mean, things do change.

Right now, we are tracking very well with the plan that we have in place, but designed within it -- this plan -- I have plenty of good off ramps if we're asked for off ramps. The two more important airframes for Afghanistan, in my mind right now in support of the -- (inaudible) -- fight and that help me develop the air corps are the MI-17 and the C-27. With those two airframes, they're going to be able to do a lot. Okay?

Now, will they be able to do the full spectrum of ops that we're trying to grow and develop for them? No, that will take us out to 2016 in order to do that. You know, the things like refining close-air support capability, the things like intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, indigenous, you know, capabilities, they can do themselves. So we don't have to have the U.S. ISR, robust U.S. ISR capability here in Afghanistan for years and years.

So this is stuff we want to teach them. Remember, our job is to set the conditions for a transition. We kind of can't come up short with the mission set if you really want to set the conditions.

So ours has always been a long-term effort. And within NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, which we are a part of, you know, we believe that -- and we are the strategic effort. We are the transition to the future for all forces out of here.

So in the short term over the next, you know, time frame that's set forth by our national, you know, leadership, really, what we're doing is helping the Afghans get to a point where they can take on more of the kinetic fight so that it allows the transition of forces that were doing the kinetic fight to leave Afghanistan. That will be a significant amount of forces when the time comes.

But the training piece will be here for a while.

Q So the 2016 deadline, I mean, is that when you would foresee the Afghan forces to be able to operate independently?

GEN. BOERA: No. First off, it's not a deadline.

Q Okay.

GEN. BOERA: It's a plan. And second, we will transition to Afghan-led and Afghan operations from now all the way out to 2016. It'll be a slow, gradual transition of different mission sets, different airframe capability, et cetera.

So this is not a line in the sand that says, okay, every mission set, you've got. No. It'll be a gradual transfer transition of that mission set to the Afghans.

And, right now, much of that -- some of that's happening now. I have Afghan maintainers training Afghans right now. So there's some of that -- you know, pretty soon, I'll be able to go, okay, I don't need my advisers around there. I can push them elsewhere where I need them. So in my mind, with a couple of the airframes that we're talking about, the off ramps, I believe I have off ramps that will allow me to transition more and more to the Afghans starting in 2014 and that will continue out to 2016. But if I need more time, you know, we'll take more time. If all of a sudden I'm asked to accelerate that for whatever reason, then I have the capability to accelerate and just some mission sets will not get done.

So, you know, it's not a hard-and-fast answer I can give you on that. I can't predict the future. All I can do is put in place the best plan that I know how and carry it out until I'm told I no longer have the assets to carry it out.

Q Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Sandra.

We've gone over by about 12 minutes, so I want to quickly go to Caitlin, and I want to wrap up today's roundtable to respect the general's time.

Caitlin, please go ahead.

Q Yes, Caitlin Harrington from Jane's Defense Weekly.

Sir, I wanted to ask you kind of about the breakdown of responsibility over there for U.S. forces. Can you talk about -- I know the Army's played a pretty heavy role and it almost seems like leading the role in training on the MI-17. So I was wondering how the Air Force kind of fits in with the Army.

And then, also, if Air Force Special Operations Command, like the 6th SOS, is playing any role in helping with this training.

GEN. BOERA: First off, I don't know where you got your information that the Army is helping me with my training. Within CAPTF under my command -- the only Army I have working for me is on my air interdiction unit side of the house when it comes to air advisers. And that was all part of pretty much the U.S. counternarcotics effort where I got some of those Army aviators. And those aircraft are pretty much still U.S. aircraft and U.S. maintained.

On my CAPTF side, I've had predominantly all Air Force. I do have a lieutenant commander from the Navy that's helping me with my forward observer, JTAC-type programs. I do have a Marine, and she is a first sergeant helping me with, you know, mission-support type of stuff out at Shindand.

I do have a couple of Army helping me with personnel manpower-type things but not in the air adviser -- (inaudible). So for CAPTF, I have been predominantly Air Force. And there is -- 6th SOS in the mix. I believe I have about -- I'll say 11 or 12 of my 250 are from the 6th SOS, but don't hold me to that number hard and fast, but it's about that, you know, on the air adviser side of the house. What you may have heard and what I've been trying to do because of the lack of trainers over here has been trying to maximize every opportunity that I have with the expertise that's in theater to help me. And so where I've asked the Army to help me was with CJTF 82, or Task Force Falcon up there out of Bagram that in their spare time can they help me with the -- two things. The crew chief, the MI-17 crew chief training because I told you I had no air advisers for the back end, so I'm asking the Army guys on the ground to help me with that, or the Army guys up at Bagram to help me with that, and air assault. Now before they were just flying MI-17s flying from point A to point B but nothing really tactical with it.

So we're teaching them how to do an air assault, quick implication, exfiltration of forces. And so the teaming that we've been able to do with Task Force Falcon has been phenomenal, and we were able

to bring the Afghans up to Bagram, spend a week or two up there, really, you know, dive into the training and -- and it's been night and day. But again, I'm asking out of the goodness of their heart other units that are around the country to help. We've gotten help teaming with the 454 Air Expeditionary Wing down in Kandahar. We've done some more with CJTF down at 82 out of Kandahar. We've got CJTF 82 out of Bagram and we've got the full 55th AEW with med-tech type training out of Bagram.

So that's the teamwork that's going on over here with the coalition forces and it's really been a win-win for everybody. We've been winning by getting the training that we need for the Afghans and the airmen and the soldiers that are part of these units over here that would have never had an opportunity to interface with an Afghan during their whole deployment here to maybe have an Afghan in the defact of the dining facilities, to see them, you know, picking up trays or dishing out food, whatever the case may be. That might be the only time they really interacted with the Afghans.

Now they're making a difference for Afghanistan, and they've been as excited about teaching them as the Afghans have been about getting taught from the best. And so that maybe where you heard -- where you heard that. Otherwise, I've got to tell you, the Air Force is pretty engaged with the captive mission overall when it comes to the air advisor side of the house and the overall, you know, but they make up the majority of my captive slash 438 Air Expeditionary Wing force. Q Thank you, sir. I guess what I was thinking about was just like the MI-17 stuff, especially the Army talks an awful lot about that and I get -- you know, you had mentioned Fort Rucker, like the pilot training for the MI-17 is actually at -- at Fort Rucker, right?

GEN. BOERA: Okay. Okay, yeah, okay. I see where -- I see where you're going. Yeah, first, you're right that we've sent the -- the MI-17s aren't there yet. The MI-17 training was at Fort Bliss, and it -- and it shut down. And then we -- there was enough pressure to go, we've got to open that back up and we have to open it back up and they're going to do it at Fort Rucker. So the training that's being done at Fort Rucker by the Army, and it's -- it's gone very well -- is for, you know, basic rotary wing training.

So they're just learning how to pivot -- they don't have that capability in country yet. You know, you don't jump a new -- a new pilot doesn't jump into an MI-17. That's a pretty heavy medium lift helicopter. So we needed to get the rotary wing training done on the pilots down at the -- so we got Fort Rucker. And so that's working well and eventually with more MI-17s coming back their way, not only will they try to do some initial MI-17 training there for more importantly the air advisors, some of them coming through there, but we'll try to do -- we're trying to do that at some contract locations to.

But the intent, and I hope the -- I'd like to see the intent of getting two MI-17s up to Colorado Springs so they can do the high-altitude training that's needed, that's so critical for us here in Afghanistan. And the other day I was flying with a unit and we landed at a site, you know, at 9,300 feet. You know, I was on the side of the

mountain here. That's not just something you just do every day in the U.S. or down southwest here where it's desert. That's the mission up in the northeast here and up in the east. So that kind of training is invaluable.

So if we can get that done there in Colorado Springs that would be -- that would be great. So Ruckers has provided phenomenal rotary wing training for our -- for the young Afghans. And again, I talked to them just a couple of weeks ago down there, saw the whole operation. I was tremendously impressed and again great hope for Afghanistan after talking to the Afghans.

The Army has also stepped up and taken on the oversight, the program management oversight of the MI-17s. Really they've taken on non-standard rotary wing aviation on oversighting. And into MI-17 is not a U.S. asset; it is made in Russia. So it's a non-standard rotary wing aircraft as far as the U.S. is concerned, and the Army has been given the mission to provide oversight of it so we have some standards across the board.

There's some challenges that we bring as that office matures, and they -- there's going to need to be some embracing of adult and partnership capacity. If everything that we do over here has to do with will it be sustainable for the Afghans ultimately. So we can't be -- you're just not going to be able to put some of the normal, everyday standards that we're used to in the U.S. to the Afghans because they just won't sustain it.

Now, in the meantime, we had the luxury of having some good resources and funding that allows us to put some rigor to the programs. As long as that type of funding is maintained, then we'll be able to do plenty. But you know as well as I do that who knows how long funding will continue at the rate it is, at the rate it is. So we just want to make sure we put in place something that is safe, that is airworthy and that is sustainable by the Afghans.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Caitlin.

We've found -- I know that we've gone over, sir, so I'm going to turn it back over to you to end with any closing statement or closing thoughts. The floor is yours again, sir.

GEN. BOERA: Well, again, thank you all for taking the time to learn a little bit more about the Afghan Air Force that are being built over here. I'm proud of my soldier/sailor/airmen and Marine, and contracts of the whole team that goes into doing this. It is not the priority effort over here. you know, building up the ground forces and the both on the army side as the police side in a COIN- centric fight is critical.

So what the air forces are able to do for this country, first off, they'll be able to provide a very visible, very, very visible form

of what the government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan can do for their people. There are -- especially when it comes to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. MI-17s have been used for -- to rescue flood victims down to the south and out to the west. It's been used to rescue Solon (ph) paths, avalanche victims off of the mountain peaks and landed at, you know, landing zones up at 13,000 feet.

It's been elevated to deliver school supplies up to schools that, you know, you read about in Greg Mortensen's books, and only it can get up there. So it gets places no -- either it gets there or a donkey gets there. And when it gets there it has, you know, the symbol of Afghanistan and the Afghan -- Afghan Air Force is on it, Afghan National Army Air Corps on it. That's a visible symbol of Afghanistan, and that's what the government can bring to the people of Afghanistan that the local elder can not. So there are opportunities to make sure that you maximize that capability.

And then finally, again, put that -- put that visible symbol of Afghanistan aside, and just the fact that it is doing good things for its people. And if we ever want to transition to a point where we truly can hand off the mission to the Afghans, then you're going to have to have the lift capability in country, the indigenous lift capability, so that the Afghans can swap out and move their troops throughout the year, whereas right now they rely on what little air corps capability there is, ISAF air or commercial air to do.

So if we truly want to transition to the Afghan status, we've got to give them the capability with their air forces to support their ground forces. With that, I'll leave you with my saying that I use with my group all the time. We push it up, we aim high, and we do everything shona (ph) by shona (ph) -- that's shoulder by shoulder -- in our embedded partnership with the Afghans. And I'm proud and honored to be in the position I am and to work with the great Americans in coalition partners.

Let me add that one thing, coalition partners, and right now I have the Canadians, the Brits, the Czech Republic and the Hungarians in the fight, if you will, our fight, with us, with the Afghans and the Americans. And so it's a great team that we have going and I hope to add to that whole coalition fight. I hope you all have a great day. It's 8:00 at night for us here in Afghanistan, on the other side of the world. And so I look forward to reading what you write about us in the papers to come. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

And to just add a note for everyone, as soon as the transcript is completed by Fed News I'll make sure I e-mail it to everyone that was on the call, and we'll also post it to www.dodlive.mil. There's a tab for blogger roundtable where you'll find a post about today's roundtable. We'll add the link to the audio podcast as well as the transcript. Thank you so much, sir, for attending today's blogger roundtable and thank you for the bloggers who called in. Feel free to disconnect at this time and end today's roundtable. Thank you.

END.