

# SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for  
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

SIGAR 21-14 Audit Report

**UNCLASSIFIED VERSION OF A PREVIOUSLY ISSUED CLASSIFIED REPORT**

**Afghan Air Forces: DOD Has Taken Steps to  
Develop Afghan Aviation Capability but Continued  
U.S. Support is Needed to Sustain Forces**



JANUARY  
2022

# SIGAR

## Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

### WHAT SIGAR REVIEWED

Since 2010, the U.S. has spent over \$8.5 billion to support and develop the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and the Special Mission Wing (SMW). Together, the AAF and SMW comprise Afghanistan's air forces. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), the Afghan air forces provide "critical capabilities," and enhancing and growing the air forces are a priority for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

The Train, Advise, Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) and the Special Operations Advisory Group (SOAG), are responsible for training and mentoring the AAF and SMW, respectively. TAAC-Air and SOAG are made up of U.S. and NATO Coalition military personnel, as well as U.S.-funded contractor personnel.

DOD has reported that the Afghan air forces continue to show progress in combat operation capabilities, pilot and ground crew proficiency, as well as air-to-ground integration. However, the air forces continue to struggle with human capital limitations, leadership challenges, aircraft misuse, and a dependence on contractor logistic support (CLS).

The objective of the audit was to assess the extent to which DOD has taken steps to develop a sustainable AAF and SMW.

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January 2022

Afghan Air Forces: DOD has Taken Steps to Develop Afghan Aviation Capability but Continued U.S. Support is Needed to Sustain Forces

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### SIGAR 21-14 AUDIT REPORT

[THIS IS AN UNCLASSIFIED VERSION OF A REPORT WE ISSUED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE IN JANUARY 2021. THE ONLY MATERIAL CHANGES FROM THE PREVIOUSLY ISSUED REPORT ARE (1) THE REMOVAL OF ALL CLASSIFIED INFORMATION, AND (2) MINOR REVISIONS FOR READABILITY RESULTING FROM THE REMOVAL OF CLASSIFIED MATERIAL.]

### WHAT SIGAR FOUND

DOD has taken some steps to develop operational capability in the AAF and SMW but challenges to achieving fully sustainable Afghan air forces remain. In August 2019, NATO Resolute Support directed TAAC-Air to shift its advising approach from building the AAF to increasing long-term sustainability. Sustainability requires the recruitment, training, and retention of qualified personnel in all areas of the air forces, including pilots, maintainers, and personnel in support positions such as general engineering, human resources, and financial management.

The AAF and SMW have not met authorized personnel levels to fulfill their increased mission requirements. The AAF lacks a recruiting strategy as directed by the Afghan Ministry of Defense, and the SMW does not have a recruiting policy or recruiting strategy. DOD officials have identified high recruiting standards, additional levels of screening, competition with other ANDSF units for recruits, and training timelines as challenges to reaching authorized numbers.

TAAC-Air has developed training requirements and standards for pilots and maintainers in both the AAF and SMW. However, TAAC-Air has not prioritized training for 86 percent of AAF personnel, including for support positions. According to TAAC-Air, there is no institutional training for AAF personnel in support positions. The SMW recruits personnel through the AAF, so this lack of training flows into the SMW personnel ranks through the AAF.

DOD currently supports the Afghan air forces sustainment through financial and non-combat support services. Neither TAAC-Air nor SOAG advisors believe the AAF or SMW have the ability to sustain themselves without continued advisor and CLS assistance. DOD officials have stated that, similar to any modern air force, the Afghan air forces will always require some level of CLS. In FY 2020, DOD appropriated over \$700 million for aircraft CLS, and the Afghan air forces continue to rely on CLS to perform the majority of maintenance on most aircraft. In addition, the AAF and SMW will continue to rely on U.S.-funded initial pilot training conducted outside of Afghanistan. Further, AAF and SMW sustainment is challenged by slow Afghan capacity development

caused by limited personnel, training gaps, inefficient leadership development leading to misuse of aircraft, and few U.S. and Coalition advisors. While DOD continues to provide assistance, the reduction in U.S. and Coalition forces will alter how advisors conduct their duties and increase reliance on contractors for day-to-day assistance.

Contractors continue to fill important roles in the development and sustainment of the AAF and SMW as U.S. and Coalition forces withdrawal from Afghanistan. Contractors provide mentoring and training in a variety of areas, including aerial resupply, air-to-ground integration, aircrew training, command and control, personnel management, logistics, communications, budgeting, training and force development, intelligence, and engineering. Additionally, contractors provide English language training, as well as pilot and maintainer training and instruction. DOD's reliance on contractors poses operational challenges and risks, as well as the potential for waste due to the challenging oversight environment. Further, the potential withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan, in addition to U.S. and Coalition forces, may leave the AAF and SMW without the necessary support to sustain and develop the Afghan air forces, if alternative sources are not identified.

## WHAT SIGAR RECOMMENDS

To assist with the sustainment of the Afghan air forces at all levels, we recommend that the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) Commander, TAAC-Air Commander, and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan Commander:

- 1. Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.**
- 2. Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Master Training Plan.**
- 3. Finalize a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.**

SIGAR received written comments on a classified draft of this report from the 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force–Afghanistan on behalf of TAAC-Air; CSTC-A; and the NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A). SIGAR submitted a draft to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, but did not receive any comments in reply. TAAC-Air did not concur with the first and second recommendations but did concur with the third. CSTC-A “partially” concurred with the first and second recommendations and concurred with the third. NSOCC-A, the agency responsible for developing the SMW, concurred with all three recommendations. We have reproduced the comments in full in appendices II, III, and IV, respectively. Additionally, CSTC-A provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report.



**SIGAR**

Office of the Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

January 12, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense

General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.  
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General Austin Scott Miller  
Commander, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan  
Commander, Resolute Support

Brigadier General Daniel Lasica  
Commander, NATO Air Command–Afghanistan

Lieutenant General E. John Deedrick Jr.  
Commander, Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan

Colonel Scott T. Yeatman  
Commander, Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air

Brigadier General Marcus S. Evans  
Commander, NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan

[This is an UNCLASSIFIED version of a report we issued to the Department of Defense in January 2021. The only material changes from the previously issued report are (1) the removal of all CLASSIFIED information, and (2) minor revisions for readability resulting from the removal of CLASSIFIED material.]

This report discusses the results of SIGAR’s audit of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) efforts to address challenges associated with developing a sustainable Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Special Mission Wing (SMW). The objective of the audit was to assess the extent to which DOD has taken steps to develop a sustainable AAF and SMW.

We found that DOD has taken steps to develop the Afghan air forces sustainment. However, the Afghan air forces continue to need U.S. support. The Afghan air forces have not been able to meet their authorized personnel numbers, the AAF has not developed a recruiting strategy, and the SMW does not have a recruiting policy or recruiting strategy. Additionally, neither DOD nor the Afghan air forces have prioritized the training or development of personnel in support positions. Furthermore, DOD does not ensure qualified and trained pilots and maintainers are in positions that utilize their advanced training, potentially leading to the payment of incorrectly placed or unqualified personnel. The DOD and Afghan prioritization of combat operations has slowed capacity development throughout the air forces due to limited personnel, training gaps, and inefficient Afghan leadership development. DOD continues to assist the AAF and SMW; however, the reduction of U.S. and Coalition forces will increase DOD’s reliance on contractors to develop a sustainable AAF and SMW. DOD’s reliance on contractors that poses additional operational and management challenges and risks for the U.S., as well as for the long-term sustainability of the Afghan air forces.



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We are making three recommendations to help ensure the sustainability of the Afghan air forces. To assist with the sustainment of the Afghan air forces at all levels, we recommend that the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) Commander; Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air (TAAC-Air) Commander; and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan Commander:

- 1. Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.**
- 2. Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Master Training Plan.**
- 3. Finalize a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.**

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SIGAR conducted this work under the authority of Public Law 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; and in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

John F. Sopko  
Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

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## ABBREVIATIONS

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|          |  |
|----------|--|
| AAF      | Afghan Air Force                                 |
| ANDSF    | Afghan National Defense and Security Forces      |
| ASFF     | Afghan Security Forces Fund                      |
| CLS      | Contractor Logistic Support                      |
| CSTC-A   | Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan |
| DOD      | Department of Defense                            |
| DOD-IG   | Department of Defense Inspector General          |
| FY       | fiscal year                                      |
| MOD      | Afghan Ministry of Defense                       |
| SMW      | Special Mission Wing                             |
| SOAG     | Special Operations Advisory Group                |
| TAA      | train, advise, assist                            |
| TAAC-Air | Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air                |

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Since 2010, the U.S. has spent \$8.5 billion to support and develop the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Special Mission Wing (SMW). Together, the AAF and SMW comprise Afghanistan's air forces. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), enhancing and growing the air forces are a priority for the Afghan National Defense Forces (ANDSF).<sup>1</sup> Due to the importance of the Afghan air forces to the ANDSF, U.S. and Coalition advisors train, advise, and assist (TAA) the forces from the Commanding General level down to the wing, group, and squadron levels.<sup>2</sup> In December 2019, DOD reported that the Afghan air forces continue to show steady improvement, but noted human capital limitations, such as English language comprehension, remained a challenge to fully meeting the recruitment needs of the Afghan air forces.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in its *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan* report, DOD identified the need for continued contractor logistic support (CLS), and U.S. and donor funding, in order to sustain aircraft provided to the Afghan air forces.<sup>4</sup>

On February 29, 2020, the United States and the Taliban signed an agreement calling for a conditions-based withdrawal of U.S. troops, initially down to 8,600 within 135 days.<sup>5</sup> The agreement states that the drawdown of troops depends on the Taliban meeting certain counterterrorism conditions, and calls for the complete withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition troops, as well as contractors, in 14 months.<sup>6</sup> The then U.S. Secretary of Defense stated that the U.S. can carry out its counterterrorism mission and TAA mission with the troop reduction to 8,600; however, DOD officials have not commented on the ability to conduct missions should the troop level drop below 8,600.

The objective of this audit was to assess the extent to which DOD has taken steps to develop a sustainable AAF and SMW. For this audit, we define "sustainability" as the ability to recruit, train, and retain qualified personnel in all areas of the air forces, including pilots, maintainers, and personnel in positions such as general engineering, human resources, and financial management.

To accomplish the objective, we reviewed various DOD documents, including *Enhancing Security and Stability on Afghanistan*, June 2018 through June 2020; the fiscal year (FY) 2020 and FY 2021 DOD budget request for the AAF and the SMW; Chapters 10 of the *Security Assistance Management Manual*; the 2019 Afghanistan Aviation Forces Master Training Plan; the Train, Advise, Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) Strategic Plans for 2018 and 2019; and the AAF recruitment policy. We interviewed U.S. officials from Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), TAAC-Air, and the Special Operations Advisory Group (SOAG), as well as officials from DOD's Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, and the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation. In addition, we interviewed Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) senior officials and received written responses from the Commanding General of the SMW. Further, we conducted site visits of third-country training locations for initial entry pilot training, aircraft qualification training, and aircraft maintenance training in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the United Arab Emirates.

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<sup>1</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan's (CSTC-A) Ministerial Advisory Group-Defense advises at the ministerial level. A squadron is the lowest level of the air forces organization. Two or more squadrons make up a group. Two or more groups make up a wing.

<sup>3</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2019.

<sup>4</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Department of State, "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America," February 29, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> The agreement includes the withdrawal of "all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel." Department of State, "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan...." February 29, 2020, p. 1.



We conducted our work in Arlington, Virginia; Kabul, Afghanistan; Orlando, Florida; Al-Fujairah, United Arab Emirates; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; and Košice, Slovakia, from May 2019 through July 2020, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Appendix I has a more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.

## BACKGROUND

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In 2007, U.S. and Coalition forces began to rebuild the AAF by sending air advisors to Afghanistan. TAAC-Air is tasked with providing TAA to the AAF. TAAC-Air consists of U.S. and Coalition military personnel, as well as U.S.-funded contractor personnel who are responsible for training and mentoring AAF personnel. TAAC-Air advisors come from 13 countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Slovakia. TAAC-Air advisors provide advice to the AAF Commanding General down to the wing, group and squadron levels. Additionally, TAAC-Air advisors assist in the entry-level training for Afghan pilots and aircraft mechanics. TAAC-Air headquarters is co-located with the AAF headquarters at Forward Operating Base Oqab at Hamid Karzai International Airport.

TAAC-Air's mission is to train, advise, and assist the AAF in developing a sustainable force capable of supporting counterterrorism missions and civil authority requirements in order to meet national security objectives. TAAC-Air's defines "sustainable" as the ability of a force to maintain the necessary level of combat power for the duration required to achieve its objectives. Sustainability includes the ability to anticipate future challenges to drive modernization efforts both in terms of equipment and operational philosophy in order to decrease future mission requirements and increase operational flexibility and resilience. TAAC-Air's plan to develop the AAF highlights the need to included long term planning and the implementation of sustainability measures in training, operations, logistics, and oversight. To be sustainable, the AAF and SMW must recruit, train, and retain qualified personnel including pilots, maintainers, and support personnel. In addition to personnel, a sustainable AAF and SMW must also have necessary funding and proper equipment.<sup>7</sup>

According to NATO Resolute Support, the AAF has entered a time of great transformation as it becomes less dependent on Coalition advisors for managing day-to-day operations and programs required for its continued success. As the AAF transforms, so too must TAAC-Air to ensure Resolute Support continues to meet the AAF's developing requirements. As part of the transformation, in 2019 Resolute Support directed TAAC-Air to optimize its approach to meet new AAF requirements, shifting from building the AAF to creating its sustainability. TAAC-Air's revised advising model has shifted to focusing on training, advising, and assisting efforts at the "point of need." Point of need advising is the conduct of training or advising below the headquarters level based on need identified by Coalition or Afghan partners.

In August 2019, as part of the U.S. drawdown of overall forces reductions in the country, TAAC-Air developed a plan to reduce its presence in Afghanistan from 498 to 59 personnel. In August 2020, the Department of Defense Inspector General (DOD-IG) reported that TAACC-Air had reduced its personnel by 90 percent, and transitioned its primary mission focus from TAA to security cooperation management. The change meant that rather than tactical training and advising, TAAC-Air focused instead on managing a portfolio of contracts for AAF aircraft procurement and maintenance, pilot training, aircraft maintenance training, formal training schools, and infrastructure support. TAAC-Air's remaining TAA efforts focused on developing the AAF in key functional areas, including leadership development, personnel management, pilot and aircraft maintenance training management, AAF organic aircraft maintenance, command and control, and supply distribution. According to TAAC-Air, the lower staffing levels reduced functional advisor staffing to minimum levels.

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<sup>7</sup> For this report, support positions include personnel and force management, intelligence operations, logistics, planning, communications, training, programming and budget, and oversight, public affairs, religious and cultural affairs, safety, medical, and legal.

The Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) provides U.S. funds to support the AAF. In January 2020, our quarterly report noted that the AAF FY 2020 priorities shifted from equipment and aircraft to training and sustainment.<sup>8</sup> The FY 2020 total appropriated budget for the AAF was approximately \$1.2 billion, consisting of \$753 million for sustainment, \$356 million for training, and the remaining \$112 million for infrastructure, equipment, and transportation.<sup>9</sup> The FY 2021 total budget request for the AAF decreased to approximately \$835 million, with \$534 million for sustainment, \$233 million for training, and the remaining \$68 million for infrastructure, equipment, and transportation.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the AAF, the Afghan government established the SMW in 2012 to support the Afghan Special Security Forces, whose mission is to combat narcotics trade and terrorism in Afghanistan. The SOAG, part of the NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan, trains, advises, and assists the SMW, working with SMW leadership and squadrons in Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kabul. The SOAG is based at SMW headquarters at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

The SMW provides fixed and rotary wing aviation support to counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations. Counternarcotics missions focus on denying illicit income from narcotics production and trafficking. The SMW's night air assault capability, and its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capacity differentiates it from the AAF. The SMW conducts its operations in accordance with the SMW "concepts of employment."<sup>11</sup> Missions that occur outside of the "concepts of employment" are categorized as misuse. The FY 2020 ASFF appropriation for the SMW included over \$134 million for aircraft sustainment, \$18 million for flight training, and \$15 million for equipment. The FY 2020 Office of the Secretary of Defense–Counter Narcotics budget obligated an additional \$15.5 million for sustainment. The FY 2021 ASFF request included an increase for aircraft sustainment, training, and equipment due in part to the introduction of the UH-60 and CH-47. ASFF FY 2021 requests included \$250 million for aircraft sustainment, \$85 million for flight training, and \$457 million for aircraft.<sup>12</sup>

In 2016, DOD began a modernization program to replace the aging Russian-built Mi-17 helicopters that had been the backbone of the AAF and SMW helicopter fleets.<sup>13</sup> Following the initial modernization efforts, in March 2019, RAND Corporation, at the request of DOD, completed an assessment of the Afghan aviation modernization, which resulted in changes to the previously approved plan. The revised modernization plan for the AAF and SMW aircraft is for 215 total aircraft, including 53 UH-60s, 60 MD-530s, 26 A-29s, 10 Armed C-208s, 20 CH-47s, 24 C-208s, 4 C-130Hs, and 18 PC-12s.<sup>14</sup> The revised plan reduced the total number of UH-60s from 159 to 53 for the AAF and SMW.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2020, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Sustainment funding includes the need to sustain the personnel, equipment, and facility requirements of the AAF. Training includes requirements for pilot, aircrew, and maintainer training, in addition to providing training mentors, operations analysts, and English language comprehension.

<sup>10</sup> DOD, Department of Defense Budget, "Justification for FY 2021 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)," February 2020.

<sup>11</sup> "Concepts of employment" outline intended roles, tasks, responsibilities, and relationships between the Afghan Special Security Forces and the coordinating headquarters to inform mission decisions.

<sup>12</sup> DOD, "Justification for FY 2021 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), ASFF," February 2020.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. sanctions have made it difficult to obtain necessary parts for Mi-17 repairs and overhauls.

<sup>14</sup> Noted aircraft are the proposed end-state numbers, which does not include the use of the Mi-17. Mi-17s will remain in the fleet but will only receive U.S. sustainment funding through FY 2022.

<sup>15</sup> DOD did not include CH-47s in the original modernization plan; however, in the revised plan, DOD added 20 CH-47s for the SMW as the SMW transitions from the Mi-17.

## DOD HAS MADE PROGRESS IN DEVELOPING THE AAF AND SMW, BUT SUSTAINMENT RELIES ON CONTINUED U.S. SUPPORT

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According to DOD, the AAF and SMW have made significant progress toward building combat operation capabilities, and continue to show improvement in pilot and ground crew proficiency. However, the air forces have not been able to meet their authorized personnel numbers, the AAF has not developed a recruiting strategy, and the SMW does not have a recruiting policy or strategy. Additionally, neither DOD nor the Afghan air forces have prioritized training or development of personnel in support positions—positions that make up a majority of the total authorized air forces strength. Furthermore, DOD does not ensure qualified and trained pilots and maintainers are in positions that utilize their advanced training, potentially leading to the payment of incorrectly placed or unqualified personnel. The focus on combat operations has led to slow capacity development due to limited personnel, training gaps, and inefficient Afghan leadership development. While DOD currently assists the AAF and SMW, the reduction of U.S. and Coalition forces will increase DOD's reliance on contractors to develop a sustainable AAF and SMW. This poses additional operational and management challenges and risks, as well as the potential for waste.

### **DOD, AAF, and SMW Have Taken Limited Steps to Sustain the Recruitment, Training, and Retention of Afghan Air Forces Personnel, But Additional Action is Needed to Help Sustain Forces**

Since at least 2007, U.S. and Coalition forces have focused on the development of the Afghan air forces. In order to provide necessary operational air support, the AAF and SMW must have trained and qualified personnel. However, the actual personnel strength of both the AAF and SMW has consistently fallen short of authorized personnel levels. The Afghan air forces and their advisors have focused on training pilots and maintainers, and have not focused on the support positions that make up a majority of air force personnel. Additionally, DOD cannot verify that Afghan air forces personnel, such as pilots and maintainers, are in jobs that utilize their unique training, even though DOD provides financial incentives to personnel in such positions.

#### **AAF and SMW Manning Levels Have Fallen Short of Authorized Levels**

Because Afghan and Coalition leaders consider the AAF and SMW a success, Afghan leadership uses the air forces for a greater number of missions and MOD has called for an increase in the size of both forces. The TAAC-Air Strategic Plan states that the goal of the AAF is to carry out operations in accordance with the ANDSF security plan. Additionally, the SMW is to provide operational support for counterterrorism and counter narcotics missions. In order to achieve these capabilities and complete the requested number of missions, the AAF and SMW must continue to recruit qualified personnel. However, the personnel strength for both the AAF and SMW have fallen short of their authorized levels. DOD officials have identified high standards, competition with other ANDSF units for recruits, and long training timelines as challenges to reaching AAF and SMW authorized Tashkil numbers.<sup>16</sup>

As of May 2020, the AAF was authorized 8,071 members and had 7,505 members assigned to it. To better recruit needed personnel, in 2017, the MOD developed an AAF recruiting policy that is separate from the Afghan National Army recruiting policy. Prior to 2017, the Afghan National Army provided recruiting for the AAF, but that recruitment did not produce the high quality recruits the AAF needs to meet the technical challenges of a modern air force. In response, the 2017 AAF policy identified the qualifications of individuals the AAF can recruit. It also directed the AAF to develop a recruiting strategy, but did not provide guidance on the steps that the AAF must take to identify and recruit potential AAF members.<sup>17</sup> However, we found that the AAF has not yet

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<sup>16</sup> Tashkil, meaning “organization” in Dari, refers to the official list of personnel and equipment requirements used by the MOD.

<sup>17</sup> The MOD policy states that the AAF command should conduct a widespread advertisement campaign.

developed a strategy to implement its recruiting policy so the AAF can fill current open positions and respond to plans from MOD to further grow the force. TAAC-Air officials noted that they are not involved in recruiting candidates into AAF programs, and did not know if the AAF had developed a recruiting strategy.

In May 2020, the SMW was authorized 1,216 personnel but had only 943 personnel assigned to it. The SMW lacked both a recruiting policy and a recruiting strategy, which effected the size and make-up of its force. SOAG officials told us they were working with the SMW to develop a recruiting policy and standards to assess potential candidates.

DOD officials have identified high recruiting standards, additional levels of screening, competition with other ANDSF units for recruits, and training timelines, as challenges to the SMW reaching its authorized Tashkil numbers. The SMW recruits personnel from the AAF, ANDSF, and Afghan Special Security Forces, but selects aviation recruits from the AAF's initial entry rotatory-wing and fixed-wing students.

### **DOD Has Established Training Pipelines for Aircraft Pilots and Maintainers, But Lacks Institutional Training for AAF and SMW Support Positions**

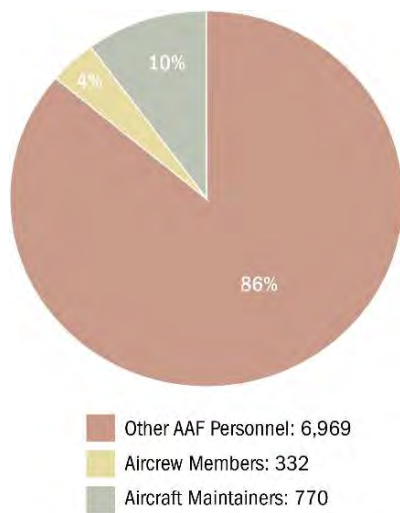
DOD has prioritized the need to recruit and train pilots and aircraft maintainers in order to meet the personnel levels necessary for combat operations and aircraft modernization. However, support positions comprise the majority of the authorized positions in the air forces, and DOD and the Afghan government have not established institutional training for those positions. Of the 8,071 total authorized positions in the AAF, 332 were aircrew positions, and 770 were maintainer positions.<sup>18</sup> The remaining 6,969 authorized AAF positions are not pilots, aircrew, or maintainers. Instead, these positions include support positions such as intelligence operations, logistics, planning, communications, training, personnel and force management, programming and budget, oversight, public affairs, religious and cultural affairs, safety, and medical. Of the 1,216 authorized SMW positions, the SMW had 303 authorized aircrew positions, and 472 maintainer positions. Senior Afghan MOD officials told us that they struggle to fill support positions with qualified or experienced personnel. A senior Afghan MOD official said that it is difficult to recruit qualified individuals for support positions due to the low salaries assigned to those positions. As such, according to the official, the AAF and SMW have filled support positions with grounded pilots and staff from MOD logistics and personnel divisions.

Figures 1 and 2 on the following page show the authorized Afghan air forces personnel.

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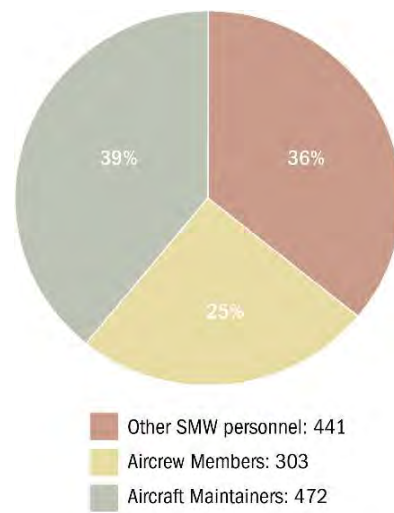
<sup>18</sup> Depending on the aircraft, necessary aircrew may include an aircraft commander, co-pilot, a backseat-only sensor operator (pilot), flight engineer, load master, mission systems operator, and sensor management officer. For example, the UH-60 has two pilots and two special mission operators, and the C-130 has two pilots, two flight engineers, and two loadmasters. During training and development, instructors may also be present in the aircraft.

**Figure 1 - AAF Authorized Personnel**



Source: SIGAR analysis of DOD data.

**Figure 2 - SMW Authorized Personnel**



Source: SIGAR analysis of DOD data.

The TAAC-Air Strategic Plan states that TAAC-Air must develop and implement sustainability measures in training, operations, logistics, and oversight that enable long-term AAF mission effectiveness. The plan highlights advising priorities, including developing training capabilities and supporting the timely movement of personnel through formal training. DOD guidance highlights the need for training as the following:

an integral part of a total program approach to building partner capability or capacity, and must be considered when estimating delivery dates of equipment or resourcing any capacity building programs. Training programs must consider the absorption capacity of the host nation; the availability of qualified personnel; the skills to be developed, to include English Language Training; and the time required to plan, implement, and complete any additional individual and unit training once equipment is delivered.<sup>19</sup>

In October 2019, DOD developed the Afghanistan Aviation Forces Master Training Plan to provide a systematic approach to assessing, developing, and implementing training and education programs for Afghanistan military aviation, and to produce a standardized, effective, and sustainable Afghan Aviation Forces training program. This plan focuses on aircrew and aviation maintenance training. In line with the plan, TAAC-Air developed a training pipeline for pilots and aircraft maintainers, which, according to TAAC-Air officials, is on track to meet authorized levels by the end of 2024. According to DOD, the SMW selects aviation candidates from TAAC-Air's training pipeline. TAAC-Air and the Afghan government select candidates for training based on the number of pilots and aircraft maintainers needed, candidate class rank, and training class size.

The 2019 Afghanistan Aviation Forces Master Training Plan provides guidance on the process for both pilot and maintainer training. The training pipeline for newly recruited pilots lasts between 47 and 66 months, depending on the type of aircraft. The pipeline for new pilots after recruitment is as follows:

1. Candidates attend English Language Training. Candidates must pass the American Language Curriculum Proficiency Test with a score of 50 or greater.

<sup>19</sup> Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *Security Assistance Management Manual*, "Chapter 10: International Training," April 30, 2012, p. 1.

2. Candidates attend initial entry fixed wing or initial entry rotatory wing training in a third country location. Currently, DOD contractors conduct trainings in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>20</sup>
3. Candidates receive specialized aircraft training through Aircraft Qualification Training, followed by Mission Qualification Training.<sup>21</sup>

The training pipeline for a basic level aircraft maintainer requires English Language Training and 600 hours of maintenance training. Basic level maintainers attend the following after recruitment:

1. Candidates attend English Language Training. Candidates must pass the American Language Curriculum Proficiency Test with a score of 40 or greater.
2. Candidates attend 600 hours of basic level training in a third country location. DOD contractors currently conduct training in Slovakia and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>22</sup>
3. Maintainers return to their unit in Afghanistan to obtain work experience for 18 to 24 months, and then can qualify for intermediate maintenance training conducted at the Aircraft Maintenance Development Center in Kabul.

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**Photo 1 - Classroom Training for Maintenance Students in Slovakia**



Source: SIGAR, November, 2020

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While TAAC-Air's current pipelines train all new Afghan pilots and aircraft maintainers, challenges have slowed part of the training. These challenges include closing U.S. training locations due to absconding students necessitating a search for alternate training locations, additional vetting requirements for third-country training locations, and delays due to force protection concerns for advisors and instructors. Furthermore, the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation and contractor representatives stated that initial entry rotary wing and initial entry fixed wing classes have never reached full capacity. Previously we reported challenges with obtaining pilot candidates due to English comprehension, medical, and security issues.<sup>23</sup> In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges for pilot and maintainer

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<sup>20</sup> DOD intends to stop initial pilot training in the Czech Republic by October 31, 2020. Training for the U.S.-based A-29 pilot program closes at the end of calendar year 2020. Future A-29 pilot training will take place in Afghanistan.

<sup>21</sup> Candidates are selected to train on specific aircraft based on student preference, instructor evaluation, class rank, ethnic distribution, and security vetting.

<sup>22</sup> TAAC-Air primarily focuses on three aircraft for formalized aircraft maintenance: the MD-530, AC-208, and the UH-60. Candidates train on specific platforms and specialty areas to include avionics, weapons, or engine and airframe based on areas of need.

<sup>23</sup> SIGAR, *Afghan Air Force: DOD Met the Initial Date for Fielding UH-60 Helicopters, but the Program is at Risk of Not Having Enough Trained Pilots or the Capability to Maintain Future UH-60s*, SIGAR 19-18-AR, January 30, 2019, p. 11.

training. TAAC-Air reported to us in May 2020 that all face-to-face training and advising was on hold due to the pandemic, and no new aircrew or maintenance personnel had entered the training pipelines. TAAC-Air noted that it is exploring the option for virtual English Language Training because English is a prerequisite for both training pipelines.

In addition to formalized training, both pilots and aircraft maintainers receive on-the-job training. However, the drawdown of U.S. and Coalition forces, along with the need to support combat operations, limits opportunity for on-the-job training. First, there are a limited and decreasing number of U.S. and Afghan advisors and instructor pilots available to continue training new Afghan pilots. Second, a greater reliance on the air forces has caused the Afghans to use all resources for missions rather than for continued training purposes. Third, the DOD-IG reported in 2018 that while many aircraft maintenance contracts include requirements for mentorship, the need to have aircraft available for combat missions has resulted in contractors focusing on maintaining aircraft so the forces can conduct operations instead of mentoring Afghan maintainers.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic paused CLS-provided training for basic and intermediate maintainers. In May 2020, officials with the NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan stated that the COVID-19 restrictions hurt the SMW's training pipeline. For example, the command reported COVID-19 restrictions would likely cause an atrophy in English skills for SMW maintainers, creating a need for maintainers to receive refresher training when advising activities resumed. Continued delays in training would also likely impact TAAC-Air's goal of full operational capacity for the AAF by 2024, and the SOAG's goal of all SMW aircraft working at full operational capacity by 2024.

While aircrew and maintainers in the Afghan air forces have clear training requirements and pipelines, there is no institutional training for AAF personnel in support positions, which make up the majority of the air forces' authorized positions.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, we found no written training plan for support positions. According to DOD, the SMW recruits support personnel through the AAF, so the lack of training for support personnel affects SMW development, as well. DOD-IG reported in January 2018 that the AAF does not have its own institutional schools because it is a component of the Afghan National Army; instead, the AAF relies on Afghan National Army branch schools, including combat arms, combat support, combat service, and general services.<sup>26</sup> The 2018 DOD-IG report further stated that AAF leadership either choose not to send its personnel to the branch schools or selected non-priority individuals for branch school training. The report also noted that Afghan National Army branch schools "did not incorporate or address AAF-specific training requirements."<sup>27</sup> TAAC-Air advisors told us in January 2020 that they did not know if AAF support services personnel attended the Afghan National Army branch schools. Additionally, the 2020 DOD-IG third quarter report continued to document a low enrollment rate for the branch schools, especially for schools that train soldiers in support functions, such as logistics, finance, and human resources. According to the report, training enrollment at the branch schools remains low due to the Afghan National Army's de-prioritization of training for support functions.<sup>28</sup> Prior to COVID-19, DOD-IG reported that in March 2020, combat support schools had a utilization rate of 22 percent, and combat service support schools had a utilization rate of 21 percent.<sup>29</sup> Further, DOD-IG reported that a

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<sup>24</sup> DOD-IG, *Progress of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Train, Advise, and Assist the Afghan Air Force*, DODIG-2018-058, January 4, 2018, p. 17. Officials with the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy noted new CLS contracts address these competing requirements for contractors, but DOD did not provide the new contracts for SIGAR's review.

<sup>25</sup> For this report, combat support and combat service support positions include personnel and force management, intelligence operations, logistics, planning, communications support, training, programming and budget, oversight, public affairs, religious and cultural affairs, safety, medical, and legal. TAAC-Air advises the AAF in the following offices; A1-human resources and manpower, Afghan Pay and Personnel System and Tashkil population and oversight, A4-logistics, aviation fuel requirements and forecasting, supply chain, property book management, vehicle fleet management, A7-training and education, clothing, and small arms management.

<sup>26</sup> DOD-IG, *Progress of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Train, Advise, and Assist...*, DODIG-2018-058, January 4, 2018, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> DOD-IG, *Progress of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Train, Advise, and Assist...*, DODIG-2018-058, January 4, 2018, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> DOD-IG, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: April 1, 2020–June 30, 2020*, August 14, 2020, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> DOD-IG, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Quarterly Report: April 1, 2020–June 30, 2020*, August 14, 2020, p. 23.

“lack of advanced training results in under-trained soldiers who are not trained in the military occupational specialty skills essential to combat units. This in turn compounds units’ inability to sustain continuous operations and achieve mission success.”<sup>30</sup> Similar information related to the SMW is classified and is included in our classified report.

The lack of required attendance and low utilization rates at Afghan National Army Branch schools, coupled with evidence from our interviews, demonstrate that neither the Afghan military nor U.S. and Coalition advisors prioritized support training in the Afghan air forces, even though support positions make up the majority of the force structure and are essential to overall success and sustainability.

### **The AAF and SMW Experience Low Levels of Attrition, But DOD Cannot Ensure Qualified Personnel Are in Appropriate Positions**

DOD officials reported the AAF currently experiencing a 15 percent attrition rate during training and a 10 percent attrition rate from the force as a whole. DOD officials noted that the low levels of attrition in the AAF and SMW were partially due to the higher pay that some personnel in the air forces receive. Specifically, AAF and SMW personnel may receive aviation incentives and bonuses that range from 2,500 Afs to 21,750 Afs per month, depending on position.<sup>31</sup> From FY 2019 to FY 2021, DOD appropriated or requested approximately \$34 million for AAF incentive pay.<sup>32</sup>

In January 2016, CSTC-A initiated the development of the Afghan Pay and Personnel System to integrate existing Afghan human resource data with compensation and payroll data to process authorizations, record unit level time and attendance, and allow the Afghan government to automatically generate payroll calculation and required forms. However, an August 2019 DOD-IG report noted, “APPS [Afghan Pay and Personnel System] still had incomplete and inaccurate personnel listings and was still missing system capabilities required by the contract.”<sup>33</sup> The audit noted that because CSTC-A uses Afghan Pay and Personnel System data to develop the ANDSF payroll and DOD does not have the assurance that personnel records are correctly linked, “DOD is still at risk of funding payroll for fraudulent personnel records.”<sup>34</sup>

In August 2017, President Ghani initiated the Afghan Compact, “an Afghan-led initiative to demonstrate the government’s commitment to creating a peaceful, stable, and prosperous society and is an important factor upon which the United States relied when developing key components of the U.S. South Asia Policy.”<sup>35</sup> In an effort to improve AAF’s capability to provide more support to the ANDSF, the Afghan Compact tasked the MOD to develop a policy to ensure that correct and qualified AAF members or members-in-training fill AAF positions. According to Compact documentation, the MOD completed this policy in June 2018. DOD officials have previously noted concern that trained pilots were not filling active pilot positions in a timely manner or at all. According to TAAC-Air officials, the AAF has placed some personnel in maintenance positions solely for pay

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<sup>30</sup> DOD-IG, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: July 1, 2019–September 30, 2019*, November 8, 2019, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Aviation incentives and bonuses do not include all AAF support personnel. Commitment letters from Afghan FY 1394, which equates to the Gregorian calendar year of December 2014–December 2015, determined incentive payment amounts. Commitment letters are no longer in use, however incentive payments continue. 2,500 Afs to 21,750 Afs equates to approximately 33 USD to 283 USD.

<sup>32</sup> SMW aviation incentives are not included in this figure. SMW aviation incentives are not separated out from the Afghan Special Security Forces incentive pay requests. “Aviation incentive pay is one of four occupation-based incentive pays. Incentives are necessary to recruit and retain the highly capable/high performing personnel required to serve in aviation positions. The requirement is available to fund the Martyrs and Disabled programs that MOD established to ensure that recruitment for the AAF remains high.” DOD, “Justification for FY 2021 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), ASFF,” February 2020.

<sup>33</sup> DOD-IG, *Audit of the Planning for and Implementation of the Afghan Personnel and Pay System*, DODIG-2019-115, August 15, 2019, p. i.

<sup>34</sup> DOD-IG, *Audit of the Planning for and Implementation...*, DODIG-2019-115, August 15, 2019, p. i.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Embassy Kabul, press release, “U.S. –Afghan Statement on the Bilateral Compact Executive Committee Meeting,” August 23, 2017.



purposes rather than based on personnel qualification or training.<sup>36</sup> For example, according to information provided by TAAC-Air in September 2019, there were 152 AAF personnel assigned to UH-60 maintenance positions; however, contractors carry out all UH-60 maintenance.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in June 2019, DOD-IG reported that of the 1,538 AAF personnel assigned to aviation maintenance positions in the Afghan Pay and Personnel System, approximately 1,100 were uncertified or were entered into these positions in the system for accountability reasons but “would be moved” to their actual job in the future.<sup>38</sup>

In July 2020, CSTC-A stated that the Afghan Pay and Personnel System has the ability to track trained personnel as long as qualifications are uploaded to a personnel file. However, CSTC-A officials noted that they can advise the Afghan government on placement of their personnel but cannot require verification of personnel qualifications. Further, while TAAC-Air officials have focused on producing required numbers of pilots and maintainers, AAF personnel placement is entirely up to ANDSF commanders. DOD ASFF budget requests for FY 2020 and FY 2021 state that ASFF will fund salaries based on time and attendance data received through the Afghan Pay and Personnel System. Because the Afghan government has assigned personnel to air force positions for which they may not be qualified, and because the Afghan Pay and Personnel System does not always contain accurate qualifications or personnel data, DOD lacks a mechanism to prevent MOD personnel from receiving salary and aviation incentive pay to which they are not entitled.

## Continued Sustainment Challenges Threaten U.S. Investment in the Afghan Air Forces and Afghan Air Forces Will Remain Reliant on U.S.-Funded Contractor

DOD continues to support the sustainment of the Afghan air forces by providing funding, and non-combat support. DOD noted that the FY 2021 AAF sustainment budget request is \$534 million, nearly 64 percent of the ASFF budget request for the AAF and just over 13 percent of the total FY 2021 ASFF request.<sup>39</sup> Slow capacity development caused by limited personnel, training gaps, inefficient leadership development leading to misuse of aircraft, and limited U.S. and Coalition advising capacity, continue to challenge the growth of AAF and SMW sustainment capabilities. Additionally, while DOD continues to provide assistance, the reduction in U.S. and Coalition forces throughout Afghanistan will alter how advisors conduct their duties and increase reliance on contractors for day-to-day assistance. Contractors continue to fill important roles in the development and sustainment of the AAF and SMW. However, there are additional challenges and risks associated with utilizing contractors in a contingency environment including operational risks, security risks, and contract oversight.

### Slow Capacity Development Hinders AAF and SMW Sustainability

DOD’s Directive on Defense Institution Building states that activities will be conducted to “enhance allied and partner capability and capacity to manage and sustain armed forces consistent with principles of good governance and the rule of law.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the TAAC-Air Strategic Plan details lines of effort to create a credible and sustainable AAF capable of providing airpower for the ANDSF in line with national security efforts. Afghanistan is currently unable to support and sustain its equipment and capabilities, and DOD officials acknowledge that the U.S. needs to continue to support the Afghan air forces and help them build the capacity to do so. While TAAC-Air had a goal of full operational capacity for the AAF by 2024 and the SOAG initially believed the SMW could achieve full operational capacity for all aircraft by 2024, continued challenges and slow development make realizing these goals unlikely.

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<sup>36</sup> TAAC-Air reported this issue through its advisor channels in an effort to correct the inaccurate placements.

<sup>37</sup> TAAC-Air updated its response in December 2019, stating that the AAF had no UH-60 maintainers.

<sup>38</sup> DOD-IG, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel *Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress: April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019*, August 16, 2019, p. 33. This report was published prior to the revised modernization plan.

<sup>39</sup> The total ASFF request for FY 2021 was approximately \$4 billion. DOD, “Justification for FY 2021 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), ASFF,” February 2020, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> DOD Directive 5205.82, “Defense Institution Building,” May 3, 2017, p. 3.

As previously discussed, U.S. and Coalition forces developed training programs to produce pilots and aircraft maintainers. From FY 2010 to FY 2018, DOD obligated \$572.8 million to support pilot and maintainer training.<sup>41</sup> In FY 2021, DOD requested \$173.7 million for AAF pilot and maintainer training and \$85.2 million for SMW flight training.<sup>42</sup> As of May 2020, the training programs have produced 509 pilots and 151 aircraft maintainers.<sup>43</sup> TAAC-Air estimated the AAF would meet pilot end strength for all authorized aircraft by 2024. As of May 2020, the AAF had 153 pilots and co-pilots assigned to flying positions and the SMW has 145 pilots and copilots assigned to flying positions for a total of 298 of the 511 pilots estimated as necessary by the 2019 TAAC-Air Master Training Plan.<sup>44</sup> Although U.S. funded training has produced 509 pilots, only 298 pilots are assigned to flying positions. TAAC-Air does not track the placement of pilots within the AAF or SMW. Some pilots may currently hold non-flying positions or are no longer in the Afghan security forces, even though the 211 pilots received advanced training funded by the U.S. government at a cost of at least \$168 million.<sup>45</sup> TAAC-Air officials told us that once the AAF fills initial Tashkil levels for pilots, it will need to continue to train 61 pilots per year to maintain necessary pilot levels.<sup>46</sup> For the SMW, NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan estimated that the SMW will need to add 18 pilots per year to maintain necessary pilot levels. To meet those new pilot requirements, the AAF and SMW will continue to rely on U.S.-funded initial pilot training conducted outside of Afghanistan.

While U.S. and Coalition forces have developed pilot and maintainer training pipelines, these pipelines have not included important aspects for AAF and SMW development. For example, in January 2019, we reported that UH-60 Mission Qualification Training only qualified pilots as co-pilots, not as aircraft commanders.<sup>47</sup> Photo 2 is an example of a UH-60 used to train Afghan pilots.

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**Photo 2 - UH-60 Used for Pilot Training in Slovakia**



Source: SIGAR, November, 2020

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Both contractors conducting the third country maintenance training and Afghan maintenance students attending training have expressed concern with the compressed timeframe provided to achieve a basic level maintainer certification for the UH-60, MD-530, and the C-208. Contractors modeled their training programs after long-standing aircraft maintenance programs that take around 900 hours to complete; however, the time allotted for the Afghan aircraft maintainers is only 600 hours and does not include English language classes. CSTC-A officials stated that the additional 300 hours were deemed “advanced training” and removed from the initial training curriculum. Officials from the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy stated that students will complete the 300 hours of advanced training at the Aircraft Maintenance Development Center in Kabul, Afghanistan, which was supposed to open to trainees in November 2019. In addition to providing the

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<sup>41</sup> This figure does not include English Language Training, literacy training, or other general training types.

<sup>42</sup> DOD, “Justification for FY 2021 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), ASFF,” February 2020, pp. 80, 104.

<sup>43</sup> We previously reported UH-60 pilot training costs more than \$1 million per student. This estimated cost consists of \$795,600 for initial entry pilot training, \$220,599 for Aircraft Qualification Training, and \$32,206 for Mission Qualification Training. SIGAR, Afghan Air Force, SIGAR 19-18-AR, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> The Master Training Plan includes pilots for Mi-17 but does not include pilots for CH-47.

<sup>45</sup> Estimated cost based on our previous cost estimate for initial entry pilot training and does not include costs for Aircraft Qualification Training or Mission Qualification Training.

<sup>46</sup> According to TAAC-Air, this includes wingmen, flight leads, instructor pilot, and aircraft commanders.

<sup>47</sup> SIGAR, Afghan Air Force, SIGAR 19-18-AR, p. 7.

300 hours of advanced training for a basic level maintainer, the Aircraft Maintenance Development Center trains maintainers at the intermediate and master levels. However, the Aircraft Maintenance Development Center experienced a 3-month delay in opening to trainees because the AAF did not determine a site location. The COVID-19 pandemic has further delayed training at the center. Additionally, in December 2019, DOD reported that trainees were not completing English Language Training “at the rate that was expected,” which could further delay training at the Aircraft Maintenance Development Center by an additional 12 weeks.<sup>48</sup>

Training gaps and delays have resulted in neither the AAF nor the SMW having the capability to perform required maintenance, repairs, or manage a logistics process. DOD reported that, similar to any modern air force, the Afghan air forces will always require some level of long-term CLS.<sup>49</sup> DOD prioritized building combat power over maintenance and support positions when building Afghan aviation capability. TAAC-Air advisors noted that while the Afghans are making improvements in the three evaluated maintenance categories, the advisors are only confident that the AAF can independently carry out launch and recovery for some aircraft.<sup>50</sup> In August 2020, DOD-IG reported that TAAC-Air was to transition A-29 organizational maintenance responsibility to AAF maintainers in April 2020 but delayed the transition because of concerns with the maintainers’ English abilities.<sup>51</sup> Compounding the reliance on costly CLS, the SMW is adding a new airframe to its fleet, the CH-47, which will require additional CLS. DOD officials stated that without an increase in qualified Afghan maintenance personnel, the SMW will remain dependent on contracted maintenance. Throughout 2020, DOD and the Afghan air forces made adjustments to respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic. DOD officials noted that TAA and face-to-face operations for the SMW were suspended, which likely paused progress made in capabilities, particularly in SMW maintenance, due to the shift of all maintenance to CLS support in order to maintain U.S. airworthiness standards.

In May 2020, TAAC-Air advisors told us that the AAF had 745 of 770 aircraft maintainers assigned. However, DOD-funded CLS still conducts a majority of aircraft maintenance. The AAF conducts 95 percent of Mi-17 maintenance. Of the six other aircraft in its fleet, the AAF performed 40 percent of the maintenance on two aircraft (C-208 and AC-208) and performed 30 percent or less on the remaining four aircraft (C-130, A-29, MD-530, and UH-60). See figure 3 for AAF maintenance capability by aircraft. In February 2020, DOD officials stated that the SMW was not capable of independent operations and maintenance of the fleet, and noted that CLS would be needed for the foreseeable future. SMW leadership expects it will take approximately 6 years for SMW maintainers to transition from their current Mi-17 specialty to the UH-60. For FY 2020, DOD appropriated \$576 million for AAF aircraft CLS and \$129 million for SMW aircraft CLS.

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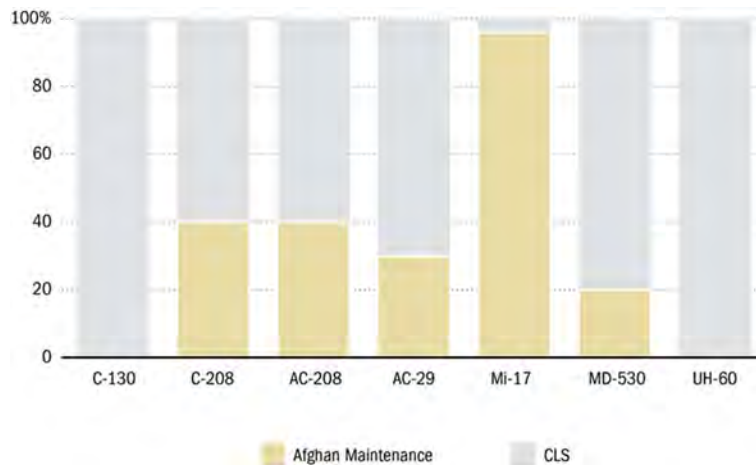
<sup>48</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2019, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> Common CLS tasks used by modern air forces may include aircraft and engine overhaul, repair and replenishment of parts, sustaining engineering, and supply chain management. DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2020, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> TAAC-Air also evaluates Afghan maintenance capabilities for launch and recovery, organizational, and intermediate maintenance. “Launch and recovery” is defined as activities to ready and recover the aircraft for each mission, including pre- and post-flight inspections, aircraft cleanliness, logbooks, records, aircraft configuration (mission equipment), replenishments (fuels, oils, de-ice, tire pressure etc.), and securing the aircraft.

<sup>51</sup> According to TAAC-Air, organizational maintenance consists of inspecting, servicing, lubrication and adjusting, replacing parts, and minor assemblies. DOD-IG, *Operation Freedom’s Sentinel Quarterly Report: April 1, 2020–June 30, 2020*, August 14, 2020, p. 27.

**Figure 3 - Afghan and Contractor Maintenance for AAF Aircraft as of March 2020**



Source: TAAC-Air data

Although the AAF and SMW have demonstrated improved operational capacity, poor Afghan leadership has jeopardized AAF and SMW sustainment capacity through the misuse of air assets. Such misuse can have long-term operational impacts that result in aircraft not being available when needed. We previously reported that overuse and abuse of the Mi-17 had been a primary factor in its reduced availability, and the high flying hours per month of the Mi-17 will likely ground the aircraft sooner than planned.<sup>52</sup> DOD defines SMW misuse as “tasking the SMW to conduct operations outside of their normal scope, and missions tasked from influential figures outside of the established tasking process.”<sup>53</sup> DOD officials stated that high-level MOD officials often circumvent the formal process for assigning SMW missions and assign the SMW general support missions that are better tailored for the AAF due to a higher degree of confidence in the SMW. For example, from January 2020 through February 2020, the NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan reported that 48 percent of sorties were categorized as misuse for general support missions, and from April 2020 through May 2020, 33 percent of sorties were categorized as misuse for general support missions. DOD officials stated that the amount of misuse has undermined the SMW’s ability to conduct counterterrorism and counter narcotic missions. Additional information related to AAF misuse is classified and included in our classified report.

In August 2018, CSTC-A began enforcing financial penalties to curb misuse, and has withheld millions of dollars from the MOD due to misuse of the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command and SMW. For example, from August through November 2018, CSTC-A withheld \$582,306 for misuse of SMW aircraft.<sup>54</sup> In June 2020, DOD reported that the SMW had made incremental improvements to mitigate misuse through the Afghan Joint Special Operations Coordination Center Joint Air Command and Control Cell, which meets twice a week to review and prioritize missions. Further, DOD reported that the success of this process “relies on the cooperation of Afghan leadership at all levels and between all entities, which requires a cultural shift across the MOD and Ministry of Interior.”<sup>55</sup>

Leadership and overall capacity development continues to be a top priority for both the U.S. and Afghan governments. Neither the TAAC-Air nor SOAG advisors believe the AAF or SMW have the ability to sustain themselves without continued U.S. and Coalition assistance. Specifically, advisors told us that there was a lack of institutional and support capacity, including areas of budget, logistics, human resources, and base support.

<sup>52</sup> SIGAR, *Afghan Air Force*, SIGAR 19-18-AR, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2019, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2018, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2020, p. 77.

The TAAC-Air optimization plan states that they must establish an advising model that enables the AAF to achieve sustainability. TAAC-Air advisors are to focus on establishing essential institutional processes and enduring contractor functions within the AAF to ensure its sustainability. TAAC-Air officials said they will remove day-to-day advising and utilize periodic advising for pre-identified shortfalls or required sustainment items. TAAC-Air described the change in posture as “contractor centric, Coalition enhanced.” TAAC-Air planned to reduce the total in country TAAC-Air personnel in support of the Resolute Support security assistance mission from 498 to 59 by November 2020.<sup>56</sup> In August 2020, DOD-IG reported that TAAC-Air had reduced its total personnel by more than 90 percent since November 2019, reducing functional advising personnel to minimal levels.<sup>57</sup> These reductions have affected TAA activities as well as oversight activities.

In mid-March 2020, DOD implemented COVID-19 restrictions for TAA activities and in-country training. TAAC-Air placed all face-to-face TAA on hold until proper safety measures were established. TAAC-Air noted that advisors are using electronic communications in an effort to maintain advising efforts and are exploring virtual options for training programs. In May 2020, TAAC-Air estimated the AAF would achieve full operational capability for all airframes by 2026, 2 years later than their previous estimate.<sup>58</sup> The SOAG projected full operational capacity for the SMW in October 2024, which included fielding and crew training of both UH-60s and CH-47s. However, due to training-related COVID-19 restrictions, the SMW will likely experience a delay in reaching full operational capacity.

### Reliance on Contractors Poses Additional Challenges for AAF and SMW Sustainment

The 90 percent decrease in TAAC-Air personnel has shifted the primary focus for the command. According to the DOD-IG report, “TAAC-Air has transitioned from its primary mission focus from TAA to security cooperation. The change means that, rather than tactical training and advising, TAAC-Air will instead focus on managing a portfolio of Afghan Special Security Forces -funded contracts.”<sup>59</sup> In October 2019, officials from the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy expressed concern over the change in TAAC-Air’s TAA strategy and restructure of the TAAC-Air personnel and the increased reliance on contractors to provide TAA to the AAF. According to TAAC-Air, contractors mentor and train the AAF in areas including aerial resupply, air-to-ground integration, command and control, personnel management, airworthiness, logistics, communications, budgeting, training and force development, intelligence, engineering, and aircrew training. DOD also uses contractors to provide English Language Training programs to help ensure the ANDSF possess the practical, basic proficiency in English necessary to progress into additional training courses, including for aircrew and maintainers. As previously discussed, DOD contractors are also used for initial and advanced pilot and maintainer training in third-country locations and throughout Afghanistan. Furthermore, the AAF and SMW rely on DOD-funded CLS for continued on-the-job training, fleet readiness, and aircraft sustainment. While contractors are a force multiplier that assist TAAC-Air in meeting its mission to develop sustainable Afghan air forces, relying on contractors poses its own set of operational risks and challenges.

According to Joint Publication 4-10 *Operational Contract Support*, the failure of the contractor to perform due to operational considerations is an operational risk.<sup>60</sup> The Joint Publication also highlights the complexity of managing government life support to contractors (such as housing, security, medical access, and transportation) as a potential additional cost. Our work has shown that the risks identified in the Joint Publication are especially high in Afghanistan. For example, we have reported that a lack of force protection for

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<sup>56</sup> The *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan Report* states that security assistance for Resolute Support focuses on “ministerial advising, institutional development, and ANDSF resourcing, equipping, and sustaining.” DOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2020, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> DOD-IG, *Operation Freedom’s Sentinel*, April 1, 2020–June 30, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> TAAC-Air expected airframes to reach full operational capability in the following years: AC-208 is 2020, C-208 is 2021, UH-60 is 2023, MD-530 is 2024, and A-29 is 2026.

<sup>59</sup> DOD-IG, *Operation Freedom’s Sentinel*, April 1, 2020–June 30, 2020, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Joint Publication 4-10, *Operational Contract Support*, March 4, 2019, p. iii–12.

language instructors limited the number of pilot candidates in key English language training.<sup>61</sup> We have also reported that where contractors can work and live is limited in Afghanistan. For example, in 2019, we reported that CLS contractors could not maintain aircraft located at Shindand Air Base because U.S. contractors cannot work at AAF bases that U.S. or Coalition forces do not control.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, according to the DOD-IG FY 2020 second quarter report, DOD delayed A-29 maintenance training by 1 year because the original contract did not include adequate lodging and security provisions.<sup>63</sup> The effective date of the contract modification was to be February 2020 however; the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the start of the training creating a gap in maintenance training capability.

Inadequate contract oversight has also been a widely reported problem for DOD in contingency environments, which increases the risk of waste and puts the mission and sustainability at risk. For example, an August 2019 DOD-IG report found that TAAC-Air did not provide adequate oversight of the advisors for Afghan air liaison officers because TAAC-Air oversight personnel did not ensure that the contractors developed the detailed training curriculum required by the contract.<sup>64</sup> According to the DOD-IG report, a non-standardized training curriculum or ad-hoc program of instruction increases the risk that graduating air liaison officers are not fully or consistently trained on target development, fratricide avoidance, and civilian casualty mitigation procedures.<sup>65</sup> In 2014, we found that CSTC-A did not perform effective oversight of three literacy training contracts, noting “the command allowed the training program to grow far beyond its oversight capacity and was unable to monitor the contractors’ performance at a majority of the training sites.”<sup>66</sup>

An additional challenge facing TAAC-Air and SOAG advisors is the prospect that under the terms of the U.S. and Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, contractors may be withdrawn from Afghanistan. Specifically, the agreement includes the withdrawal of “all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel.”<sup>67</sup> According to the original time line for the implementation of the peace agreement, the U.S. would complete the withdrawal of its forces and support personnel in 2021, several years before TAAC-Air’s estimated goal of AAF self-sustainment. If contractors are permitted to stay in Afghanistan without the benefit of the military providing life support and they are required to provide their own housing, security, medical and other support, the risk to the mission will increase—because contractor oversight will be far more challenging—as will the potential cost to the American taxpayer.

The Joint Publication, DOD contracting guidance, as well as numerous audit reports point out the need for robust contractor oversight.<sup>68</sup> As the DOD’s Command and Staff Guide to Operation Contract Support points out, “Contract management is not a fire-and-forget capability.”<sup>69</sup> DOD Instruction 3020.41, “Operational Contract Support,” directs commanders to consider the risk that contractors will not be able to provide contracted services and devise a mitigation plan to offset the risk.<sup>70</sup> According to the instruction, this planning requirement applies when the commander has concerns that the contractor cannot or will no longer fulfill the

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<sup>61</sup> SIGAR, Afghan Air Force, SIGAR 19-18-AR, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> SIGAR, Afghan Air Force, SIGAR 19-18-AR, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> DOD-IG, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: January 1, 2020–March 31, 2020*, August 24, 2020, p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> Air Liaison Officers work with ground forces to coordinate air power.

<sup>65</sup> DOD-IG, *Evaluation of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Train, Advise, Assist, and Equip Afghan Tactical Air Coordinators, Air Liaison Officers, and Afghan Air Targeting Officers*, DODIG-2019-110, August 8, 2019, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> SIGAR, *Afghanistan National Security Forces: Despite Reported Successes, Concerns Remain about Literacy Program Results, Contract Oversight, Transition, and Sustainment*, SIGAR 14-30-AR, January 28, 2014, unnumbered second page.

<sup>67</sup> Department of State, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan,” February 29, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> For example, DOD Joint Publication 4-10 *Operational Contract Support*; DOD Instruction 3020.41, “Operational Contract Support,” August 2018; DOD, *Command and Staff Guide to Operational Contract Support*, October 25, 2016; SIGAR, *Afghanistan National Security Forces*, SIGAR 14-30-AR, January 28, 2014; and DOD-IG, *Evaluation of U.S. and Coalition Efforts to Train, Advise, Assist, and Equip...*, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> DOD, *Command and Staff Guide to Operational Contract Support*, October 25, 2016, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> DOD Instruction 3020.41, p. 13.

terms of the contract because the threat level, duration of hostilities, or other factors specified in the contract have changed. Furthermore, the mitigation plan should identify alternative sources for obtaining the essential service such as the sustainment services provided to the AAF and SMW.

## CONCLUSION

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Without continued assistance and clear focus on the development of all levels and positions of Afghanistan's air forces, the resources, capability, and sustainment of the AAF and SMW may be at risk. Increased Afghan government reliance on the AAF and SMW to conduct combat operations illustrates the importance of the forces' development and sustainability. Despite this importance to the safety and security of Afghanistan, neither the AAF nor the SMW have been able to meet their authorized end strengths, and both forces lack a strategy to overcome these challenges and respond to growing mission requirements. Additionally, sustainable Afghan air forces requires more from the Afghans than simply providing pilots and aircrew to be trained by the U.S. government for combat missions on airframes purchased and maintained by the U.S. government. The U.S. and Afghans' lack of focus on the non-combat support activities of the SMW and AAF risks the development of independent, self-sustained Afghan aviation capability. Further, the potential absence of both military advisors and contractors before the AAF and SMW are able to staff, manage, fund, or maintain their forces puts at risk the entire U.S. investment in the Afghan air forces.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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To assist the sustainment of the Afghan air forces at all levels, we recommend that the CSTC-A Commander, TAAC-Air Commander, and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan Commander:

- 1. Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.**
- 2. Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Master Training Plan.**
- 3. Finalize a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.**

## AGENCY COMMENTS

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We provided a classified draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. We received comments on the draft from the 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force–Afghanistan on behalf of TAAC-Air; CSTC-A; and NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A). SIGAR submitted a draft to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, but did not receive any comments in reply. TAAC-Air did not concur with the first and second recommendations, but did concur with the third. CSTC-A “partially” concurred with the first and second recommendations and concurred with the third. NSOCC-A, the agency responsible for developing the SMW, concurred with all three recommendations. We have reproduced the comments in full in appendices II, III, and IV, respectively. Additionally, CSTC-A provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report.

With regard to the first recommendation, TAAC-Air did not concur; CSTC-A partially concurred; and, NSOCC-A concurred. TAAC-Air stated that it could not implement the recommendation because it “no longer has a sufficient number or mix of personnel to establish or implement a recruiting strategy or manage personnel placement procedures.” In addition, TAAC-Air stated that due to reductions in the AAF Tashkil, there is an

excess of recruits and the AAF has not planned additional recruiting until at least 2022. However, TAAC-Air acknowledged the need to focus on human resource management to ensure personnel are correctly slotted, trained, retained, developed, and promoted. We agree that a focus on human resources is important, as we made clear in our report. Developing formal recruiting strategies is necessary toward establishing a professional, sustainable air force, regardless of current staffing levels, and is a first step in more effective human resource management. Implementing personnel placement procedures in the recruiting process, as we recommended, would also help ensure that AAF personnel are correctly slotted. CSTC-A stated it supports TAAC-Air's focus on human resource management, and that it would support the efforts of NSOCC-A to "formulate recruiting strategies to improve placement procedures." In concurring with our first recommendation, NSOCC-A stated that the SMW will develop recruiting strategies to help improve placement procedures and allow the recruiting team to identify candidates with the necessary qualifications to join the SMW.

TAAC-Air also did not concur with our recommendation to incorporate all support personnel in the Master Training Plan. However, TAAC-Air acknowledged that some additional support personnel may need to be included in the training plan because base support skills are poorly developed, and therefore weaken the AFF's institutional viability. Our report highlights the need to train support personnel to ensure an AAF that can function without U.S. support. In addition, a Master Training Plan that includes all support personnel would be another step in developing a more effective human resource management system to help ensure personnel are correctly slotted, trained, retained, developed and promoted. As with recommendation one, TAAC-Air said more institutional training will require additional funding, contracts, and skill sets in TAA personnel that currently do not exist. For its part, CSTC-A partially concurred and stated that "...training support personnel is essential for Afghans to sustain operations...", and that CSTC-A "...will work with TAAC-Air to ensure the Master Training Plan contains a focus on logistics and base support." NSOCC-A concurred with the recommendation, and identified current and future training plans for the SMW.

TAAC-Air concurred with the third recommendation and stated it is currently planning and implementing a mitigation plan. As a result, TAAC-Air suggested changing the recommendation wording from "Develop a mitigation plan..." to "Update and execute a mitigation plan..." in order to account for the ongoing work related to this recommendation. However, the mitigation plan is not yet complete, so revising our recommendation per TAAC-Air's request would be premature. Therefore, we have updated our recommendation to more clearly reflect our intent. The recommendation now begins, "Finalize a mitigation plan..." In response to the third recommendation, CSTC-A stated it would help TAAC-Air and NSOCC-A develop mitigation plans to ensure the continuation of essential support to the AAF and SMW. Similarly, NSOCC-A stated that the Special Operations Advisory Group to the SMW is developing a plan to mitigate contractor transitions that would affect aircraft maintenance and aircrew capabilities.



## APPENDIX I - SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

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The objective of the audit was to assess the extent to which the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to develop a sustainable Afghan Air force (AAF) and Special Mission Wing (SMW).

To accomplish this objective, we assessed the extent to which DOD in conjunction with the AAF and the SMW developed plans, policies, and procedures that would help ensure ability to recruit, train, and retain qualified personnel to create professional, credible, and sustainable Afghan air forces capable of supporting the Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF). We reviewed DOD's reports, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, from 2018 through 2020; Train, Advise, Assist Command–Air's (TAAC-Air's) 2019 Strategic Plan; 2019 Afghanistan Aviation Forces Master Training Plan; 2019 TAAC-Air Optimization Fragmentary Order; Chapter 10 of the *Security Assistance Management Manual*; Joint Publication 4-10, *Operational Contract Support*; DOD Instruction 3020.41, *Operational Contract Support*; DOD's *Command and Staff Guide to Operational Contract Support*; and the AAF recruiting policy and checklist. Additionally, we reviewed reports completed by the Government Accountability Office and the DOD Inspector General.

We interviewed officials from the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), TAAC-Air, NATO Air Command–Afghanistan, Special Operations Advisory Group (SOAG), and the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation. In addition, we reviewed training and advising data provided by TAAC-Air, NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan, SOAG, and the Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation. Further, we interviewed senior Afghan officials of the Ministry of Defense and reviewed written information provided by the SMW commander.

We also visited third country training facilities for initial entry pilot training, aircraft qualification training and aircraft maintenance training. These sites included Al-Fujairah, United Arab Emirates; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; and Košice, Slovakia. At each site, we interviewed contracting officials responsible for pilot and aircraft maintenance training, and spoke with Afghan students regarding their training experiences.

We did not rely on computer-processed data or assess internal controls for the purpose of the audit objective.

We conducted our audit work in Arlington, Virginia; Kabul, Afghanistan; Orlando, Florida; Al-Fujairah, United Arab Emirates; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; and Košice, Slovakia, from May 2019 through July 2020, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was performed by SIGAR under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

## APPENDIX II - AGENCY COMMENTS FROM THE TRAIN ADVISE ASISST COMMAND-AIR

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(UNCLASSIFIED)



HEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES FORCES-AFGHANISTAN  
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN  
APO AE 09356

NAC-A/9 AETF-A CoS

17 November 20

MEMORANDUM FOR Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2350  
Crystal Drive, Arlington, VA 22202

SUBJECT: Responses to SIGAR Request for Information (RFI), 133A-2

1. (U) 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force-Afghanistan (9 AETF-A) was responsible to concur, partially concur, or non-concur with the recommendations on the following Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) Request for Information (RFI), 133A-2. The SIGAR recommendations are italicized and copied verbatim from the original tasker, and answers provided in detail.

2. (U) *SIGAR-RFI 133A-2 recommendation #1: Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.*

(U) **RESPONSE: NON-CONCUR**

(U) TAAC-Air no longer has sufficient number or mix of personnel to establish or implement a recruiting strategy or manage personnel placement procedures. 2020 reductions in total AAF Tashkil have led to overages in existing recruits for skilled positions and no substantial recruiting or new accessions is planned until at least FY22. Instead of a focus on recruiting, TAAC-Air recommends a focus on human resource management in the maintenance and support sections to ensure trained personnel and effective leaders are being correctly slotted, retained, developed, and promoted. To do so, TAAC-Air will require additional contract TAA personnel or to exchange some air operations-focused staff for HRM and contract expertise.

3. (U) *SIGAR-RFI 133A-2 recommendation #2: Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Master Training Plan.*

(U) **RESPONSE: NON-CONCUR**

(U) If any skillsets are to be added to the Afghan Master Training Plan, we recommend the focus be logistics and base support. We assess that these two areas continue to represent weaknesses in the foundations for Institutional Viability. Air logistics support comprises a large segment of overall sustainment and centralized logistics planning and management is required for efficient use of the capacity limited aircraft and crews. Base support (facilities management, civil engineering) is poorly developed skillset within the AAF and one that will be under much pressure and great demand as airfields are transitioned to AAF and GIRoA management. Any additional institutional

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training will require additional funding, contracts, and skillsets in TAA personnel that currently do not exist.

4. (U) **SIGAR-RFI 133A-2 recommendation #3:** *Develop a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.*

(U) **RESPONSE: CONCUR**

(U) TAAC-Air is in the midst of this planning and execution now. Planning includes adapting the Afghanistan Master Training Plan to the retrograde timeline and the need to establish functioning detachments more quickly than previously planned. Recommend this focus are be changed from "develop a mitigation plan..." to "Update and execute mitigation plan..." to acknowledge the dynamic nature of the problem set and the on-going work to adapt the existing planning to the evolving facts on the ground.

5. (U) The point of contact is [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(UNCLASSIFIED)

# APPENDIX III - AGENCY COMMENTS FROM THE COMBINED SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND–AFGHANISTAN

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DCOS SA/CSTC-A                      UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY  
SUBJECT: (U) Response to the SIGAR 133A-2 Audit



**HEADQUARTERS RESOLUTE SUPPORT**  
COMBINED SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN  
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN  
APO, AE 09320

CSTC-A

24 November 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2350 Crystal Drive, Arlington, VA 22202

SUBJECT: (U) Response to Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 133A-2 Audit *"Department of Defense's Effort to Develop a Professional Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing"* Recommendations

1. (U) Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is responsible for answering "concur, partially concur, or non-concur" with the three recommendations within the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) audit 133A-2 *"Department of Defense's Effort to Develop a Professional Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing"*. The SIGAR recommendations are italicized, and CSTC-A's responses are detailed below.

a. (U) **Recommendation 1:** *Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.*

(U//FOUO) CSTC-A partially concurs with Recommendation 1. We will continue to train, advise and assist the ministerial leadership levels for ANDSF recruiting as needed. CSTC-A will support NSOCC-A on their effort to formulate recruiting strategies to improve placement procedures. However, 2020 reductions in total Afghan Air force (AAF) Tashkil have led to overages in existing recruits which results in no substantial recruiting until at least FY 2022. Additionally, CSTC-A supports TAAC-Air in recommending a focus on human resources management to ensure appropriate personnel are accurately slotted, retained, developed and promoted.

b. (U) **Recommendation 2:** *Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Master Training Plan.*

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DCOS SA/CSTC-A

SUBJECT: (U) Response to the SIGAR 133A-2 Audit

(U//FOUO) CSTC-A partially concurs with Recommendation 2. We agree that training support is essential for the Afghans to sustain operations and CSTC-A will support NSOCC-A on their training efforts for aircrew personnel. Additionally, we will work with TAAC-Air to ensure the Afghanistan Master Training Plan contains a focus on logistics and base support.

c. (U) **Recommendation 3:** *Develop a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.*

(U//FOUO) CSTC-A concurs with recommendation 3 and will assist TAAC-Air and NSOCC-A to develop a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW.

2. (U) The point of contacts for this memorandum are [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

# APPENDIX IV - AGENCY COMMENTS FROM NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND–AFGHANISTAN

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**HEADQUARTERS**  
NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMPONENT COMMAND SPECIAL  
OPERATIONS JOINT TASK FORCE  
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A-COS

09 November 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2350 Crystal Drive, Arlington, VA 22202

SUBJECT: (U) Response to Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 133A-2 Audit *“Department of Defense’s Effort to Develop a Professional Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing”* Recommendations

1. (U) NATO Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) / Special Operations Joint Task Force – Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) is responsible for answering “concur, partially concur, or non-concur” with the three recommendations within the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) audit 133A-2 *“Department of Defense’s Effort to Develop a Professional Afghan Air Force and Special Mission Wing”*. The SIGAR recommendations are italicized, and NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A’s responses are detailed below.

a. (U) **Recommendation 1:** *“Coordinate with the AAF and SMW to develop and implement formal recruiting strategies and personnel placement procedures, to include personnel and position qualification verification.”* Answer:

(U//FOUO) NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A concurs with the recommendation. Recently, the Special Mission Wing (SMW) leadership reassigned the recruiting team to the G1 (Personnel) section from the G7 (Force Modernization) section. This will enable the recruiting team to synchronize with the SMW personnel strength managers. SMW will formulate recruiting strategies to help effectively improve placement procedures, therefore allowing the recruiting team to recruit candidates that possess the qualifications to join SMW.

b. (U) **Recommendation 2:** *“Incorporate support personnel and their training requirements, including institutional training, into the Afghanistan Mast Training Plan.”* Answer:

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NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A-COS

SUBJECT: (U) Response to the SIGAR 133A-2 Audit

(U//FOUO) NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A concurs with the recommendation. SMW recently began UH-60 training with five pilots and five crew chiefs conducted by the U.S. military. The transition to contractor supported training will occur when our contracted UH-60 trainers return to country. The PC-12 crews resumed organic Afghan led training with U.S. military and contractor oversight. The Mi-17 program began the 14-day quarantine for four pilots and two crew chiefs on 7 November 2020. After completion of quarantine, they will begin training with contractors. English Language Training began in mid-September with 89 Students enrolled. SMW SOAG administered placement tests for the students to determine their English language proficiency and placed students into the appropriate class/book level. The classes concluded on 4 November 2020 followed by progression into more advanced English Language Training. SMW also plans to resume maintenance training.

- c. (U) **Recommendation 3:** *“Develop a mitigation plan to ensure the continuation of essential maintenance, operation, and advisory support to the AAF and SMW should the U.S. and Taliban agreement require the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan.”* Answer:

(U//FOUO) NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A concurs with the recommendation to implement a mitigation plan if contractor personnel are required to withdrawal from theater. SMW Special Operations Advisory Group (SOAG) is developing a plan to mitigate contractor transitions that would affect maintenance and aircrew force regeneration capability. The only contracts SMW can remove without affecting the SMW mission would be the Afghan Security Forces Fund-Training Program (ASFF-TP) mentorship program. The PC-12 maintenance program is closest to being institutional viable followed by Mi-17 and UH-60 programs. Additionally, supply-chain management requires an enduring solution to ensure on time delivery of critical parts to conduct maintenance. As the UH-60 program is the farthest from maintenance and operations viability.

2. (U) The point of contact for this memorandum is [REDACTED]

## APPENDIX V - ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Carole Coffey, Senior Program Manager

Annalise Latting, Analyst in Charge

David Stephens, Senior Program Analyst



This performance audit was conducted  
under project code SIGAR-133A.

## SIGAR's Mission

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- improve management and accountability over funds administered by U.S. and Afghan agencies and their contractors;
- improve contracting and contract management processes;
- prevent fraud, waste, and abuse; and
- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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## SIGAR's Mission

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