

Brigadier General John Michel

AFA - Air and Space Technology Exposition

"The Future of the Afghan Air Force"

17 September 2013

INTRO from Brig. Gen. Shepro: I'm Steve Shepro. I was the outgoing commander of the NATO Air Training Command, Afghanistan, 438th Air Expeditionary Wing. General Michel and I just changed command, as General Van Cleef said, on August 6th. So I could stumble through the first couple of slides if you would like.

Next slide, please.

Over the last year most would agree that the Afghan Air Force has really turned a corner. This project started in November of 2007 when we started training the Afghan Security Forces [inaudible], original war if you will. The focus was on the ground forces, and then the Afghan Air Force was something that first was picked up by the Army to establish an Army Air Corps where each of the corps commanders would have their own little aviation battalion. That didn't work. As a result, the Air Force came in 2007 and started building up the Afghan Air Force.

As you know, one of the principles of security force systems is that you cannot put capability ahead of capacity. If you want to create a sustaining force that is going to meet our objectives for the future, you have to be able to develop the Afghan Air Forces to [inaudible]. [Inaudible], commander of the Afghan Air Force said to me, [inaudible] a sound bite you'll hear him say frequently, and that is that for those in the Afghan Air Force now, it's from the inside out. What you don't see when you look at the outside is what's going on in the inside. That is what he considers an unprecedented development in human capital. You see NCOs, the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy being run by non-commissioned officers. You see the foundation for an Air Force Academy being built up. You see professional pilots, professional maintenance that [inaudible] standards, [inaudible], equipment manufacturer standards that are slowly building up that [inaudible] that will make this a successful project.

This part has been a good news story.

What is the challenge we have? The challenge we have is the Afghan Air Force is growing. Right now it's just over 8,000, it's authorized to grow up to 8,000 and will continue to develop.

Brig. Gen. Michel: I know that's non-standard, but flexibility is the whole key behind air power, and you just witnessed it right there.

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As Brother Shep was saying, I'll pick up -- Not a lot of folks appreciate the long history of the Afghan Air Force and the fact that this is a source of national pride. So we're building an Air Force but we're also going a lot of things that lay out the fundamentals for them to recapture something that they've enjoyed for a long period of time.

He's probably taken you through the elements that for, the first Afghan pilot was actually trained by the Italians, so they're very very versed in the idea of having advisors help shape their future in a positive way.

As we look through what continued over time, we know that the Soviets had a very very, if you will, a long history there. I would just leave you with, the challenge with that is the Soviets, the way they chose to operate, is not create an independent air force, an air force that can sustain itself, it was a dependent air force by design. It provided a lot of platforms, but a lot of the things it takes to sustain it were things that they continued to do in the shadows.

So one of the things we're trying to overcome is many many decades of more of a dependency mindset and not having all the capabilities they need to stand alone in this area.

As you go through this, and I'll unpack the history of our particular command a little more a little later, but obviously decades of warfare have devastated their Air Force so we have the, it's almost a white sheet exercise is what we're undergoing. I'll show you my very last slide in a little bit is what makes this particularly complicated given we have a finite timeline and we have a lot of variables that affect us waking up in the morning.

The one thing that we get the opportunity to tell this story is, again, it's not just about the Afghan Air Force. The legitimacy on the world stage, the ability to attract people to invest in your country over the long term, you need an aviation enterprise. Especially when you live on a big rock. Anybody who's been to Afghanistan understands the impassability of terrain, going back to the very reason why aviation's always been so fascinating to them. It's been the one thing that's kind of normalized and brought the countries' borders closer together. It also allows them now when you have, for everything from resupply, it's been the one thing that's allowed them to be able to get closure in areas that no other mode of transportation can do.

So this is about being able to project power within their borders. This is about the ability to have influence beyond their borders. It's a legitimacy issue.

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So when it comes down to the folks that make this happen, I kind of think of advisors, and I didn't even know anything about advising before I had this great opportunity to follow Shep and a long line of other great team mates. It really comes down to three particular tenets.

The tenets are versatility, just like air power. I can promise you this, if you go to Afghanistan and you go into a meeting and you've got your great plan, you are exactly 30 seconds into the conversation to find out that your plan really doesn't mean that much. I remind people also, I called my wife after about a week of being there, and said please pray that I somehow develop the patience of Job. Once you figure that out, it's not a matter of disrespect, it's just a function of understanding their culture and realizing that although we may work slower, you really don't seem to accomplish much, and all of a sudden you achieve a breakthrough. We need people to be versatile. That's the kind of advisors we're trying to bring forward.

The biggy here is cultural competence. I'll be honest with you, sometimes we in the United States aren't perhaps as accommodating of other cultures as we should be. And it's everything, and it means everything in this culture. So they're high context. What that means is they're all about relationships. We're low context. We're a little more informal, a little more direct. That doesn't work out so well.

So the importance of getting people that are versatile in their thinking and that also have the ability to be culturally aware, that can suspend their judgment and take a broader perspective. And you would think well officers can do that, right? All enlisted folks. Not really. That's why things like the Air Advisory Academy becomes so critical to us, is shaping the way people are.

This is the one that I love to throw in, and that's emotionally intelligence. Some folks are like what do you mean, emotionally intelligent? Emotional intelligence is what gives you self-control is what allows you to emotionally regulate.

It's interesting when you deal with a high context culture like our Afghan team mates, and that is -- I tell folks if you don't have the ability now to be able to take that broader perspective, to be able to perhaps control how you feel in a moment because things aren't progressing exactly as you want. If you don't have the ability to manage self and then manage relationships, you're not going to succeed in this business.

So the goal here was to say if we had to distill down to three components on what we need in future advisors, remember, as Shep probably told you, we have 39 months and counting to accomplish

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this mission I'm about to show you, and getting the right people at the right place at the right time is the only way. The advisors are the desired bridge to tomorrow.

So here's who we are as a command. So you can read that vision up there. The 7th word, do you see the 7th word? It says "behind". The other thing that's different is we're really used to leading. Heck, I've got 25 years of people telling us okay, you should be a leader, you should do these things. In this case we're not leading from the front as much as we're actually helping guide and coach from the back. Advising is about being a mentor. So getting people to understand that. Otherwise, how are they going to fully internalize and own this mission?

How do we actualize that vision? I have to look to my brother Shep here. He really did a lot of this great work in establishing this flight plan and giving us these four lines of effort. None of these have changed.

These first three, professional air force. Well, if it's going to be self-sustaining, how do you actually get the right people? How do you actually sustain the right people? How do you create a professional officer corps? How do you create the secret sauce of all services, an NCO corps? Those are all the things we're doing in places like PEH, our academy.

How do you now take up there and how do you resource manage? I told you, this is a dependency minded type of organization for decades. They now have to manage their own checkbook. We're asking them some hard questions about how do you do that? How do you write a contract? Heck, we struggle with writing contracts in the United States Air Force and we've had a lot of practice.

So just understanding the complexity. But these are important.

In a world where resources always matter and it doesn't matter if it's Africa, Afghanistan or America, they have to develop that capability.

Safe and effective operations in aviation. I want to tell you, I want to show you in a subsequent slide that there's been a history of some challenges and some decisions had to be made, so we had to revector our approach. If you don't have safe aviation you're not going to have an Air Force for very long.

Last but certainly not least, this idea of Afghan planned and led. There are some tremendous successes. While I'm standing here today 90 percent of the missions are planned and led by the Afghan Afghanistan. That's not well understood. Yeah, we're there advising, but the nice thing is we're going more and more into the shadows. We're going more and more into the back.

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That's why I appreciate you coming out to listen to this story because there's a lot of misunderstanding.

I understand there is a lot of skepticism as to the sustainability of this. Probably because one, we're the only air advisor wing in the world and we've never undertaken this scale of a project to build from the inside out, from the bottom up, build an Air Force while you fly it while engaged in a war, and do all the other things that are going on simultaneously.

So who are we?

Here's the other part about this wonderful team that we've got. If you look you're going to see from, I'll march you around the country. We have six different locations right now, so we're operating all around in order to project power out there in the west, I just showed you on this far left, think of our UPT base. That's where the production, that is the future of Afghanistan when it comes to aviation. This is where we take and we're growing organic talent from the ground up. The other places we're doing training. Oh, by the way, we're doing combat operations. We're not, the Afghans are.

And there's more. Here's what I'd like you to take away from this. In this entire totality of all these varied folks that are spread across the theater with a finite amount of assets trying to do all the things they've got to do, that's not a lot of people in our command. I'm going to show you a little later, we're going to grow for a season. But do you notice the 14 different flags? Here's why that's important.

The last time I checked, the United States of America doesn't have the ability in our Air Force to actually do MI-17 training or actually to fix them. We don't have the ability to do MI-35 training. This is a team sport. So what happens is we want subscription. We depend on our NATO partners, and as I'm going to show you some of the real challenges we have in the future to our continued success is getting the right team mates from other nations to sign up. I will not lie to you. Right now that's not necessarily -- We don't have all the folks with the specific skill sets that are there yet, but we're working it. That's why we're in places like this.

I said I'd come back to our particular story, the NATCA story the 438th. You look at the Afghan aviation history and then when you look here you realize that we actually started talking about this Afghan Air Force thing a little later than we got involved in Afghanistan in 2001. It started in 2005 with an Army colonel. He was actually the first one that started looking at aviation assets and how would you develop and employ that. Then over time we started to formalize that and we had great folks like General

Padilla come and lay out the initial vision. But our Air Force effort if you will, building what I'm talking to you about, didn't start until 2009, so we're pretty late to this game. This is part of why we're staying until 2017. That's still pretty aggressive when you think you're going to build a capability they've never had, fully sustainable, 8,000 people, a whole host of different platforms, and you're going to do it in eight years. That's still something we should be proud about, but it's also, again, why it's immensely difficult and why every variable matters.

So if you see up there, you notice that we had a little bit of a tough season for a while. Like anything that you literally get off the ground, we had a host of factors occurred. One, we started to see a series of mishaps, safety mishaps in MI-17s and other things. General Ray, the predecessor to Shep, we actually had to get to the point we had to do a lot of different safety stand-downs so the Air Force started to falter a little bit. Then we saw that we had the cancellation of a mid-lift platform. So we really then almost had to stand the Air Force down for a season, and then we were able to regroup, come up with a plan from the ground up on how we're going to go forward even more judiciously, use that as a teaching moment with our Afghan partners. And largely because of Shep's efforts, what happened is for the first time in their history, we co-developed a strategy with those lines of effort I told you about that they owned, and that has guided us to this day. And look at the successes that start to occur almost immediately once we took a more disciplined approach.

You see these first in terms of CasEvac, human remains. We started to see them projecting power within their borders a little smarter the first year. Look what happened when we really started to come on. I know that print's a little small, but what I want to show you here I, there's a whole host of firsts, and I've got some very big arrows with numbers that will help unpack that for you.

So when you look at their ability to be able to now care for their wounded on the battlefield, if you look for the ability to move their dead on the battlefield, and I'll talk to that number a little more in a moment. When you talk about supporting combat operations, integrating in more complex operations with their own forces, moving tons of supplies. All that really started to materialize in the last year.

Did we have a rocky start? The last time I checked any time we've ever tried anything hard, most people do. The thing is, we've recovered in a way and we've actually been able to use it in a way to integrate discipline within the system. And remember, this is largely Afghan led. The vast majority of

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things we're doing, they're more in front. We're helping a lot with maintenance. I'm not going to lie to you. Supply, maintenance and logistics is always a challenge when you're actually building an air force. It's not complex to us but it's complex to them.

Now you're like wow, what have we done? Since the first of January this year until the first of September of this year, this is only eight months folks, take a look at what the Afghan Air Force has been able to do. These numbers, again, their proportion are unprecedented. You look at 2000 missions, 32,000 passengers. You can look at that. A thousand CasEvac. Let me tell you the CasEvac story.

If last year you would have said hey John, how are they doing? Shep, how are they doing on CasEvac? We would have gone from radio call to the person getting picked up and delivered to a hospital in 72 hours. Today when they have radio call to say there's a need, it happens in three to four hours. Folks, that's NATO standard and they're doing it all on their own.

Is it always perfect? No. But the fact is, these are pretty astounding.

Then you notice that really big arrow there. Five hundred HR missions. That's human remains. This is one that we scratch our heads on a little bit, but let me tell you, the ability to move those are perish in defense of their nation on the battlefield or anywhere is so significant in the Islamic faith. What that means is, to them, very finite time lines. There's a whole series of events that have to occur to honor that person whose life was lost.

So this is an example of how do you conceptualize an air force? They've asked us to continue to improve this area, and you notice that over 170 percent improvement this year. This is an Air Force that is in line with the things they're asking us to do priority wise. People may not always understand it, but what happens, it demonstrates to those in Afghanistan who are making the ultimate sacrifice, that you will be taken care of by your government.

Remember, the Afghan Air Force represents, it's an arm of the government. This is a legitimizing function for the government. And we know one of our national objectives is to help create a stable Afghan nation, so we're doing that directly by contextualizing how we support them.

Where are we going now? You're going to notice a lot of this capability growth. A week and a half from today the first two C-130s show up on the ramp out of four. That's a pretty big deal

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for them. Why? You can move a lot of stuff. So we're going to move from having to take a whole bunch of supplies and things and move it one C-20 at a time and now we're going to be able to aggregate and be able to do a lot of things with this C-130. What it does is it frees up blade hours in the MI-17s. What it does is it actually allows that capacity to be used smarter elsewhere. So it's a very very very big deal for our Afghan team mates.

ATAC and ALO. At the end of the day, do you know who's going to measure whether we succeeded with the Afghan Air Force? It will be the Afghan Army. This is why we're building an Air Force. It's not just so we can go to air shows it's so a small but might 8,000 person force is going to be there to be able to increase the proportional positive effect of those army forces. So the ability to do close air support, the ability to do non-standard ISR, the ability to aid their team mates and have a reach that the army can't get to. This is disproportionate effect. We talk about air mindedness and air power. This is a perfect example.

Now you look at maturing C2 processes. If you go John, what's the hardest thing that we're going to constantly have to whittle away to the last day? It is disciplined operations. What makes our Air Force so marvelous is we are very clear about centralized command and decentralized execution. But we're dealing in a different culture that again, they're power based. We know there's a dispersion. There are a lot of moving pieces at any one time.

What have we done in just the recent past here? I'm talking the last month and a half. We've doubled the size of the ACCC which is, if you think about it, it's their centralized node for command and control. We've simplified processes and we've increased the discipline. So the goal here is centralized control of an Air Force.

When you have less total air frames than you have in an Army CAB, you better use them wisely. So we're thinking about all these things. We watch all these things. We measure all these things. We're helping them grow and to become better stewards of the resources that they have.

Last but not least is enhanced recruiting efforts and development of a professional officer corps. About 45 days from today we have team mates that are joining us for six months from Recruiting Command. We're building an outright, from the ground up, come join the Afghan Air Force recruiting campaign. We're going to high schools and we're going to look for them there. We're going to create test batteries. We're even looking to get commercials of their Afghan Air Force on Afghan television. The point is, we're leveraging the best of what we do because we have

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a supply and demand problem, as I'm going to show you. You only have X amount of folks that are qualified to even serve in the armed forces, and then we have to be able to continue to compete for that at a time when the complexity of our system is going up. So recruiting is key.

And the ongoing development of professionals is really what's going to sustain this Air Force. The right people with the right skills at the right place at the right time.

I'm going to show you four enablers to success. One slide that's going to bring all this together. Then I've got another video, through the eyes of our Afghan team mates, if that's fair.

So you would probably say okay, if we had to distill it down to four things that are really dynamic, I spend a lot of my waking hours on them as my friend in the front row did. And what we need to succeed, these are what they're going to find.

Security, and I'll unpack that more in a second. Investment in English language, as well as the right personnel and guess what? The right type of infrastructure.

When I talk to security, clearly, it's job one. I think most folks in here may be aware of the tragic history of our command. When you're doing advising duty on the one hand it's very relational and very rewarding. On the other hand it's also dangerous. Although the vast majority of folks are very excited to have us there, we just need to be real about the threat. Here's how that threat shows up.

As we continue to draw down there are increasing pressures and increasing concerns about our ability to do our mission. We have 39 months. Every minute lost in training is not a minute we have time to make up. On any given day now when we for some reason have an increase in the threat stream, or if we don't have the proper security forces we need for let's say a specific Islamic holiday, whatever the cause is, immediately guess what suffers. It's not security. We of course will always do that first. It's training.

AS we've gone back and done the math this year, we've lost well over 25 percent of our training just by virtue of factors outside our control. We will never hedge on this. But I would tell you that every single day creates another challenge for us to be able to get to the finish line. That's why we continue to watch and measure and continue to advocate for always leading into the right amount of security. So when people come do the mission they know we're clear on job one.

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Obviously, thankfully, our Chief of Staff is very clear on that as well and he obviously provides the greatest level of support.

Now you're talking about, I call them architects of excellence are really the bridge to the future. Right people, right place, right time. I alluded to the fact that there are three different kinds of people that do our mission. Contractors, United States Air Force uniform wearers, and then those that we call our coalition partners or the CJSOR. As of today I would tell you we're under-subscribed pretty significantly. We can't make up that capability, and I know for a lot of folks there's a lot of political decisions and a lot of decisions are being made outside of our control that people are waiting for. We're still waiting on the final numbers. None of those things, there's nothing anybody in this room can do anything about. But understand that if we need X amount of coalition partners with exact skill sets that we can't replicate, then there will be a degrading effect on the system if we don't ultimately get them.

This is just being real about the challenges.

So security is a constant challenge that we're paying close attention to. Getting the right people in the right place at the right time.

Before I got on the plane, there were a lot of conversations going on in theater right now. Well intentioned conversations. One of them is there's OPTs about how we reduce BOG. We're not immune from those conversations. So there are things right now, and people talking about the future of everybody there and how do you get to that magical whatever that number is going to be. As we get caught up in that, if we don't get the personnel that we need to be able to accomplish the full set of capabilities, then that means we have to basically readjust the plan. That's all I'm sharing with you. Okay, these are just another variable we're watching very closely. That's why it's important to be here and talking to the press and letting folks know. To produce these capabilities, to be self-sustaining and done in 39 months, it's kind of an easy math problem. We need this amount of people with these kinds of skills. All I'm sharing with you is we know exactly what those skills are, down to the person. We've got a really good grasp on what we need to succeed.

This is an interesting one. I don't think anyone told me in the warm-up that we were going to be running seven English labs. I got the whole, we're going to build an air force. But if you look at one of the systemic challenges we have, check out -- What you see in those two charts are this. The literacy rate in Afghanistan is 31 percent. The literacy rate to be a member of the Afghan Air Force is 100 percent. Remember when I said I have a little bit of a supply and demand problem?

Across Afghanistan only five percent of the people actually speak English. We have almost half of our force that has an English language requirement. So we just can't go pick someone off the street and say let's go teach you to turn a wrench and be an MI-17 mechanic. We actually have to say, let us actually make sure you're literate, then after that we've got to go ahead and now get you spun up on English, and then we can get you in the pipeline.

So the reason it takes time to build an Air Force from the ground up in a country like Afghanistan is we're dealing with systemic limitations we don't even think about in the United States. By the time you pick someone out to be a pilot or a maintainer, they've been through so much vetting, testing, screening. We know what we're getting. So this is another one of the systemic limitations we watch. It's also why we invest so heavily in English language training and why those of us on y'all's behalf who are building the Afghan Air Force are also English instructors.

Last but certainly not least, it's awesome flying an air force. Building an air force, employing an air force, while literally building the infrastructure around that air force. So we are about 70 percent of the way there on having our infrastructure. It won't be done until 2015. Last I checked there's no pass. We're done in 39 months. So this poses another challenge. This challenge is staying on top of the contractors. Every slip in contract has a degrading effect on the system. All four of these elements -- again, what we can do is advocate, what we can do is watch, what we can do is measure. Trust me when I tell you we've got that part down. But these are the things that I in my current capacity pay close attention to because when we start to degrade in one, we have to start communicating that we need help, or we're going to have to now rethink exactly the full set of capabilities we deliver in the Afghan Air Force.

So I'd ask you to remember a couple of things. It will be we're clear on our enablers. We're helping to reestablish a proud heritage of aviation within Afghanistan. We're seeing a capability that isn't just about the military, this is foundational for the legitimacy of that country so they once again can be stable. That is a national security interest of the United States of America. It is a complex, probably the single most complex dynamic system problem I've ever seen in my life because there are so many variables that are out of your control. Fortunately we use data to our advantage. We're involved in the right conversations. And a lot of this is we've just got to get more folks to understand the story. We're going to be there for a while and we still need the right kind of team mates. These are the enablers to success.

I'm going to wrap this up with what I call now the NATCA story. Don't worry, you don't have to be able to look at the boxes. Everything I've told you boils down to this. That top left corner tells you that this system is getting more complex. I told you we've got two C-130s showing up. As of today I had three more MI-17s show up on the ramp that they're gluing together. We had three show up last week and we've got six more showing up next month. Oh, wait. We've got 20 A-29s that are coming here in the summer of next year.

So our system complexity is increasing by 40 percent while most of the theater is thinking about how do I get out of here fast?

Up here to the right is our report card. We know what it takes to build an Air Force. We've conceptualized it and I can promise you we're not building any more than we have to. We're going to build an Air Force that's going to serve their needs as they've communicated them.

What that Rubik's cube means is today if we left, everything that's green, they could sustain. Everything that's yellow would degrade to the point that it is unsustainable. Everything that is red is we haven't even begun. Thirty-nine months.

Bottom left is that big pile of blue. Those are the humans. The most important part of the system. Three types. The bottom gives you an idea of contractors; the middle gives you a sense of how many TA or Air Force uniform wearers; and the top is our CJSOR coalition partners. We know down to the person and the skill set who we need. For a season we've got to grow. It's perhaps inconvenient at times, but the reality is we need to grow to about 1100 and then we can come back down again. We've got a smart plan to phase capabilities so as soon as they grow and can fully sustain the C208 in 2016, and the MI-17, literally, they're going to have it. We're out of that business so we can be very good stewards of the people that are behind.

Here's the message I want you to get from that bottom left. We don't control how many people we get. We know how many we need. What I can tell you is that we are very diligent. We're asking for no more and no less and we will be able to transition those folks out of theater as quickly as we possibly and safely can.

Then there's the slide down in the right. We've been asked to build an independent sustainable Afghan Air Force. One of the key attributes of sustainability is affordability. Not for us. We've written a lot of pretty big checks, folks. As a matter of fact I spent \$867 million of taxpayers' money this year. But that's the question we just asked the Afghan leadership. How much air force can you afford when we're no longer here in 2017?

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So what we've did is we aggregated how much that Air Force is projected to cost. I can tell you today it's about \$620 million. That may not sound like a lot to run a whole Air Force, but let me put it in context for you before we get ready to wrap up. According to the Chicago Accords, there's a fixed cost to how much Afghanistan can spend on their defense based on who's going to give what. That's \$4.1 billion.

So \$4.1 billion in the out years is the cost of the Afghan Air Force. Sorry, the entire defense structure. \$4.1. That's their entire Army, that's everything. So the Afghan Air Force is 8,000 people. We represent 3.5 percent of the population, yet currently we're probably going to consume as much as 15 to 20 percent of the budget. The reason we ask this question is, if we're not going to be able to sustain this amount in the out years, we need to know that today so we can go ahead and make sure we're only developing affordable, sustainable capabilities.

What I'd ask you to remember from that point is we're being very good stewards. We're asking really hard questions to people really high in the food chain. We're asking them, and we've already started moving out, if they choose to say no, we can't afford that, we will work alongside them to come up with a range of options on things we can do so that we then determine which capabilities or what is the smartest way to right-size this Air Force? We will deliver no more air force than they need. We will deliver an air force that they can sustain. That will honor all the folks that have invested in this air force.

So what is this about? It's not about things. It's not about money. It's not about runways. All those things are needed for an air force. This is really what it's about.

[Video shown].

Those last words are really what it's about. It's for the next generation.

Let me just wrap up and tell you this. One of the things that I've had the great privilege now for six weeks, and my brother over here had the privilege for a year, is I know this is hard and we've given a lot as a nation to create this capability, but sometimes we lose sight of how much even our Afghan team mates are giving up.

Every day one of the privileges I have is to be the mentor to their Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Wahab. What I know is I know his story. He spent five years in prison, and when he got out, he couldn't feed his family. This is an individual who every day has so many body guards, he has to stay until 3:00

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o'clock in the morning because he's got so many death threats against him because he's working with us to build their air force.

Before I got on the plane, the other thing is we had a young man who is really one of our poster children for the future of Afghanistan. He was the top graduate of their helicopter class a little under a year ago. Unfortunately on a training mission he got married, and 12 days after being married he came back to work. That was last week. When they were flying a helicopter maneuver out at Shindan, he and his instructor, they unfortunately landed on an IED planted by terrorists, or planted by the insurgents. He lost his left arm and his left leg in that explosion. For three days he was in the hospital. He developed a blood infection. We tried to transport him, and unfortunately right before I got on the airplane he passed away.

My point is he got married 12 days previously. He was 20-something years old. He looks no different than the young kids that are coming out of pilot training that we are producing.

All I leave you with is we have sacrificed a lot and we are working hard, but whether it's the 60 year old and the older generation that have for years waited for the opportunity to have the kind of things we sometimes -- I mean for us, we're blessed. They know their kids and their grandkids, they get that that's their future. And I've got young Afghans as well who are dying in training to be able to do what we're trying to do here so that they can create the kind of future they want.

So the point is when we say shona by shona or shoulder by shoulder, they are working hard. It's hard for us. It's hard for them. I think this is certainly a noble gig.

They get it.

This gentleman here, General Barat, as my friend knows in the front, this is a two-time hero of Afghanistan. This is an individual who has been on death row multiple times. Every day he comes to work he has lots of body guards. He has lots of death threats. And he is the first person to do whatever it takes to sacrifice for his men. I've had the privilege to fly with him. I would go anywhere with that guy and I've only been there six weeks.

So folks, I'm telling you the vast majority of them are astonishingly good partners. They want this more than we want it. I'll say that again. They want this more than we want it.

It's a privilege to be out there to serve. Thank you for coming to listen to as much of their story. And know that this is hard.

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We're working it. I have no doubt that if we fly the flight plan that we've created, we're going to create a fully sustainable independent Afghan Air Force that all of us can be proud of in the future.

Thank you for that, and we'll take questions or go to Happy Hour.

[Questions not on recording].

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