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**The “Forever War:”
Tough Decisions About
War Termination**



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The “Forever” War in Afghanistan: Time to Make Tough Decisions About War Termination

09/03/2018

By Edward Timperlake

The Trump Administration has focused in its defense strategy upon the urgent necessity to deal with the direct threats to the United States and its allies posed by peer competitors.

And a crucial skill set in succeeding in this competition will be to know how to manage crises, use force and diplomacy to terminate crises effectively.

But with the endless war in Afghanistan demonstrating clearly that the Administrations which launched and conducted the endless war simply can not terminate US engagement in a conflict, how will this work.

War termination in Afghanistan is not only important in terms of redirecting out efforts to protect core American interests and to deter adversaries investing and building for the high end fight, but also in demonstrating that the US can actually do war termination effectively.

Stability operations simply requires no clear war termination strategy.

Crisis management with peer competitors clearly does.

The Afghanistan “warfighting school” is simply teaching the US very bad strategic habits.

It is time to learn a new set of habits.

Strategic battlefield past combat success with the treasure of American Families going to war can be seen in contrast with the Afghan time line of the current **6,175 days** and still counting “forever” Afghanistan war.

Something is seriously wrong with the ongoing US military strategy.

A simply historic review with a day count of American combat history shows that in all wars, there has been in retrospect a tipping point of a successful battle that shows eventual victory.

Vietnam excluded because we won that war in combat but lost it on a political battlefield.

After 17 years, except for the very successful opening engagement in Afghanistan, a tipping point engagement has yet to have been seen.

And simply projecting one into the endless time horizon is not a strategy; it is an abdication of leadership and strategic responsibility.

From Nation Building to Counter-Insurgency, to Stability Ops, whatever that means, tremendous treasure has been squandered with limited progress as the US begins to face deadly peer-to-peer adversaries.

The assumption that the US can drain treasure and blood in the endless war while we refocus on peer competitors, who are directly threatening the United States at home and abroad is simply misplaced.

China has built up its forces by investing in the high end fight, while the US has spent precious human and investment capital in an endless war, which will have little or no impact on deterring peer adversaries.

US/NATO combat actions the warriors have won at the small unit level.

It is not the valor and undaunted courage of the troops, nor their battlefield tactics, that is in question.

It is the grand strategy that has failed, because how can the Taliban be so successful against the Afghan Army when they do not have American advisors and air cover?

If we look back at the timelines of past wars compare to the Afghan war, it is readily apparent what endless means.

The Vietnam War

Excluding the great insight that the US frontier expansion was actually over a century of warfare, the longest war American's had previously fought was the Vietnam War.

On August 7, 1964 the US Congress approves "all necessary action" in Vietnam."

On August 11 1973, U.S Combat troops leave South Vietnam and on April 30, 1975 the Vietnam War ended.

That was a total of 3,918 days.

However, prior to Congressional action casualties began to happen taken from the history of Vietnam:

On October 21, 1957 – Capt. Harry Griffith Cramer, Jr. a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, was killed near Nha Trang, Vietnam.

He served in Korea, where he was injured and awarded the Purple Heart, as well as in Vietnam. He was the first US Army soldier to be killed in the line of duty in the Vietnam War. A street at Fort Lewis, Washington, is named in his honor.

He is buried at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

During that period of 1964-1975 there were approximately 9 million men and women in uniform with around three million serving in South East Asia.

There were 47,434 battle deaths and an additional 10,786 deaths in theater.

An actual census count in the 2000 Census determined that the surviving U.S. Vietnam Veteran population estimate is: 1,002,511.

My personal belief is exposure to Agent Orange created a lot of uncounted casualties.

Because it wasn't until 1990 that Secretary Ed Derwinski in a visionary move, service connected Vietnam Veterans exposure to Agent Orange to early life ending diseases.

On a personal note I tried to get the Obama Administration to count number of living Vietnam Veterans in the 2010 census but failed.

I hope the Trump Administration has collecting that data as part of the 2020 Census.

That generation of warriors are still paying an horrific price of early death from environmental factors on their battlefield

The Afghan War

The Afghan war essentially began on October 7, 2001 and continues to this day which is **so far 6,175 days.**

Taking nothing away from our very courageous NATO Allies whose service members fought and died shoulder to shoulder in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US Killed in Action has been reported as:

Deaths from War.

6,251 U.S. troops have been killed in war since 2001

4,474 U.S. troops died in the Iraq War.

1,695 American soldiers have died in the war in and around Afghanistan.

82 American soldiers have died in other theaters of war.

Approximately, an additional 20,320 American service members have been wounded in action during the war.

Speaking “ground truth” reported September 2 2017, the departing US Commanding General stated that it was time to end this war.

Of course the question is simple, with six previous combat tours in Afghanistan, he was perhaps the most experienced Four Star Commander to take command so why didn't he create a strategic “tipping point” to end the war on his watch?

How many tours are necessary in the endless war while you are doing open-ended stability operations?

Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr., (West Point 1982) the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan for the last 31 months, urged all sides to bring an end to the war there as he departed his post,

<http://thehill.com/policy/defense/404779-outgoing-us-commander-time-for-war-in-afghanistan-to-end>

Another Afghan hand was even more blunt:

“Our soldiers are volunteers, permitting the American people and their elected representatives to be indifferent about the war in Afghanistan,” Karl Eikenberry, (West Point 1973) a former American commander in Afghanistan and U.S. ambassador to Kabul, told the Times.

“We continue to fight simply because we are there.”

“Military commanders in Afghanistan, absent political guidance and a diplomatic strategy, have filled the vacuum by waging a war all agree cannot be won militarily,”

Eikenberry added “Their mission has been to ‘make progress,’ which they themselves define and which is often unrelated to the tasks of delivering a sustainable peace and the withdrawal of U.S. forces.”

Time Line of the Tipping Point moments In American Wars

A very fair time line of American tactical and strategic leadership since the American Civil War shows us that:

From beginning of American Civil War April 12, 1861 until Union victory at Gettysburg July 1-3 1863 —**810 days**

From declaration of Spanish American War April 25 1898 until Commodore Dewey sinks the Spanish Pacific Navy May 1 1898—**6 days**

July 1 1898 San Juan Hill and then July 3 1898 the Spanish naval presence in Cuba was destroyed—**69 days**

August 12 1898 the war ended.—**114 days**

World War I Congress declared war on April 6, 1917 and the US Marines made their heroic fight at Belleau Wood to save Paris and turn the tide from June 1 to June 26 1918—**446 days**.

From December 7, 1941 to the US Navy miracle at Midway June 5 1942 was —**180 days**

From December 7, 1941 to D-Day 6th of June 1944—**912 days**

From opening North Korean/CHICOM attack in Korean war until General MacArthur (West Point 1903) initiated the combat successful USMC amphibious assault at Inchon —**82 days**.

Desert Shield/Desert Storm- The brilliant tactical and strategic air campaign lasted **42 days, with ground combat 100 hours**.

It is very obvious something is terribly wrong in our Afghan Strategy especially with the Taliban and apparently ISIS, when not killing each other, are essentially gaining ground after a 17 year US and NATO combat engagement.

The latest push for talks between the US and the Taliban also stems from the reality on the ground.

The Taliban, along with other insurgent groups, keep gaining control or influence over territory and people in Afghanistan.

The US-backed Afghan government and troops, meanwhile, continue to lose ground.

So any end to the conflict would require Washington and Kabul to strike some accord with the Taliban, although the insurgent group currently only wants to talk to the US first to ensure it leaves Afghanistan.

<https://www.vox.com/2018/8/3/17629856/afghanistan-taliban-us-talks>

American combat history has a similar example of warring parties joining forces until they didn't.

Ironically like Taliban and ISIS a similar situation arose out of The Vietnam War.

It was a two front war, with the NVA and Vietcong attacking along with the Cambodia Khmer Rouge active on the South Vietnam border.

After the US pull-out, the NVA took on and defeated the very evil Khmer Rouge who were supported by the PRC.

After their defeating the Khmers the Vietnam Army severely mauled the PLA attacking on their Northern border.

The US was not engaged in this regional war!

Rethinking the Afghan Engagement: “We cannot reach the point we want to go.”

We are focusing on ending the endless war which Afghanistan has become.

In 2011, we interviewed a colleague of Massoud's who fought the Taliban and as a former French Foreign Legion Officer, has significant experience in dealing with conflicts in remote locations with significant operational challenges.

In this interview, he underscored that if the United States did NOT change its strategy, it faced an endless war and defeat.

Unfortunately, he has been proven right.

He outlined his thinking about the conflict, the challenges and war termination.

We repost this article below, an article which we first published in March 2011 on Second Line of Defense.

It is rare that a voice with so much experience can provide understanding of a possible path to withdrawal from Afghanistan and ending the endless mission.

We introduced our readers to this experienced Afghan hand late last year.

Our French correspondent in 2010-2011 Olivier Azpitarte interviewed Johan Freckhaus after a visit to Afghanistan.

According to Freckhaus:

“The truth is that the centralized and authoritarian system that we have put in place with the help of an emigrant, urban and progressive Afghan elite, is unsuited to the fundamentally rural, conservative and religious country.

“This system has no chance of survival and, by using force to impose itself, it only creates rejection, as indeed before him Prince Daoud's “republic” in the '70s and the Communists' “democracy” in the 80's.

The more resentment, the less hope and the more Afghans are in the moment, in search of quick profits. Today, there are foreigners and money; it's time to fill their pockets for the future of the family, the future education of the children, even exile if the Taliban was to be back soon!”

The senior SLD team interviewed Freckhaus in both Paris and Washington DC to get a better sense of his thinking about the past and the way out of the endless tunnel. How best to shape the future of Afghanistan and the Western engagement?

Freckhaus has a wide-ranging background and engagement with Afghanistan.

Freckhaus is a French citizen and graduate of St. Cyr. After serving as an officer in the French Infantry and in the Foreign Legion, he went to Afghanistan to join Ahmad Shah Massoud's resistance fight and helped train his commandos.

After the strategically important and tragic murder of Massoud, Freckhaus has remained engaged in Afghanistan in various ways and he has had over a decade of experience on the ground.

Providing consultancy services for several private companies or directly managing the projects, he has been involved in the rehabilitation of urban water supply network systems, the deployment of military satellite communication equipment, the construction of district centers and police district headquarters, as well as the supply of petrol, diesel and jet fuel for the International Security Assistance Force.

In addition, he served as a former team member of the political advisory group supporting the presidential campaign of the candidate Abdullah Abdullah.

In 2008, Freckhaus was captured by the Taliban and then released in a prisoner exchange and ordered to leave Afghanistan. He did so only to return shortly thereafter.

His kidnapping was described in *Newsweek Magazine* <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/09/05/for-the-taliban-a-crime-that-pays.html>

In our interviews with Freckhaus he connects two broad points.

First, the light footprint followed by the Bush Administration after 9/11 was the right strategy.

The piling on of foreign troops has stirred up a hornets nest of Taliban activity who are using the large scale foreign presence as a recruiting issue.

The point simply put is that Afghans distrust foreign motives and the large number of troops.

And the foreign troops are backing a centralized government, which is out of sync of broader Afghan national aspirations and objectives.

Certainly, recent events in the Middle East suggest that building up the power of the Presidency, as a focus of Western activity might well be counterproductive for political progress.

In a recent speech to the Kuwait National Assembly, on 22 February 2011, the UK Prime Minister admitted: "For decades, some have argued that stability required highly controlling regimes (...). [We] faced a choice between our interests and our values. And to be honest, we should acknowledge that sometimes we have made such calculations in the past. But I say that is a false choice."

Freckhaus also suggested an interesting lesson from history that might just work — a Swiss “neutrality” model from the time of Napoleon.

His observations in his own words are extremely interesting.

The West can work with Russia, Pakistan and others to shape a neutrality treaty and can assist where appropriate in countering foreign fighters like Al Qaeda and the Taliban seeking to penetrate Afghan territory.

But the West needs to leave security to the provinces, and work with a much smaller central government tasked with dispensing aid to the provinces, control of the Army and collecting taxes. But the provinces cannot, nor need, manage large police forces.

In the earlier interview, Olivier underscored the following:

There is indeed an insurgency in Afghanistan because you have 30 000 or 40 000 rebel fighters – according to allied military intelligence – backed by millions of Afghan civilians, in growing numbers, who feed them, house them, transport them, protect them, give them information and so on.

These civilians are doing it foremost to drive foreign troops out of the country and in rejection of the system we are trying to impose, but do not want the return to power of the mullahs either.

Withdrawing our troops is therefore the right strategy to effectively drive a wedge between the rebels and their supporters. This famous momentum, this magic moment where the power relationship can be reversed, will come from fair and complete withdrawal of foreign forces, because then the fate of the country will return to its population.

Then the Afghan security forces, as they exist today, would very well be capable, with the help of villagers, of chasing away those rebels on motorcycles mainly armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, whose most lethal know-how is simply to trigger explosives remotely.

The strategy of “always more” prevalent until today for the Afghan security forces is a dangerous illusion: more troops, more money, more power to the central government, all of this is counter-productive, it fuels the insurgency! We are building oversized security forces in Afghanistan that the country is far from being able to afford.

We imagine a police state, supported from abroad, which would subject the population to the decisions of Kabul.

We imagine building in a few years, for one of the poorest countries in the world, an army that could successfully maintain in power a hyper-centralized system. This is not sustainable.”

Let’s remember, for the record, that the Afghan government, which now has 140, 000 military and 109, 000 police officers, aims at a 240,000 military and 240,000 police officers force. And that is for a country of about 20 million inhabitants.

In comparison, France, for a population three times larger, has fewer than 170,000 military personnel (ground and air) and 265 000 gendarmes and police officers.

SLD: In your view, why will the current strategy fail?

Freckhaus: Because we part of the problem.

The political model is wrong.

We need to return to 2002 where we had more limited and realistic objectives in a certain sense.

We are seeking to build too large of an army and too large of a police force to support a model of government, which cannot be sustained.

By the way, who is going to invade Afghanistan after we leave? We are building unstable equilibrium, not stability.

It looks like it could stand but any kind of disturbances tend to bring the system down, and we need to spend a lot of energy – blood, toil, sweat and money – to maintain it.

SLD: So, we declare victory.

Freckhaus: We should have declared victory in Afghanistan at the end of 2001, after a regime that was oppressing its own people, lying to the world and supporting terrorism collapsed under our joint military action.

On the other hand, what was called the “war on terror” goes on and this is not a kind of struggle that ends with a statement.

On the Afghan battlefield, better than declaring victory we must acknowledge mistakes.

There is a Nation over there with several ethnic groups used to live together on the same land for centuries.

The so-called State building went wrong.

The central government should be no more than a clearinghouse for development.

We should not build up the power of the President to become a dictator for the country.

SLD: But we’re focusing on basically provincial police and security.

We can call it an American National Guard; the kind of people who belong to the states.

Freckhaus: We built the Afghan National Army, but they are dedicated to defend their country against foreign forces.

The ANA is reluctant for counterinsurgency, because they are Afghan insurgents.

There is no more.

Let’s consider insurgency like a part of your own people supporting armed and organized rebellion groups.

If you ask the Afghan Army to fight Afghan insurgents, they don't want to; when you leave, they will stop fighting their own people, I'm sure.

They are likely to look for local deals or even recognize another leadership considered as more legitimate than a foreign-backed central government.

SLD: Could you discuss your concept about the relevance of the Swiss model and the relevance of bargained neutrality?

Freckhaus: We need to enforce neutrality of Afghanistan by making Pakistan become a signatory to an argument and an enforcer of the accord.

Making them part of a Western counter-insurgent strategy will not be considered legitimate by the Pakistani military.

Pakistan plays against Afghanistan because they don't want Afghanistan to play with India against them. Iran plays the same dirty game because they don't want Afghanistan to play with the U.S. against them.

And actually, we are there because we don't want Afghanistan to play again with a terrorist organization against us.

That is the great game.

But to end it, to neutralize Afghanistan, let's come back to the old story.

There is no sustainable way but make Afghanistan neutral and give up on this idea of "strategic partnership".

No Afghanistan against us or with our enemies; that is all what we need.

SLD: Please explain the Swiss model.

Freckhaus: The history of Europe can help to understand what happens now in central Asia.

If we compare Afghanistan to Switzerland, at the beginning of the 19th century or the end of the 18th century, we can see a way ahead.

You have the problem of the cities and the countryside. Switzerland is a rural country at that time, conservative, religious with many proud people living in remote valleys.

Like Afghans now are really conservative and religious and rejects the modernizing initiatives of the cities and the central government when it comes to cultural values and morality.

In 18th century Switzerland, the cities and urban elites supported the French revolution; the countryside did not.

The urban elites even asked the French troops to come in to enforce the revolution, the same way that the Afghan urban elites have heavily solicited for decades the Soviets and the West to help empowering a new generation for the progress of their own country.

The French did an organized Switzerland in a centralized way with appointed governors.

This failed.

For four years, the French troops occupied Switzerland and enforced centralization.

Eventually Napoleon got the point. A group of French senators were sent to Switzerland to see what they could do to solve the issue there.

The group of senators came back to Napoleon, to the emperor, and said okay, we have a problem because the political model is not correct; it's wrong for this country.

We have to come back to what was Switzerland before the centralization and to give back the power for people to sort their problems at the village level, with an arbitrator chosen by themselves, sitting at an upper level, and who can solve most issues without necessarily referring to a central authority.

There is a famous speech of Napoleon in 1802, in which he said that it's not for a wise man to try to change the nature of the country in Switzerland.

So, we came back to a more decentralized power in Switzerland.

And I think it is reversed, this acknowledgement of mistake from Napoleon at that time, must inspire us for Afghanistan.

The model we put in 2002 to have a centralized country, actually, the idea is to control the president who controls the government, to control the governor who is supposed to control the province.

This is a flawed organization.

The power in Afghanistan is not culturally centralized and people want to be involved in any decision...

Of course, we have to think about the structure of the government.

Should the district and provincial governors be selected by the president?

Or elected by the people? Where is the limit between the people organizing themselves at the local level, and the central leadership?

How is it that the experts who say that the solution is political only propose to deal with the enemy?

Politics is the way you organize the power and we did it wrongly in Afghanistan.

Let's do real politics before asking the Taliban to sign any paper.

How is it that we keep consulting historians of guerilla warfare, experts in counter-insurgency, psychological operations or information warfare, but don't ask any help from specialists in decentralization, federalism and constitution?

How is it that the people who studied at the Kennedy School of Government only rely on West Point graduates to find a solution?

I strongly believe that the keys are not in the military toolbox.

SLD: Could you discuss the significance of the rural population in your thinking?

Freckhaus: Afghanistan is a rural country, it's a conservative country, and it's a religious country.

But the West is talking with urban or emigrated elites who are not too much religious and does not really represent what their country is.

I know many of them who think that a dictatorship is the way to bring progress to the mass of illiterate and ignorant farmers.

But you will not find a good dictator in Afghanistan and if you concentrate the power in Kabul you will never have enough seats of power for each community to be represented there.

Better to send the money to the provinces – I mean to provide them with a budget – and rely on the people, than to ask all the communities to send representatives for request to the ministries in the capital city.

Then, you have the Pashtuns who say they are 65% of the population, the Tajiks say they are 40%, the Hazaras 25%, the Uzbeks 15%, etc.

Every community pretends that they are the least advantaged by the government.

The relationship between Kabul and the provinces must be reinvented.

The central government provides development whereas the provinces should provide security.

It is not reconstruction before security or security before reconstruction, it should be an exchange of reconstruction for security and security for reconstruction, from two different entities and not all coming from a foreign supported central government.

Like the Soviets and the British, we want to talk with modern elites.

We want to change the society to fit our objectives; we want to adapt the people to the system.

And we are wrong.

We believe that it is a question of commitment, of resources, of time. “It will take one generation”; “it will take time as it takes”.

I myself believe that it is not going to work...

This idea of change and progress are not understood nor believed by the population.

We may have some hidden agenda... And this hidden agenda of the West drives the Afghans into the arms of the Taliban.

I thought it was interesting about the communists in Afghanistan was that they were in alliance with the Russians for kind of modernization agenda.

Which in a certain sense, we're doing the same thing.

SLD: Could you discuss your views on the light footprint role in 2002?

Freckhaus: I was in Afghanistan before 2001, after 9/11, Secretary Rumsfeld organized a strategy, and he came out with a light footprint strategy.

It was because there was only a small group of experts on Afghanistan and they told him, well... it is complicated. We must not do what the British or Russians did before. So let's add very light footprint.

And there were two objectives; to destroy Al Qaida, and to neutralize the Taliban. Actually, the first idea was not to remove the Taliban from history but to “attack the military capability of the Taliban regime”, as President Bush said.

The first, to destroy Al Qaida could not have been achieved, but the neutralization of the Taliban was completed quite quickly because as we say in French “the fruit was ready”.

But then, in the months in 2002, we changed; there were many new experts of Afghanistan coming with an experience of Africa, with an experience of the Balkans, with an experience of South-East Asia, etc. All these people came with new ideas, new experiences, and the big machinery... They knew little about the real nature of the country and wanted to make a nation building, state building and organize the country like we would like.

So, we lost the main first ideas, and we went to the wrong direction.

And because things went badly we just added more resources to deepen our commitment and engagement.

So we say okay, we need more.

We need more troops; we need more money, we need more commitment.

We need more time.

And to me, that we are going the wrong way, and we're going there faster.

We cannot reach the point we want to go.

SLD: The final thing we just want to go back on one of the things we were talking about, which is the notion of the transition we need to do now.

We put the Swiss model on the table; we have a Congress of Vienna, kind of concept of getting folks in the region to accept the neutrality of Afghanistan as the legitimate objective for the country.

We can then transition militarily out of this situation. And really, focus on the central government as really the development center for the country, not so much the governing and national army kind of focus. Beginning to focus more as a partner for international institutions to build development acceptable to the Afghan people.

And underlying that is that you reminded us of the rural/urban divide, in that most Afghans are rural.

So, probably the development that they would value would reinforce the rural existence, not impose a new urban existence on them.

So, just your final thoughts on that.

Freckhaus: And I believe the rural people of Afghanistan can provide the security. They are their own masters in their village and in their house. And if they want to keep the Taliban away, they can do it.

But now the Taliban are their guests, and it's our big problem. They are living with the people, because the people open their door to the Taliban. Doing so, they do what they think has to be done: fighting the foreigners and the hidden agenda.

But we cannot get back the people with counter insurgency model. Building the wrong political model, and actually occupying the country with more and more troops. We have to send a very strong message, like we tried to do, actually.

But in the last year, there were two messages. One message from the political side, like Secretary Clinton. You hear the diplomats say we are not here to occupy the country. The Afghan people must understand that we are not occupiers. So, this speech and the other one where the military will say we are here as long as necessary. We are very committed, and we have to stay until the job is done. So, the Afghan are faced with these two speeches, and which one do you think they believe is the true one?

When he does the surge in Afghanistan, President Obama focuses on counter-insurgency, not constitutional reform.

America must acknowledge its mistake and focus now on giving back the power to the Afghan people, as well as building the neutrality of the country.

One of the consequences is a foreign withdrawal with commitment by the international community to closely monitor the neutrality.

The Future of Afghanistan: The Perspective of Olivier Aziparte in 2010

In an article published on December 1, 2010, the core questions were posed about the way ahead in Afghanistan which should have led to the United States to changing significantly its engagement in the endless war.

These questions are as pertinent then as they are now.

[Why do US officials expect a different answer in 2018 or 2019 or 2020 than we have already been given nearly a decade earlier?](#)

That article follows:

Will The Afghan National Army (ANA) Be Able to Sustain Itself Once Western Troops Depart?

Olivier Aziparte is a former Foreign Legion officer and his findings based on one of his trips to Afghanistan in 2010.

Since the announcement by the French former Minister of Defence Hervé Morin about the start of withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan in 2011, the issue of the evaluation of Afghan security forces is more relevant than ever.

Foremost among the concerns are the maintenance, logistics and troop support.

Will these native troops be able to sustain themselves after the withdrawal of Western troops?

On the occasion of a one-week stay in July 2010 in the main base of the Afghan National Army near Kabul, we had the opportunity to see several battalions in training and operation.

Here is our report.

Outsourcing Maintenance

The Pol-e-Sharki camp is located on the outskirts of Kabul on the Jalalabad road.

Dozens of Afghan battalions – the “kandaks” in Dari – are permanently stationed there. North on the Shamali plain, hundreds of peeled hectares extend in the foothills of the Koh-e-Safi massif: the place called Deh Sabz is the main field of the “kandak factory”.

This summer, the pace of production is a battalion (around 700 men) every fortnight. Units cross and follow each other, to quickly instruct the future mass army of the Karzai government.

They no longer carry the Kalashnikov assault rifle, as it was still the case across the country in 2008, but the M16, and as handgun, a Beretta. The troops ride in brand new Ford Ranger pick-ups or “reconditioned” U.S. Humvees: sand painting has been replaced by a coarse camouflage, the most important being not to be confused with the insurgents.

Across the country, American troops remain the preferred targets of rebel bombs.

All these vehicles, we are told, are maintained and repaired by a civilian company. Western and Afghan employees would be working within this sector of outsourced maintenance. On the shooting target range, they wear with discipline sand-colored American boots, pixilated fatigues, Kevlar helmets and modern body armor.

With some individual adjustments: one prefers leather sandals, and another has the kevlar helmet backwards. “It allows me to place my rifle better,” he says. His instructors bow to the cardboard he shows in support: everything is right on target. So be it.

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Unpaid soldiers

At the rear of a Ford Ranger, four recently incorporated Afghans are tossed towards an area where they are supposed to show up in response to a fictitious ambush. That is their initial instruction, which must come to an end within weeks.

One of them, aged 18, shares with spontaneity. “I have not received pay for the past two months,” he says, half-amused, half annoyed. Laying on the ground moments later, under orders from an instructor who tries to make a good impression, the soldier shouts: “*Bam bam bam bam bam bam bam ... I would have liked to shoot, but we do not have blank ammunition for the exercise*” “Is he still in good spirits anyway? He does not answer yes or no, a grunt escapes his mouth.

However, his determination to fight at gunpoint is firm: “*I’m not afraid to go into battle, I am even eager to be there,*” he says with an attitude steeped in masculinity.

A tradition in Afghanistan.

Little arrangements regarding jerrycans...

Starting at dawn towards the valley of Tagab.

A logistics company of the Afghan army (a “coy”) leaves to supply kitchen wood to two Afghan outposts. Their food supply, unlike the Western troops, is local. And their method of cooking, traditional: from large pots on the fire. In the convoy, Ford Ranger pick-ups and Humvees armed in a respectable way surround gleaming trucks with a payload of 7 tons and bearing the International brand. There are also three French armored vehicles: on board, armed militaries of the “Train” (i.e. the French Army logisticians) on a mentoring mission with their Afghan counterparts for a period of six months.

Journey without mishap until the first battle station, situated on parallel 42: the “hornet’s nest” controlled by supporters of the Tagab Valley begins at this point, but no incidents to report. Lieutenant Jérémie [the French army requires that the civilian press keeps the anonymity of its members in Afghanistan, NDLA] still displays astonishment. This officer of the 2nd material Regiment is the chief of the convoy’s French elements.

He receives a message sent through his interpreter: the Afghan part of the convoy, he learns, has restarted without his knowledge towards the second position on the parallel 51, further north, and in the heart of the insurgent area. The Afghan convoy commander estimated that the risks of being attacked were lowered significantly by not being accompanied by French armored vehicles. His calculation paid off: not even one harassing fire punctuated his one and a half round trip. On the position of latitude 42, the French find time a bit long.

The mood is philosophical: “*After all, they are at home, it is their country, we’re just guests*”, a French logisticians interjects.

Another one is more upset: “*When they need us, they know where to find us, but beyond that, they do not even bother to be courteous.*” This sentencing was a little tough but did not take long to prove true: the French Lieutenant just received a second message through his interpreter that makes his blood boil.

He gathers his ten men on the field and addresses them in an unfussy style: “*The Mouchkil [the problem, NDLA] today is what? The Mouchkil is that they are almost dry on some vehicles. In one of them, they have less than a quarter tank. It*

means that we will go to Kabul on the way back and we will run out of fuel. So, as usual, we will give them a jerrycan. I'm sorry but that's the way it is."

According to their own smart calculations, the Afghan logisticians manage to systematically be given fuel by the French under duress: unless they remain stranded and fear a possible roadside bombing, the options are scarce. That's worth an explanation between French and Afghan command. We observe the scene from a distance: the Afghani tempers, smiles effectively and the "case" is resolved.

The return convoy starts off, rolls a bit, and 60 kilometers from Kabul, stops. Cans are unloaded from the French tanks by Afghans. Chief Warrant Officer Yves, a noncommissioned officer of the 515th regiment of the train, looks on, perplexed.

He comments: *"For them, everything that can be set aside is worth taking. It is even common for a tanker of the Afghan army to never reach its destination. The crew disappears for two weeks, and then returns to the kandak, where it is immediately reinstated, after one of their secret arrangements, as if nothing had happened."*

It must be said that fuel is a very sought after good, because the difficult supply makes it very expensive.

Corruption, which is so often the subject of debate at the political level, sometimes undermining the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Karzaï administration, thus also affects, not surprisingly, the army ranks ... *"It is morally reprehensible,"* moderates the Sergeant-Chef Hervé of the 515th Regiment of the Train, *"but humanly understandable: the price of fuel on the black market in Kabul is very high."* Certainly.

"Time to fill their pockets"

Back in Paris.

We meet Johan Freckhaus, a French expert on Afghan issues.

A former Massoud comrade, a former team member of the presidential campaign of the candidate Abdullah [1], he prefers to blame large scale political mistakes rather than individuals.

"Corruption in Afghanistan is not based on a group of bad people that we could identify and replace. What a good excuse: we would do an admirable job unfortunately marred by a shameless native administration!"

The truth is that the centralized and authoritarian system that we have put in place [at the loya jirga – traditional constituent assembly – in 2003, NDLA] with the help of an emigrant, urban and progressive Afghan elite, is unsuited to the fundamentally rural, conservative and religious country.

This system has no chance of survival and, by using force to impose itself, it only creates rejection, as indeed before him Prince Daoud's "republic" in the '70s and the Communists' "democracy" in the 80's.

The more resentment, the less hope and the more Afghans are in the moment, in search of quick profits.

Today, there are foreigners and money; it's time to fill their pockets for the future of the family, the future education of the children, even exile if the Taliban was to be back soon! "

"The strategy of 'always more': an illusion"

Beyond the feelings collected during this report, the issue raised by Johan Freckhaus about the Afghan army is more fundamental:

"There is indeed an insurgency in Afghanistan because you have 30 000 or 40 000 rebel fighters – according to allied military intelligence – backed by millions of Afghan civilians, in growing numbers, who feed them, house them, transport them, protect them, give them information and so on. These civilians are doing it foremost to drive foreign troops out of the

country and in rejection of the system we are trying to impose, but do not want the return to power of the mullahs either. Withdrawing our troops is therefore the right strategy to effectively drive a wedge between the rebels and their supporters.

This famous momentum, this magic moment where the power relationship can be reversed, will come from fair and complete withdrawal of foreign forces, because then the fate of the country will return to its population. Then the Afghan security forces, as they exist today, would very well be capable, with the help of villagers, of chasing away those rebels on motorcycles mainly armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, whose most lethal know-how is simply to trigger explosives remotely. The strategy of “always more” prevalent until today for the Afghan security forces is a dangerous illusion: more troops, more money, more power to the central government, all of this is counter-productive, it fuels the insurgency!

We are building oversized security forces in Afghanistan that the country is far from being able to afford. We imagine a police state, supported from abroad, which would subject the population to the decisions of Kabul. We imagine building in a few years, for one of the poorest countries in the world, an army that could successfully maintain in power a hyper-centralized system. This is not sustainable.”

Let’s remember, for the record, that the Afghan government, which now has 140, 000 military and 109, 000 police officers, aims at a 240,000 military and 240,000 police officers force [2]. And that is for a country of about 20 million inhabitants.

In comparison, France, for a population three times larger, has fewer than 170,000 military personnel (ground and air) and 265 000 gendarmes and police officers.

Exiting the conflict “from the top”

Organizational and strategy matters are also emerging: shouldn’t the Afghan army enhance its defense functions rather than the control of areas by a mass infantry?

Focus on heavy melee and support weapons, such as tanks, artillery, engineering, and its vital functions such as maintenance, logistics and supporting the troops, rather than recruiting legions of brave men left and right?

In addition to the French military logisticians mentors belonging to the “Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams” that we followed, several thousand of troops, French and from other nations under the NATO banner, already participate in the Epidote mission, within “Embedded Training Teams” in educating and mentoring in the logistics, artillery, cavalry and engineers fields.

An action plan from the U.S. military has set up an effective system of payment for the Afghan army in 2010 although, as we leaned through our story, progress still needs to be made. No partnership initiative has yet emerged internally, to our knowledge, in the areas of maintenance.

Those practical considerations are essential but certainly not sufficient for exiting the conflict “from the top”.

The geostrategic explorations still deserve to be discussed elsewhere [3].

No partnership initiative has yet emerged internally, to our knowledge, in the areas of maintenance.

Footnotes & references

[1] Present in the second round of Afghan presidential elections in 2009, before withdrawing his candidacy due to suspicions of electoral fraud.

[2] <http://fr.rian.ru/world/20101003/187552455.html>

[3] Johan Freckhaus wanted to add about this matter during our interview:

“Our mistake is that of stubbornness.

We’d do better to finally propose a more relevant, decentralized and distributed political system, and to give up the poison of “strategic partnership” to return to the historical neutrality – which has always been the stability of Afghanistan – rather than wanting to create over time a “new man” who would adapt to what we wish for his country, who would obey the President “in all that he will order” provided that that President is favorable to us.

Finally, we only give the Afghans a choice to be with us or against us. And unfortunately, we must note that they are increasingly likely to be on the side of our enemies.”

The Role of Airpower and Special Forces in the Afghan Transition

In an article published on October 12, 2012, an approach for a significant transition from the endless land war with large US force presence was underscored leveraging the combination of airpower in the hands of the Afghans working with the US and allies complimented with Special Force capabilities.

That article follows:

Airpower is crucial to every aspect of operations in the Afghan Area of Operations, and crucial to hot pursuit of the Taliban who do not respect lines on a geographical map.

Interviews we have conducted with American and French military operators in Afghanistan have hit hard on a key theme: airpower is central to today’s operations in Afghanistan and there is a clear need to arm the Afghan allies with a functional capability along the same lines.

As Nathan Hodge of *The Wall Street Journal* recently put it:

The budding Afghan air force was supposed to receive \$355 million worth of planes custom-made for fighting guerrillas well ahead of the U.S. withdrawal in 2014. Equipped with machine guns, missiles and bombs, those reliable, rugged turboprop aircraft are cheaper to operate and easier to maintain than fighter jets.

The Afghans won't get the planes on time.

And Hodge went on to quote SLD’s own, the Honorable Ed Timperlake:

"They have wasted the most precious commodity they have in combat, which is time," says Edward Timperlake, a former Marine Corps fighter pilot who served as a director of technology assessment at the Pentagon until 2009 and is now retired.

As SLD’s Murielle Delaporte, commented upon her recent return from Afghanistan embedded with the French forces:

SLD: How important is air support to the Afghans and to the French forces?

Delaporte: It is everything. It is one of the key elements and will grow in importance as the transition evolves. The French military helos will become proportionally a greater part of the force as withdrawal accelerates (i.e. remaining at approximately the same level while other units drawdown). Especially as the Mirages leave the combat theater, the role of the helos in providing air support tends to go up.

The Afghan military population has really come to appreciate air support as a key element of future success, as well as security (a Medevac ability being in particular part of any operation). One French officer told me that the Afghan helo force should become increasingly significant in enabling the Afghan security and defense forces, as the Coalition forces gradually enable them to take over.

And Major General Walters, now 2nd MAW commented upon his return from Afghanistan:

SLD: As we face transition in Afghanistan, one option clearly is to rely more on the Special Forces type of support to the Afghans against the insurgency. Your experience in many ways presages such an effort. How would your experience shape understanding from a professional military point of view of how to best support the Afghans with a Special Forces type of support?

General Walters: Our role will be to support the Afghan security forces. You're going to have to support those guys, and they're going to be much more distributed. You're not going to have the battalions out there that you support people on the FABs. It's going to have to be from a central location. And the QRF (Quick Reaction Force) is going to have to be good, and it's going to have to be there quickly.

In the end, we have to be able to prove to the Afghan security forces that if something happens, this platoon is good enough until we get someone in there.

If you ever need more than a platoon's worth of trigger pullers in a district center, the V22s is how you're going to get there quickly and decisively enough to matter.

The Afghan National Army and Afghan Security Forces understand from their perspective, how important air is. We have made them big consumers.

They know that the air is there for them; they'll go out and operate. I've had more than one brigade commander tell me that if it wasn't for the medevac, it wasn't for the resupply, and if it wasn't for the aviation fires, he didn't think he could get the battalions out operating like they do. Because they've learned that if they get hurt, we'll fix them. They know if they run out of bullets, we'll get them bullets. And if they're hungry or thirsty, we'll get them food and water.

General Mattis understood all of this when he asked for a Light Attack Aircraft to be sent to Afghanistan for the use of the Afghans.

One of the most respected and experienced Marine Combat Generals just made a very important point directly to the US Senate. General James Mattis, Commander United States Joint Forces, told the US Senate in testimony on March 9, 2010:

"In Afghanistan, US airpower represents one of our joint force's greatest asymmetric advantages over the enemy. The employment of air-based joint fires, used properly, will wreak havoc on enemy forces. In the fluid environment of a counter-insurgency fight, the decision to employ these joint air-based fires will come from leaders who understand that to be effective these fires must be employed rapidly and precisely against the enemy while avoiding civilian casualties. Effective employment often requires persistent observation, integrated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and shortened approval procedures.

Our airpower is unmatched in the world, however today's approach of loitering multi-million dollar aircraft and using a system-of-systems procedure for the approval and employment of airpower is not the most effective use of aviation fires in this irregular fight.

A Light Attack Armed Reconnaissance (LAAR) aircraft capability has the potential to shift air support from a reactive threat response, to a more proactive approach that reduces sensor-to-shooter timelines, with immediate and accurate fires, providing surveillance and reconnaissance throughout a mission, while providing communication and navigation support to troops on the ground.

Additionally, a LAAR capability can provide a means to build partner capacity with effective, relevant air support. This year Joint Forces Command will closely follow a project called Imminent Fury where the Navy and Air Force will employ a LAAR capability to reinforce our asymmetric advantage over the enemy."

Hodge noted the why and the how of the missing planes in Afghanistan. But it is bigger than even Afghanistan.

As the U.S. looks forward to work with allies worldwide in the years to come on COIN and related operations, the U.S. will not be bringing the entire gamut of capability to the party. Working with allies in current and projected financial conditions requires a new formula: the U.S. supports allies who can fend for themselves, up to a point.

But allies likely to need COIN assistance are not in the top 10 financial giants of the global economy. And they will need and can afford what the Super Tucano can offer.

As an article by Chris Kraul highlighted:

Unsleek and unpersononic, the Super Tucano hardly fits most people's concept of a modern warplane. But Brazilian manufacturer Embraer is finding a growing market for the retro "light attack" propeller-driven aircraft among nations looking to secure their borders, fight drugs and support counterinsurgency operations.

Ecuador is one such customer. The two Super Tucanos that flew into Manta air base late last month were the first delivered on a 24-plane order that President Rafael Correa placed shortly after Colombian armed forces entered Ecuador's airspace in March 2008 to kill a high-ranking FARC rebel leader, Raul Reyes.

Although the \$250-million purchase was seen as a reaction to Colombia's violation of its sovereignty, Correa in his weekly television address Feb. 6 said that the aircraft acquisition didn't signal an arms buildup. Rather, he said, the planes were replacing Ecuador's fleet of mostly 30-year-old A-37 Dragonfly aircraft made by Cessna.

But Correa is wrestling with a problem that the planes can help him confront: the persistent presence in his territory of guerrillas with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or, FARC. Without specifically mentioning FARC, Correa said the aircraft would help support the Ecuadorean military as it fights "regular and irregular forces" inside the country's borders.

(It was a Colombian air force Super Tucano that dropped the "smart bomb" that killed Reyes, then second in command of the FARC, as he slept at a camp a mile inside Ecuadorean territory.)

And the model has already been highlighted by the 12th USAF in working with Columbia: what needs to happen is to recognize this model and move ahead in global support for these types of operations with the U.S. providing its complement to those allies willing to field counter-insurgency airpower.

As Ed Timperlake emphasized:

The 12th is supporting nations just off our shore and recently held a U.S. Air Power demonstration in celebration of 100 years of aviation in the Dominican Republic.

Unheralded success has just been achieved by this partnership between SOUTHCOM and the Dominican Republic Air Force flying the Embraer Air Super Tucano. This remarkable and replicable success is made possible by U.S. "Hi" ISR technology in partnership with the Dominican Republic "Lo" technology the Super Tucano.

It has not been widely reported that this war against drug barons is being won in the sky.

Although drug money is unrelenting in finding ways to supply their corrosive product for now in the war against narco-criminals and terrorist this is a huge accomplishment, and the opening headline from Dominican Today quoted above says it all

Along with the success in Dom Rep, the Colombian AF is winning the fight against the FARC with sensors and shooters—again the Super Tucano.

Consequently, this "Hi-Lo" mix is beginning to look like a winning formula for world wide partnerships between the U.S. and other nations by using American ISR that can give hot vectors in both the air-to-air and air-to-ground mission to a Light Armed Attack Aircraft (LAAR) like the Super Tucano.

And if we return to Afghanistan, we can underscore what a transition strategy might look like. Get the Super Tucano and C-27Js into the hands of the Afghans and let the US Army and USMC work with them in hot pursuit of the Taliban who know now geographical boundary in the region.

The US Army would highlight their role for Apaches and the USMC the role of the Osprey.

Together working together with an air-enabled Afghan force, the U.S. could continue to influence outcomes necessary in the war against terrorism and at the same time pull out most of our troops.

This would be a war winning formula, which the US Army might want to look at for its global future.

The Super Tucano Opportunity in Afghanistan and Fundamentally Changing the Afghan Engagement

2016-01-17 It took awhile but finally these planes are showing up.

If the Afghans as a nation are going to work together to shape a counter-insurgency and defense strategy, air power is a crucial lynchpin.

This is true for multiple reasons.

First, the geography of Afghanistan makes this an air-connected territory, not a road connected one.

Second, the conditions of operation are challenging and require robust and maintainable air systems to support Afghan forces.

Third, the US and NATO have demonstrated without a shadow of a doubt that airpower is a fundamental element of security and defense “ground” operations.

The demonstration effect is palpable in Afghanistan.

Leaving the Afghans with little or no operational air capability would be a statement of neglect by the exiting NATO forces.

Finally, the new aircraft are coming to Afghanistan.

Amazingly, the heated A-10 debate in the United States completely missed the coming of the Super Tucano and the perfect fit for the US and partners in shaping capabilities for the long war.

Rather than planning to show up with slow counter insurgency airplanes, which require a significant infrastructure to protect them, partnering with countries fighting the long war and helping them acquire the Super Tucano would make a great deal of sense and then to partner that capability with core US ISR, C2 and other power projection capabilities,

We wrote earlier about this potential in the real world example of the 11th Air Force working with the Dominican Republic.

In the video below, A-29s are seen coming in for a landing, taxiing, parking on apron.

The video includes an interview with 81st FW Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Jeffrey Hogan while in route to Afghanistan as well.

The A-29 Super Tucano is a 'light air support' aircraft capable of conducting close air support, aerial escort, armed overwatch and aerial interdiction.

Designed to operate in high temperature and in extremely rugged terrain, the A-29 Super Tucano is highly maneuverable 4th generation weapons system capable of delivering precision guided munitions.

It can fly at low speeds and low altitudes, is easy to fly, and provides exceptionally accurate weapons delivery.

It is currently in service with 10 different air forces around the world.

The role, which this type of aircraft can provide for Counter Insurgency Operations, was identified and discussed in our 2011 interview with Bill Buckey, former Deputy Commander of the NATO Airbase at Kandahar in 2009 and now vice-president for business development for Embraer North America.

According to Buckey:

SLD: How does a turbo-prop compare to unmanned aircraft in providing such a savings or performing such a role?

Buckey: One of the things that the special operations forces, who started the idea of the whole Imminent Fury piece, wanted was the ability to have a partner in that light attack platform; a TAC-A or supporting arms coordinator that would be above them in the air and who, if things got ugly, could then marshal in other aircraft. The guys sitting at Creech can't do that.

The individual in the backseat of the aircraft is the one that's going to be communicating to these jets who are still 30 minutes away – 15 minutes away, an hour away – and giving them the target brief and the whole situational awareness piece of what's going on while they ingress; which is something that your guy at Creech is not going to be able to do.

But now that's the tactical piece. The operational piece is back to the whole COIN environment. Again, if what you're trying to do in a COIN environment is drive your cost of doing business down as close as you can to the level of the other guy; right now, UAVs ain't cheap.

You've got a tremendous logistics piece; you've got the sophisticated communications infrastructure required to fly them. You've got the whole piece back in CONUS in order to operate them. Your cost of doing business is huge and you also have reliability issues. The accident rates are not great with UAVs right now.

And in terms of that ability to act as FAC-A, that's something that you just can't get with a UAV.

SLD: And presumably, your ground and air team are forcing the insurgents to do something vis-à-vis your ground element. This is what was often not recognized is people are not placidly waiting around. So essentially your ground element is affecting their behavior. So you want your air tool to be part of a quick response to the behavior they are creating on the insurgent's part.

Buckey: And it may be a four to six-hour operation because if it doesn't necessarily happen when you want it. The other guy gets a vote when he wants to move. And the problem with cycling in fast movers is if I am a JTAC on the ground, or let's say I'm a FAC-A, is how many times am I giving target briefs to a new crew? Every thirty to forty minutes I've got a new callsign checking-in; maybe even less than that depending on whose available, time/distance, tankers, etc.

But I'm spending a lot of my time briefing new crews; whereas if I'm working with a platform with greater persistence, not only am I giving fewer target briefs, he's constantly building Situational Awareness over a greater period. I have more time to focus on the target while he's building up more and more SA.

From the aircrew perspective, if I'm checking-in in a fast-mover, I may have 30 or so minutes on station. I'll get a good target brief and I'll be able to build a certain level of SA. But am I able to absorb as much as someone who is on-station for hours? No.

SLD: So to summarize your thinking about a COIN aircraft, you want to drive down the cost of providing close air support to the guys on the ground. You want manned air for the roles that you have described – to be involved with the ground commander, the ability to loiter, the engagement, the systems to provide the “find/fix” piece and the persistence to be there for the “finish.” You want sufficiently lethal manned airborne presence but at lower cost than a fast jet.

Buckey: We have the systems and the weapons to pair up with a turboprop aircraft that has the persistence to get us through the entire “find/fix/finish” process at a substantially reduced cost that is more appropriate for air operations in a COIN environment.

<http://sldinfo.com/re-visiting-the-concept-of-a-counter-insurgency-aircraft/>

We had a chance to continue our discussion with Buckey in late March 2013 about the coming of the Super Tucano to Afghanistan and the planning approach for its inclusion in the Afghan Air Force.

SLD: The Super Tucano will enter into a certain period of history where there is significant training experience of a positive sort and not so positive of a set of experience with maintainability experienced by the C-27J experiment. What is your thinking about the challenge of aircraft robustness and maintenance and the approach to working with the whole training regime going forward?

uckey: The good news is that the Super Tucano was made to be low maintenance. It was designed to operate in very remote areas of the Amazon Basin and the frontier areas, if you will, of Brazil. In that sense, it is well suited to the challenges that the Afghan Air Force will be facing, for training the fledgling Afghan Air Force.

SLD: And how will the training for the aircraft be approached?

Buckey: Initially the training of the trainers will occur in the continental United States. They will be trained at a facility in New Mexico. Air Force personnel and contractors will be trained in conditions similar to Afghanistan. And then the effort will move to Afghanistan for training at two separate sites. The most likely Afghan candidates for training will come from those already with rotary and some fixed wing experience.

SLD: How will the Afghans be trained to maintain the aircraft?

Buckey: Initially, the US Air Force and contractors will be trained in these skills and then those skills transferred to the Afghans in Afghanistan. The aircraft was designed from the outset to require a very small number of maintainers to be able to work on it. A lot of the components are built in the United States and are extremely reliable.

The aircraft was also built to be maintenance friendly, if you will. You open up the panels, there’s plenty of room to work. Ease of access to the avionics and the engine compartment are much more maintenance-friendly.

Of all the airplanes that you could possibly want to put in this kind of environment, both in terms of the operating environment but also the new build out of an air force, this is an ideal one.

And you can see just by virtue of the fact that this airplane is now on three continents, four if you now include the United States Air Force in North America, but it’s in Central and South American air forces, it’s moving now to three different air forces in Africa, and they’re all accessing this airplane because of its capabilities but also because it’s very, very simple to maintain.

SLD: There is also a significant advantage which accrues to the Afghan Air Force as it uses the airplane to work with other Air Forces worldwide with Super Tucano experience.

Buckey: I believe so. In terms of the counterinsurgency record that the aircraft has established in Columbia, the border security counterdrug record that it’s established in Brazil, and the counterdrug record that the Dominican Republic has shaped in concert with the U.S. Twelfth Air Force, there are multiple lessons learned across a wide range of operational environments that countries will be able to access and employ, utilize, learn from with the experiences of Air Forces with A-29. There is a global learning group if you will.

Dragging Your Feet: And Ensuring the Endless War Continues

2017-09-04 The Secretary of the Air Force recently loaded up for high visibility on an experiment to examine light attack aircraft options.

Indeed she noted at an Air Force Association Event on August 1, 2017:

“The light attack aircraft experiment took five months from conception to aircraft delivery,” said Wilson. ”

We will learn some things, including how fast and cost-effectively we can get capabilities to the warfighter.”

Last time we looked this capability has already been delivered to the warfighter.

What has amazed us about this notion, is that the USAF already has a squadron of Super Tucanos and is working closely with the Afghans on using the plane in combat.

The 81st Fighter Squadron is part of the 14th Flying Training Wing and operates the Super Tucano conducting close air support to the Afghan Air Force.

It is stationed at Air Force Base, Georgia.

As Ed Timperlake noted about the amazingly long process that it took longer for the USAF to decide to buy the Super Tucano than it took to fight World War II.

A key advantage of the Super Tucano has always been its global support structure and there is now a plant in the US to assemble the aircraft as well.

The first one was rolled out in 2014 in Jacksonville Florida.

Apparently, the US Government does not need an experiment unlike the USAF to figure out how to leverage the plane which has already been bought for the light attack aircraft mission.

Today our partner defenceWeb highlighted the Super Tucano potential sale by the US government to Nigeria.

Nigeria’s Super Tucano contract includes Paveway II guided bombs, laser-guided rockets and infrared sensors in addition to 12 aircraft, the United States government has revealed.

The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) on 3 August announced the possible Foreign Military Sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, along with weapons, spares and training, to Nigeria in a contract that could be worth \$593 million.

Congress was notified on 2 August, but more details emerged in the US Federal Register on 28 August.

In publishing the unclassified text of the arms sales notification, the Federal Register revealed Nigeria has requested Paveway II and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) laser-guidance kits and ammunition. It lists these items as “major defence equipment” valued at \$29 million, while the “other” component of the deal, for the Super Tucanos, sensors, training and support, is valued at \$564 million.

The weapons and ammunition includes 100 GBU-12 (500 lb) Paveway II Tailkits; 100 GBU-58 (250 lb) Paveway II Tailkits; 400 Laser Guided Rockets including Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) rounds; 2 000 MK-81 (250 lb) bombs; 5 000 2.75 inch (70 mm) Hydra 70 unguided rockets; 1 000 2.75 inch Hydra 70 unguided rockets (practice); and 20 000 rounds of .50 calibre machine gun ammunition.

The APKWS is a low cost semi-active laser guidance kit developed by BAE Systems which is added to unguided 70 mm rockets, turning them into precision strike weapons. Similarly, the Paveway II, developed by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, uses semi-active laser guidance to turn Mk 81 and Mk 82 general purpose bombs into guided weapons. The DSCA said the sale includes the tail kits to transform Nigeria's existing 500-lb and 250-lb bomb bodies into GBU-12s and GBU-58s respectively, and that Nigeria is also buying additional GBU-58s/Mk 81 bombs.

The proposed sale also includes seven AN/AAQ-22F electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensor and laser designator turrets, spares, support equipment, facilities infrastructure and hangar construction, night vision devices, simulators, and software. Training will cover pilot and maintenance instruction and human rights and international humanitarian law. FLIR's Brite Star system comprises a large format thermal imager and colour daylight camera with laser designator for terminal guidance of laser-guided bombs and rockets.

The DSCA notice said the 12 Super Tucanos will support Nigerian military operations against terrorist organization Boko Haram and to counter illicit trafficking in Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea.

The Super Tucano is a sustainable platform for counterterrorism, counter insurgency, border surveillance, and illicit trade interdiction operations.

The proposed sale will support U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping Nigeria to meet shared counterterrorism objectives for the region.

This proposed sale will strengthen the U.S. security relationship with Africa's largest democracy.

The prime contractor is the Sierra Nevada Corporation.... The company is building Super Tucanos for the Afghan Air Force and Lebanon at its US facility.

Embraer has recorded a number of orders for its Super Tucano from African countries, which see it as a low cost light attack aircraft that can also be used as a trainer. On the continent, the Super Tucano has been ordered by Angola, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Ghana and Senegal.

The Nigerian Air Force may also get second hand Super Tucanos — in February the Nigerian Air Force announced that Brazilian government had approved the sale of three second hand Super Tucano aircraft to Nigeria.

http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49113:nigerian-super-tucano-sale-includes-guided-bombs-rockets-sensors&catid=35:Aerospace&Itemid=107

And Lebanon earlier received Super Tucano's as well from the United States via FMS.

<https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2015/06/18/lebanon-to-buy-super-tucanos-with-saudi-funds/>

According to the Pentagon's Defense and Security Cooperation Agency, the Lebanese government has requested the sale of six A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, along with eight PT6A-68A turboprop engines, eight ALE-47 countermeasure dispensing systems, 2,000 advanced precision kill weapon systems, eight AN/AAR-60(V)2 missile launch detection systems, and other related items.

"This is a straight-forward military sale," Kahwaji said. "This was funded through a Saudi \$1 billion dollar grant that was given late last year."

The point simply put is that we want to train partners to do the low intensity, counter terrorism tasks in their countries rather than US conducting these missions.

It is about training and transfer of relevant aircraft; it is not about building up the slo mo USAF pilot and maintainer force to do tasks which partners need to do, or if not, then not done at all.

We have no difficulty in understanding why the newly developed Scorpion might be of interest for training commands and other tasks, but we are having real difficulty understanding why the USAF is flying off once again between Super Tucano and the AT-6.

And in a time where the North Korean threat is a clear and present danger, putting the senior USAF brass into a media event built around this competition highlights the continuation of slo mo war when high intensity war is on the way.

This is a time to ramp up F-35 buys, deploy aircraft to Europe and the Pacific and bring forward the bomber buy.

Certainly PACOM gets it.

According to an article by CDR David Bentham, US Pacific Command, in an article published on August 31, 2017:

The United States' newest and most advanced fighter, the U.S. Marine Corps' F-35B Lightning II, joined U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancers for the first time in a sequenced bilateral mission with Japan and Republic of Korea air forces in Northeast Asia August 30.

Two B-1Bs from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam; four U.S. Marine F-35Bs from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan; two Koku Jieitai (Japan Air Self-Defense Force) F-15Js; and four Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF) F-15Ks executed this mission to emphasize the combined ironclad commitment to the defense of Allies and the U.S. homeland. Enhancing combined military readiness through integrated missions ensures national leaders of viable and ready military options.

This mission was conducted in direct response to North Korea's intermediate-range ballistic missile launch, which flew directly over northern Japan on August 28 amid rising tension over North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development programs.

"North Korea's actions are a threat to our allies, partners and homeland, and their destabilizing actions will be met accordingly," said Gen. Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy, Commander, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, who just returned from an unscheduled visit to Japan to meet with his counterparts. "This complex mission clearly demonstrates our solidarity with our allies and underscores the broadening cooperation to defend against this common regional threat. Our forward-deployed force will be the first to the fight, ready to deliver a lethal response at a moment's notice if our nation calls."

Over the course of the 10-hour mission, the F-35Bs, B-1B bombers and Koku Jieitai fighters flew together over waters near Kyushu, Japan.

The U.S. and ROKAF aircraft then flew across the Korean Peninsula and practiced attack capabilities by releasing live weapons at the Pilsung Range training area before returning to their respective home stations.

"The F-35 embodies our commitment to our allies and contributes to the overall security and stability of the Indo-Asia Pacific region," said Lt. Gen. David H. Berger, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific.

U.S. Pacific Command maintains strategic bomber and fighter capabilities in the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater, retaining the ability to respond to any regional threat at a moment's notice.

<http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1295820/us-fifth-generation-fighters-strategic-bombers-conduct-show-of-force-with-allie/>

The Super Tucano brings significant capability to the Afghan Air Force for the COIN fight. Credit Image: Embraer

Leveraging Insertion Forces and Moving On Beyond Stability Operations and the Endless Engagement in Afghanistan

09/04/2018

By Robbin Laird and Edward Timperlake

It is way past time to eliminate stability operations as a core focus for the US Army and the US military.

There is no way that preparing to fight a peer competitor highlights combat success using the stability ops investments, skill sets and mind set.

In the famous Secretary Gates decision to fire Secretary Wynne and USAF COS Mosley, he followed the yellow brick road down the stability ops victory path.

And although this policy has been a costly but hopefully not fatal mistake by US leadership in the past two Administrations, the continued endless war commitment by the current Administration makes no real strategic sense.

Not the least of which, because the current incumbent in the White House has made it very clear that the massive investments in the land wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been not only costly but counterproductive to American interests.

In a 2014 article,, we highlighted an approach whereby one could leverage higher end capabilities to influence events in areas peripheral to conflict with peer competitors but in such a way to protect oneself against engaging in endless wars with no strategic end and to real strategic benefit to the United States.

That article follows:

2014-09-22 By Robbin Laird and Ed Timperlake

As the crises in Europe and the Middle East heat up, the debate quickly turns on which path is crucial to deal with evolving threats: boots on the ground or airpower with no boots on the ground.

The specter of responses to the 9/11 attack and the various engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq naturally shade perspectives.

Yet changing capabilities and concepts of operations are overcoming the classic distinction as the USMC has become the only tiltrotar enabled force in the world, as the USAF and USN have shaped highly integrated air grids, and advances in both the lethality and effectiveness of manned and unmanned aviation have grown.

And the past decade's experience of the need to shape a very large and expensive ground grid from which to feed Special Forces and ground operations is not one the US is going to repeat anytime soon.

At the same time, conflict is evolving as well.

The evolving pattern of 21st century conflict is emerging.

It is a pattern in which state and non-state actors are working to reshape the global order in their favor by generating conflicts against the interests of the democracies but which the democracies are slow to react.

The assumption of ISIS terrorists and Putin's Russian Ukrainian adventure and the Chinese leadership relying in part on the PLA to expand the domain of Chinese sovereignty is that the slow decision making cycles of democracies can be exploited to make gains.

And gains can be achieved on a piecemeal basis, rather than going for the big grab which can provide a dramatic event usable by democratic leaders to mobilize public opinion and generate resources to respond.

A mix of non-kinetic, kinetic and information warfare elements are blended into an assertive adversary political-military policy against democratic interests.

Russia and the Ukraine

A good case in point is that of Putin and his ongoing efforts to control Ukraine. The actions in Ukraine have included seizure of territory, the use of Special Forces, information war, the use of indigenous Russian armed and trained "separatists," and other techniques.

Vladimir Putin was a young KGB Officer who was active when President Reagan won the IW against the Soviet Union trying to stop the US and NATO successfully placing tactical nuclear cruise missiles in Europe as a major deterrence move.

In the Euromissile Crisis he learned how not to lose an Information War. Consequently he is shaping a 21st century blend of combining military moves with successful propaganda.

By seizing Crimea, Russia set in motion internal pressures aided by direct support to continue map writing in Ukraine and to reduce the size of the territory under the country of the government in Kiev. The Crimean intervention was destabilizing, and the enhanced role of Russian "separatists" aided and abetted by Moscow within the remainder of Ukraine is part of the Russian 21st century approach to warfare.

The shoot down of the Malaysian airliner by Russian "separatists" and the absence of any Western response to secure the site and work with the Ukrainians to bring the separatist operation to a halt was a key element of his successful strategy.

The US and NATO lost a significant opportunity to do a very good thing in protecting the victims bodies and rolling back literally drunken separatists that could have been achieved by the President of Ukraine calling in an insertion force of MV-22 enabled Marines.

Sadly an opportunity was missed, the US could have responded to the Malaysian shoot down in Ukraine by working with the Ukrainian government to bring in forces to secure the crash site.

If this was the pre-Osprey era, an insertion might be more difficult, but with the tiltrotar assault force the USMC can be put in place rapidly to cordon off the area. Had this occurred it would have signaled a credible global response to the disinformation campaign of Russia and its state-sponsored separatists.

Airpower dominance over Ukraine coupled with the Marines on the ground, and forces loyal to Kiev could have secured the crash site without becoming a permanent US military base. It is about using flexible military insertion forces in ways appropriate to the political mission.

The Emergence of ISIS

The 2014 USMC MV-22 insertion forces can also respond to ISIS threat. The emergence of ISIS is a political force challenging the US President on how to respond with an extremist group aggregating power, trying to build an army and shaping a leadership role in a volatile region. The ISIS rejection of all groups other than their own, a join us or die mantra had been proven to be a very powerful IW weapon.

ISIS is dedicated to the violent destruction of those who object to their leadership of a mythical Middle Ages dream which is directly opposed to any Western values of religious freedom, secularism and tolerance. When you have a group grabbing for power that Al Qaeda finds extreme the United States, Europe and many countries in Middle East, from Israel to Saudi Arabia have a major problem.

ISIS is shaping a brand via its military successes and its ability to eliminate religious opponents; it is a kinetic force using information war to spread the murderous fanatical brand to shape their evolving influence in the region.

The leader does not dress in black or fly a black flag by accident; it is part of the branding effort and the religious information war against their enemies.

<http://sldinfo.com/isis-and-information-war-shaping-the-battlespace/>

ISIS is a rapidly moving target and needs a response that is not measured in the months and years of a return of the US Army to Iraq to re-start training an Iraqi Army which the Obama Administration has already clearly recognized as part of the problem not the solution. The total collapse of the Iraq Army after a decade of US investment is a testimony to failure, regardless of who is at fault in US planning and execution of Iraq Nation Building.

For defenders of COIN, it would have to be explained why time and continued effort would overcome what are clearly deeply rooted fissures within the political texture of Iraq: namely the Sunni-Shite cleavage, the role of Iran and the use of the military by Prime Minister Malki for his own political purposes?

In effect, Maliki has used his Shia-dominated military in ways similar to how Saddam Hussein used his Sunni-dominated military, namely to prop himself up in power and to shape domestic political outcomes to his benefit. Simply changing the name of the leader is not likely to change power realities.

And when the ISIS were able to aggregate forces, the absence of an air enabled ground force, demonstrated a fundamental fact often forgotten: it is not about airpower versus boots on the ground.

As Lt General (Retired) Dave Deptula has pointed out it is about an air dominance enabled ground force versus ones that are not, especially with a 21st Century ISR grid in the air not on the ground.

Consequently in addition to new tiltrotter MV-22 technology, a notable political difference between Iraq in 2014 and 2003 is the politics of the Turkish-Kurdish relationship and the ability of the US to build upon that relationship. Kurdistan with their Peshmurga fighting force is one area of Iraq that has immediate promise of thwarting, rolling back and to begin the process of destroying ISIS.

With respect to success in IW, the leaders of Kurdistan deserve great praise because of the tolerance and lifesaving physical sanctuary they provided to the Christians and others. The Kurds can now play a key role in shaping a relatively stable island in a violent region, and provide an important focal point for the United States and its allies. Working with the Kurds and augmenting their autonomy within Iraq, including control of critical oil infrastructure, is a clear objective for the operation of US forces.

Successfully employing airpower to destroy visible items of war such as ISIS captured, tanks, major artillery, rockets, and other road mobile transportation Humvees, MRAPS and their pick-up trucks with automatic weapons can be done.

Destroying this captured US military hardware, which enables ISIS to operate and maneuver, is a key priority.

If the ISIS forces loses their maneuver ability and their crew-served weapons and armored vehicles, especially tanks, to seize terrain and key choke points, they will be forced back into the cities or be forced hide in small units in the countryside.

If US forces can see them outside of cities they can kill them. City fights should be left to what is remaining of the Iraq Army.

ISIS was well on the way to fielding an Army when the US finally engaged.

Focusing upon what is needed to pulverize military capabilities of ISIS to move rapidly and lethally, can buy some strategic maneuver space to sort out what kind of aid the Kurds might really need to protect their augmented territory within a fragmenting Iraq.

Because the US has the option of leveraging our seabase in conjunction with whatever force capabilities might be shaped to support the Kurds, the US is NOT forced to have agreements with a collapsing regime to influence events. The sea-based force can function as the foundation for a force able to operate without the need for specific territorial agreements on basing with fractious factions of Baghdad.

And when they depart, they do not have to leave their equipment behind which can become later seized by hostile forces and used against the United States and its allies.

Leveraging both our sea base aviation strike assets throughout Iraq, and combined with the global strike reach, outside of Iraq of the USAF fighter, bomber and tanker fleet in support of US tactical jets, ISIS will encounter death from above delivered by Air Force and Navy combat pilots. This is war-tipping capability. We don't need to write a blank check for the insertion of forces of COIN-determined size packages and prop up an ally who is not; we have already done that one.

Buying strategic maneuver space for the immediate period ahead, and pulverizing ISIS's military capabilities – trucks, cars, artillery pieces, etc. — are the crucial objectives and is an airpower strike mission. It is about the ISR strike grid in the air rather than relying on the previous US Army way of war building an extensive and expensive operational grid on the ground.

Overcoming the Boots on the Ground Versus Airpower Dichotomy

In both the Ukrainian and Iraq cases, the ability to insert force empowered by airpower is crucial. What is often forgotten about Drones and Special Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan is the need for very large ground-based grid of support necessary to move the ground forces (helicopters), feed ground forces, provide medical assistance to ground forces to support Special Forces and also the vast targeting appetite for the Drone fleet.

By contrast, the ability to station and supply a Navy Marine Team anywhere around the globe, ready for immediate combat, demonstrates, yet again, why the US Navy Fleets of Carrier Battle Groups and ARG/MEUs are invaluable assets for American military power projection.

The USMC can easily setup a TEMPORARY FOB for 22nd MEU with their MV-22s somewhere in Kurdistan to conduct missions into Iraq proper to rescue Christians and eliminate any ISIS fanatics in the way in the process and then leave. USS Bush CBG could provide a real combat punch when ISIS mass their forces-or SOCOM/CIA identifies isolated groups. Just like they could have secured the crash site in Ukraine.

This is not about long term occupation and training; this is about ready now USMC sea based tiltrotor MV-22 assault forces coming to the aid of the Kurds and Christians, and setting up a forward operating base that can influence events in the Nineveh plain, helping move threatened minorities to Kurdish protection, all the while working with SOF in country, and then returning aboard ship.

The U.S. has insertion forces able to engage and withdraw, rather than setting up long-term facilities and providing advisers as targets. The ability to establish air dominance to empower multi-mission USMC insertion force able to operate effectively, rapidly and withdraw is a core effort that now exists in US way of war for emerging 21st century conflicts

The classic dichotomy of boots on the ground versus airpower really does not capture the evolving capabilities of either airpower or the evolving capabilities of ground forces capitalizing on those evolving capabilities to provide for more effective and more lethal insertion forces.

A version of this piece has appeared on **Breaking Defense**:

<http://breakingdefense.com/2014/09/its-not-airpower-vs-boots-on-ground-any-more/>

General Mattis on Imminent Fury II: How to Alter the Conduct of the Afghan War

09/03/2018

By Defense.Info

Secretary of Defense Mattis faces the challenge of terminating the endless war approach to Afghanistan.

When as head of JFCOM, he argued for ways in which the war could be fought differently with a smaller US footprint via the rapid acquisition of light attack aircraft.

But like the war, the acquisition has been anything but rapid.

In this article published on September 24, 2010, Ed Timperlake looked at how the acquisition and deployment of light attack aircraft in the hands of the Afghans could alter the course of the Afghan War.

Light Attack Aircraft Can Alter the Course of a War

By Ed Timperlake

September 24th, 2010

The world has taken notice of an important and successful military attack in a nasty war raging in Colombia, South America. The event has a lesson for the American Military especially in Afghanistan.

Recently, Colombia has killed a key FARC leader with a strike task force.

As reported by [AFP](#) on September 24th, 2010:

The military said that 72 warplanes, including 30 helicopters, low-flying Super Tucano attack planes and Israeli-built Kfir jets, were involved in the attack, dubbed "Operation Sodom." Also killed were three senior rebel leaders, including a member of the FARC directorate, a regional military commander, and the head of the group's urban militias, according to the military.

Second Line of Defense is fortunate to have recently interviewed Colonel William Buckley USMCR (ret), now Vice-President of North America for Embraer, the maker of the [Super Tucano](#), as well as the Embraer Brazilian leadership team.

These interviews will appear soon on SLD. Willam Buckley's interview is important because his last assignment before retiring was serving as the senior Marine Aviator building out Kandahar for the President's surging of troops into combat.

He and his NATO Team were nominated for the prestigious Collier Trophy for their efforts, and the airfield at Kandahar is now the largest and busiest single runway operation in the world.

Colonel Buckley has provided his insights into the combat need for a light attack aircraft and recent events in South America have just shown that the combat effectiveness of such an approach can alter events for winning in a very dramatic way.

As the French news report about a successful operation to schwack some very bad individuals, it shows the Super Tucano has yet again demonstrated its world class reputation as an extremely capable combat tested light attack aircraft. In the U.S.

Military, three very capable American combat Generals know of the Super Tucano: General Mattis, General McCrystal, and General Petraeus.

All have to be “platform agnostic” in support of the concept of operations in a program called Imminent Fury II. All three men are warriors who want fielded capability to help win in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, Congress delayed or permanently ended IF II and that is not good.

- General Mattis then Commanding Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) testified about a special forces effort called operation Imminent Fury II. The Department of Defense supported the effort and sent a request to Congress to act. The entire action from testimony to request took just a month, which is relative light speed. But nothing occurred. Then a letter was made public in the *Washington Times* by Bill Gertz that showed General McCrystal solidly behind the rapid fielding of Imminent Fury II. General Petraeus in the chain-of-command as then CG Central Command forwarded the letter to the Chairman. But nothing happened.
- It turns out that, unlike the recent combat success in Colombia, Imminent Fury II was stopped by Congressional Action. An immediate request for a combat program was not approved by Congress because IF II was going to use the Super Tucano. The ST is in direct competition with the attempt by the Hawker Beech to convert their T-6 Texan trainer into a combat aircraft—the AT-6. The T-6 Texan trainer (the basis for the proposed AT-6) is manufactured in Kansas by Hawker Beach a Canadian-owned firm currently in dire financial straits. There have been reports that, in order to stave off disaster, management has been considering moving some production lines to Mexico.
- It now appears, looking at the Congressional reporting, that stopping IF II was part of a bigger effort to give time, so a combat version of the T-6 could be developed and tested. Unfortunately the Afghan War goes on and time is short. Congress has earmarked millions to try and get the T-6 Texan, a US Air Force trainer aircraft, up to combat standards ahead of a pending fly-off competition for equipping the emerging Afghan National Army Air Corps. This fly off will be a competitive test of ready-to-fly, non-developmental tactical light attack planes that are currently available. The “AT-6B” version of the trainer is not yet ready. The non-combat certified AT-6B’s competitor is Brazil’s Embraer A-29 Super Tucano, the FARC killer that has been operational for several years. including several combat missions schwacking FARC guerillas in the dead of night.

Then in an article published on May 6, 2011, we revisited the concept of a counter-insurgency aircraft in an interview with Colonel (Retired) Bill Buckey.

That article follows:

05/05/2011 With the request by General Mattis for a Counter-Insurgency Aircraft (Imminent Fury) and with the forthcoming USAF fly-off to choose an aircraft to play such a role for the Afghan National Air Force, the question of the potential role of a turboprop counter-insurgency aircraft has re-surfaced.

Late last year, SLD team members Robbin Laird and Ed Timperlake sat down to talk with Bill Buckey, former Deputy Commander of the NATO Airbase at Kandahar in 2009 and now vice-president for business development for Embraer North America to talk about the potential role and impact of a COIN aircraft both for the U.S. and the Afghan forces.

SLD: How did your time at Kandahar shape your thinking about the role of a COIN aircraft and where it might fit into the mix?

Buckey: We were launching a lot of airplanes but not necessarily expending a whole lot of ordnance. When you talk to the aircrews they'll tell you they were doing a lot of "show of force," and when they did drop they were certainly not expending the 1000-pounders and the 2000 pounders. They were dropping 500 pounders or even smaller Hellfire, or Brimstone, which the RAF had just introduced into Afghanistan.

So what you realized right away was that in this COIN environment, you needed manned presence and you needed the systems to provide you with the information required to accomplish the task; but you didn't necessarily need a boatload of ordnance. Were there times when you surged and you needed a lot of iron on target? Yes. But on a day-to-day basis, there just wasn't that much being expended.

SLD: So for a normal manned aircraft engagement in COIN, the observation is that presence is extremely important and ability to put some ordnance onto target is necessary but it was not necessary to carry a heavy bomb load.

Buckey: If you needed to call in more, a B-52 or a B-1 might be given the task, or an F-16, F-18 or Harrier, but on a routine basis in a COIN environment your platform does not need to be carrying a lot of heavy ordnance.

SLD: Why not use unmanned systems rather than a turboprop COIN aircraft?

Buckey: To digress just a little bit, one of the aims of the Imminent Fury (<http://sldinfo.com/?p=6669>) program was to have the ability to get close air support but sometimes it was a matter of sitting and waiting to see if a high value target was actually present in a certain compound, you're waiting for him to show up to that compound, or you are waiting to find out whether there are women and children in that compound before you take this guy out. And it means sitting and waiting, developing more information. And in the meantime, you need weapons in a moment's notice to be able to kill this guy when you've got the go ahead to do it. So if what you are working with are F-15s, F-16s, F-18s, or whatever, you're talking about a lot of resources to perform find/fix/finish.

SLD: If you've got a clearly identifiable target and that you need a rapid response, that's one scenario. A different scenario is where you perform the "find/fix" phase and have the persistence to actually "finish" the target.

Buckey: Exactly. And, if you need to pour it on to a level that goes beyond what this aircraft is carrying, you want to have somebody up there, a FAC-A or a SAC-A who's then able to start marshalling in the heavy iron and the ability to provide the target brief during ingress to build their SA.

SLD: Are you're trying to develop a new layer here that gives him a persistent...

Buckey: It's not a new layer; it's a different way of looking at the existing layer of air combat support. You're offering the same capability but you're driving down your cost of providing that capability. In a COIN environment, one of the insurgent's main goals is to drive up your cost of operating to an unacceptable level. The cost of using fast jets in this environment is simply unsustainable.

SLD: Those costs per hour should be augmented as well, I would guess, by the cost of logistic support in an extreme environment?

Buckey: What does that pound of fuel cost by the time it's going through the boom into that F-16? There's a monstrous logistical tail to get fuel into Kandahar; the ships that get it to Karachi, the trucks that drive it up into Kandahar. Then we eventually have to get some of it out to FOBs like Dwyer and Bastion.

SLD: But your point is by driving down price point for the operation is a crucial strategic element.

Buckey: Exactly. It was a concern of Gen. McChrystal and it's clearly what Gen. Mattis was trying to address at JFCOM and now as CENTCOM. If you believe that a goal of an insurgency is to drive your cost of operating to an unacceptable level, we're doing a great job of it over there right now given the logistical constraints and the aircraft we're putting against the operational requirement. What we have to do is field the same capabilities in a platform that's hundreds of dollars per flight hour instead of tens of thousands per flight hour.

SLD: How does a turbo-prop compare to unmanned aircraft in providing such a savings or performing such a role?

Buckey: One of the things that the special operations forces, who started the idea of the whole Imminent Fury piece, wanted was the ability to have a partner in that light attack platform; a TAC-A or supporting arms coordinator that would be above them in the air and who, if things got ugly, could then marshal in other aircraft. The guys sitting at Creech can't do that.

The individual in the backseat of the aircraft is the one that's going to be communicating to these jets who are still 30 minutes away – 15 minutes away, an hour away – and giving them the target brief and the whole situational awareness piece of what's going on while they ingress; which is something that your guy at Creech is not going to be able to do.

But now that's the tactical piece. The operational piece is back to the whole COIN environment. Again, if what you're trying to do in a COIN environment is drive your cost of doing business down as close as you can to the level of the other guy; right now, UAVs ain't cheap.

You've got a tremendous logistics piece; you've got the sophisticated communications infrastructure required to fly them. You've got the whole piece back in CONUS in order to operate them. Your cost of doing business is huge and you also have reliability issues. The accident rates are not great with UAVs right now.

And in terms of that ability to act as FAC-A, that's something that you just can't get with a UAV.

SLD: And presumably, your ground and air team are forcing the insurgents to do something vis-à-vis your ground element. This is what was often not recognized is people are not placidly waiting around. So essentially your ground element is affecting their behavior. So you want your air tool to be part of a quick response to the behavior they are creating on the insurgent's part.

Buckey: And it may be a four to six-hour operation because if it doesn't necessarily happen when you want it. The other guy gets a vote when he wants to move. And the problem with cycling in fast movers is if I am a JTAC on the ground, or let's say I'm a FAC-A, is how many times am I giving target briefs to a new crew? Every thirty to forty minutes I've got a new callsign checking-in; maybe even less than that depending on whose available, time/distance, tankers, etc.

But I'm spending a lot of my time briefing new crews; whereas if I'm working with a platform with greater persistence, not only am I giving fewer target briefs, he's constantly building Situational Awareness over a greater period. I have more time to focus on the target while he's building up more and more SA.

From the aircrew perspective, if I'm checking-in in a fast-mover, I may have 30 or so minutes on station. I'll get a good target brief and I'll be able to build a certain level of SA. But am I able to absorb as much as someone who is on-station for hours? No.

SLD: So to summarize your thinking about a COIN aircraft, you want to drive down the cost of providing close air support to the guys on the ground. You want manned air for the roles that you have described – to be involved with the ground commander, the ability to loiter, the engagement, the systems to provide the "find/fix" piece and the persistence to be there for the "finish." You want sufficiently lethal manned airborne presence but at lower cost than a fast jet.

Buckey: We have the systems and the weapons to pair up with a turboprop aircraft that has the persistence to get us through the entire "find/fix/finish" process at a substantially reduced cost that is more appropriate for air operations in a COIN environment.

Remembering Massoud in the Endless War

09/03/2018

By Robbin Laird and Ed Timperlake

The endless war goes on in Afghanistan with no clear strategy or policy in place to end the American engagement.

If the Pentagon strategy on dealing with peer competitors is to be realized, resources need to be mobilized to deal with this evolving threat and set of challenges.

Assumptions made about the endless capacity of the US and its allies to sink investments into a commitment to fitting land wars of the type which have little or no real relevance to dealing with the Chinese or the Russians have proven invalid.

We need to put the land wars behind us and get on with the strategic shift.

The following article which we published SEVEN years ago called for a recognition that the endless war well needed to end from the standpoint of the costly engagement needed to be terminated.

Stability operations really have very little to do with success against a peer competitor and the skill sets and equipment and investments in the first have little carry over to the second, and actually create a significant learning problem to move from the first to the second.

What follows is the article published on September 14, 2011 entitled Remembering Massoud:

As Americans observe the day 10 years ago when terrorists in hijacked planes attacked New York and the Pentagon, the people of northern Afghanistan remember what for them was a greater tragedy two days earlier on Sept. 9, 2001. It was then that two agents of Al Qaeda posing as journalists detonated a bomb hidden in a television camera during an interview with Mr. Massoud, killing him instantly.

For his closest aides, who first tried to keep his death secret, fearing the truth would sink the besieged Northern Alliance for good, the collapse of the World Trade Center towers was a sign of hope. They instinctively saw a nexus in the two acts — though one has never been proved — and knew that the Americans would soon be on their way.

“I sort of woke up out of this shock I had been in since Sept. 9,” Abdullah Abdullah, the Northern Alliance’s former foreign minister, recalled about hearing the news of the attacks in New York. “It automatically came to my mind that out of this tragedy, there might be an opening.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/world/asia/11massoud.html?ref=todayspaper&pagewanted=print>

Earlier we had an opportunity to discuss with Johan Freckhaus, a former French military officer and an advisor of Massoud about the way ahead in Afghanistan.

In our interviews with Freckhaus he connects two broad points.

First, the light footprint followed by the Bush Administration after 9/11 was the right strategy. The piling on of foreign troops has stirred up a hornets nest of Taliban activity who are using the large scale foreign presence as a recruiting issue. The point simply put is that Afghans distrust foreign motives and the large number of troops.

And the foreign troops are backing a centralized government, which is out of sync of broader Afghan national aspirations and objectives. Certainly, recent events in the Middle East suggest that building up the power of the Presidency, as a focus of Western activity might well be counterproductive for political progress. In a recent speech to the Kuwait National Assembly, on 22 February 2011, the UK Prime Minister admitted: “For decades, some have argued that stability required highly controlling regimes (...). [We] faced a choice between our interests and our values. And to be honest, we should acknowledge that sometimes we have made such calculations in the past. But I say that is a false choice.”

Johan Freckhaus also suggested an interesting lesson from history that might just work — a Swiss “neutrality” model from the time of Napoleon. His observations in his own words are extremely interesting. The West can work with Russia, Pakistan and others to shape a neutrality treaty and can assist where appropriate in countering foreign fighters like Al Qaeda and the Taliban seeking to penetrate Afghan territory. But the West needs to leave security to the provinces, and

work with a much smaller central government tasked with dispensing aid to the provinces, control of the Army and collecting taxes. But the provinces cannot, nor need, manage large police forces.

In the earlier interview, Olivier underscored the following remarks by Johan:

There is indeed an insurgency in Afghanistan because you have 30 000 or 40 000 rebel fighters – according to allied military intelligence – backed by millions of Afghan civilians, in growing numbers, who feed them, house them, transport them, protect them, give them information and so on. These civilians are doing it foremost to drive foreign troops out of the country and in rejection of the system we are trying to impose, but do not want the return to power of the mullahs either.

Withdrawing our troops is therefore the right strategy to effectively drive a wedge between the rebels and their supporters. This famous momentum, this magic moment where the power relationship can be reversed, will come from fair and complete withdrawal of foreign forces, because then the fate of the country will return to its population. Then the Afghan security forces, as they exist today, would very well be capable, with the help of villagers, of chasing away those rebels on motorcycles mainly armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, whose most lethal know-how is simply to trigger explosives remotely.

The strategy of “always more” prevalent until today for the Afghan security forces is a dangerous illusion: more troops, more money, more power to the central government, all of this is counter-productive, it fuels the insurgency! We are building oversized security forces in Afghanistan that the country is far from being able to afford. We imagine a police state, supported from abroad, which would subject the population to the decisions of Kabul.

We imagine building in a few years, for one of the poorest countries in the world, an army that could successfully maintain in power a hyper-centralized system. This is not sustainable.” Let’s remember, for the record, that the Afghan government, which now has 140, 000 military and 109, 000 police officers, aims at a 240,000 military and 240,000 police officers force. And that is for a country of about 20 million inhabitants. In comparison, France, for a population three times larger, has fewer than 170,000 military personnel (ground and air) and 265 000 gendarmes and police officers.

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