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HUNGARIAN MI-35 AIR MENTOR TEAM IN AFGHANISTAN

RESUME

Mentoring is a very difficult duty, especially in a relatively adverse environment. There is a small group of Hungarian aviation experts – pilots and maintenance personnel – which has been attempting to reach the NATO's declared target in Afghanistan, to enable the local forces to take over the security issues in their own country.

MI-35 AIR MENTOR TEAM AFGANISZTÁNBAN

REZÜMÉ

A műveleti tanácsadás nehéz feladat, különösen az, ha azt ellenséges környezetben kell végrehajtani. Magyar Honvédség harcihelikopteres szakemberei – hajózó és repülő-műszaki mentorok – próbálják elérni a NATO egyik legfontosabb célját Afganisztánban: képessé tenni az afgán fegyveres erők állományát arra, hogy átvegyék a saját országuk biztonsága feletti felügyeletet.

In spring 2010, the Hungarian Defence Forces got a possibility, of sending a small group of aviation experts to the developing country of Afghanistan. The group is called as Hungarian Defence Forces Mi-35 Air Mentor Team (AMT). The mission of this group is to train, help and assist the Afghan Air Force rotary wing units, in developing their operational capability. The AMT consists of twelve personnel, including Mi-24/35² instructor and maintenance test pilots, maintenance personnel, such as engineers, airframe, weapon systems, avionics and radio systems specialists, and furthermore logistics and admin specialists. The aim of this article is to provide insight of the NATO training mission in Afghanistan, through a view of the AMT's operations.

THE PLACE OF THE AMT IN THE NATO TRAINING SYSTEM IN AFGHANISTAN

As a training organization, the AMT is a part of the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A). The NTM-A is responsible for the training the Afghan governmental forces, such as army, air force and police, practically it is the training division of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). The NTM-A is a fusion of NATO training efforts, and the US led Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan (CSTC-A).

There are several training units, operating for the NTM-A/CSTC-A. One of them is the United States Air Force 438th Air Expeditionary Wing (438 AEW). This Wing is a kind of a “shadow” for the Afghan Air Force, providing coalition mentors up to the Afghan Ministry Of Defence, trough the Afghan Air Force Commander, down to a simple soldier. The struc-

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² Mi-35 is the designated term for the export version of the Russian made Mi-24 special attack helicopter. The airframe, and the main systems – especially the weaponry – are the same, there are only minor differences in the avionics, and the radio systems.

ture of the wing is tailored functionally to the table of establishment of its Afghan sister unit. This allows the subunits to be the most effective in mutual operations. The 438 AEW has groups in a several locations, such as Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif, and also in Kabul. The Kabul group, known as the 438th Air Expeditionary Group, has a Fixed Wing Squadron, a Maintenance Squadron, an Operational Support Unit, and the 438th Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron (438 AEAS) to which the pilots of the AMT are directly subordinated. The maintenance mentors of the AMT are subordinated to the 440th Maintenance Advisory Squadron.



1. picture

Afghan Mi-35 attack helicopter over Afghanistan with Hungarian mentors in the cockpit

The 438 AEAS consists of a US led Mi-17 flight, and a Hungarian led Mi-35 flight. There are US, Croatian and Czech mentors in the Mi-17 flight, Hungarian and Czech mentors in the Mi-35 flight. The 438 AEAS is assigned to train the pilots, flight engineers, and door gunners of the Afghan Air Force 377th Rotary Wing Squadron.

The 440th Maintenance Advisory Squadron is also a truly multinational unit, with US, Mongolian, Jordanian, Ukrainian, Italian, Croatian, Czech and Hungarian maintenance specialists, who cover all fields of maintenance issues, from unit level, to intermediate level activities.

This multinational unit is assigned to fulfil the NATO-ISAF training policy, in order to make the Afghan government able to take over the security issues over their own country.

ISAF'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN IN RELATION WITH TRAINING

ISAF aims to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a haven for terrorists, to help provide security, and to contribute to a better future for the Afghan people. NATO-ISAF, as part of the overall international community effort and as mandated by the United Nations Security Council, is working to create the conditions whereby the government of Afghanistan is able to exercise its authority throughout the country.

To carry out its mission, ISAF conducts population-centric counterinsurgency operations in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and provides support to the

government and international community in security sector reform, including mentoring, training and operational support to the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP).

ISAF key priorities in Afghanistan are to:

- protect the Afghan people;
- build the capacity of the Afghan security forces so they can take lead responsibility for security in their own country;
- counter the insurgency;
- enable the delivery of stronger governance and development. [1]

The second priority is concerning the development of Afghan security forces capacity, to the level of being able to take the responsibility for the security of Afghanistan. But what this level is? How can it be reached? These are the major questions, asked by the experts at all levels. Answering these questions is extremely difficult, and complicated, it can be done only in one way: throughout a transition period, which hopefully leads to the thorough handover-takeover of security issues between the coalition forces and the Afghan authorities.

TRANSITION OF SECURITY

Transition is the process by which responsibility for Afghanistan will be gradually handed over to the Afghan leadership.

At the London Conference in January 2010, the Afghan Government and the International Community pledged to the development of a plan for transition, which they later endorsed at the follow-up Kabul Conference in July 2010.

Implementation of this plan is scheduled to start in the spring of 2011 and it is expected that, by the end of 2014, the Afghan authorities will have taken the lead throughout the country. As Afghan leadership expands, ISAF's presence in Afghanistan will evolve progressively from a mentoring to an enabling and sustaining role, beyond 2014, until that time whereby the Afghan leadership is capable of taking full responsibility for its country. [1]

Principles Of Transition

The following principles are guiding the transition process:

Transition is a conditions-based process, not a calendar driven event. Recommendations are based on an assessment of conditions on the ground. Transition does not signify ISAF's withdrawal from Afghanistan but a gradual shift to a supporting role as Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) capabilities develop. Gradually, as circumstances dictate, the international community's civilian and military representatives will shift to supporting, then mentoring, then enabling, and finally sustaining roles across the three pillars of security, governance and development. Operationally, local transition of security responsibilities to the ANSF can take place at the district or even sub-district level in some areas. Transition is involving key Afghan institutions and functions as well as geographic areas.

MENTORING THE AFGHAN AVIATION PERSONNEL

Principles Of Mentoring The Flight Crews

Academic Training

The academic training is the first step of mentoring, which helps the mentors to select and classify the mentored personnel in order to be able to determine a suitable training plan for them, according to their training level. If the plan is ready, it is possible to start the training at multiple levels and fields.

The general purpose of academic training is:

- to provide a solid base for the hands on training in the cockpit;
- to improve the general and aviation English of the aircrews;
- to integrate the Afghan airmen into international air traffic, according to general air traffic rules;
- to familiarize the aircrews with new equipment, such as GPS, digital radio systems etc;
- to integrate Afghan and ISAF operational flight procedures, to be interoperable with each other, and to reach a satisfactory battle space deconfliction, for safety reasons;



2. picture GPS training

Hands-On Training

This type of training is essential for the aircrew members. The hands-on training has two major fields, such as system operations, and emergency procedures. The system operations is generally the execution of the knowledge acquired by the academic training, including start-up, an shut down of the engines, and the auxiliary power unit, operating the fuel system, the hydraulics, checking the avionics and the radio systems, and furthermore the operating the weapons systems.

The emergency procedures is the training of the immediate response to the malfunctions of helicopter systems, and equipment. It includes the realizing of the signals and signs of the

system failure, and the “bold face” procedures to correcting it. This training is mission critical, because it increases of the ability of survival in the theatre.

The hands-on training occurs strictly in the helicopter cockpit, with the mentor calling out the signs and signals, or a system to operate, and the mentored has to respond or act correctly.

Flight Training

Coalition mentors provide direct ground instruction and in-aircraft aircrew mission and aircraft qualification, upgrade, and re-currency training for Afghan aircrew, from the very basic individual level, through formation, and combat training. Mi-35 flight training also includes realistic weapons employment and forward observer integration flights on dedicated ranges. Training flights for the Afghan rotary wing pilots normally occur outside the immediate airport traffic area, and as such, are subject to local threats, which are normally low threat.

Flight Mentoring

Mi-35 air advisor instructor pilots mentor Afghan rotary wing Mi-35 aircrew in fixed-base (friendly forward operating base or airport) to fixed-base defensive attack helicopter escort of both aircraft (general purpose helicopter) and ground convoys. These defensive missions include mentoring Mi-35 escort of logistics and personnel mobility and MEDEVAC³ formations, VIP and presidential airlift flights, and tactical ground convoys. Flight mentoring also encompasses defensive aerial patrols over urban areas during high-visibility government conferences and activities for the purpose of reconnaissance and government shows-of-presence. The primary objective of in-flight mentoring is to train effective defensive counter-insurgency tactics, techniques, and procedures and still a professional military ethos within the Afghan Air Force rotary wing aircrew. Every attempt is made to return to local operating bases each day, but if they are unable to return, will be billeted within secured facilities overnight. For Mi-35 operations, this type of sortie represents the bulk of NTM-A training.

In-Flight Tactical Assistance

On occasion, Mi-35 air advisors directly assist Afghan rotary wing aircrew in medium and increased-threat helicopter operations. These operations generally require Mi-35 or other attack helicopter escort or a second Mi-17 for mutual support and, from time to time, proceed to unsecured helicopter landing zones or forward operating bases threatened by insurgent forces. Coalition air advisors assist on some of these Afghan Ministry of Defense-assigned Afghan Air Force missions due to limited Afghan rotary wing tactical capabilities or expertise. These missions include search and rescue/recovery operations in unknown or unsecure areas, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) relief-in-place missions to threatened locations, ANSF reinforcement missions to threatened locations, and general purpose missions requiring an increased degree of tactical helicopter proficiency. On occasion, NTM-A, the Government of Afghanistan, and the Afghan Air Force will team to perform a humanitarian assistance operation to unsecured locations in order to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan and influence the population to support their government. When flown with air advisor air-

³ MEDEVAC – Medical Evacuation.

crew, this is another example of in-flight tactical assistance. The ability to support these type missions are beneficial to the NTM-A mission.

Principles Of Mentoring The Maintenance Crews

Academic Training

The maintenance academic training includes the knowledge of the Technical Manuals of the Mi-35 helicopter, in all fields, the usage of Technical Bulletins given out by the manufacturer, or the higher level maintenance authorities. It also includes the theoretic part of the pre- and post flight maintenance works, the intermediate level 50, and 100 flying hours inspection procedures.

Hands-On Training

The maintenance hands-on training is very similar to the flight crews activities, includes all the practical skills, based on the academic training.

Supervising Of The Maintenance Works

This field requires a great caution, and tolerance. The mentors should not act as a supervisor, and should not check the work of an Afghan maintenance specialist from outside. However the supervisor is responsible for keeping high the technological discipline, it is rather a role of a counterpart, a workmate. The best results can be reached, by this type of behaviour.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

There are several key factors to be successful in the role of a mentor. The following part describes the most important issues, which have to be complied with.

Cultural Respect

Everyone who wants to build a good relations with the local people, has to respect their cultural background.

Religion And Spirituality

It includes the religion and spirituality what are a system which every culture uses to provide meaning, unity, piece of mind, and control over events in society. It often helps to preserve the social order. By defining the individual's place in society, religion provides people sense of personal identity and belonging. Spirituality refers to a belief in higher power like God and spirits. Religion in Afghanistan is extremely important for the inhabitants, so the mentor has to keep this field always in his mind.

Family And Kinship

This refers to blood descent, marriage, and people treated like family regardless of actual kin relation It provides continuation of society through the generations and defines the network on which a person depends for aid. In Afghan society status, residence, inheritance and transfer of a social position take place based on kin groups.

Time And Space Perception

The perception of time differs among cultures. A culture with a highly linear orientation toward time such as western countries, sees time as a limited commodity to be used efficiently

towards problem-solving or coming to an agreement. In non-linear cultures such as Afghanistan's, people feel there may be less pressure to accomplish things quickly. If reminded to a time, an Afghan person is going to answer: "You have all the watches, we have all the time." Additionally, the concept of personal space or distance and the significance of these values often varies between cultures. While we communicate, an Afghan will stand much closer to us, as we think it is convenient. [2]

Professionalism And Experience

Obviously a mentor has to be professional in his specialty. It is essential for the mission success. The mentored personnel tests the mentors permanently, but most of all at the first contact. When the mentor fails the test, he cannot be called a mentor anymore. That is why the professional knowledge has to be maintained at high level all the time.

The importance of experience flows from the Afghan culture. There is a great respect of the elder, because they have the wisdom, which is based on the experience acquired, along the life. However some mentors are much younger than the mentored, if they have the professional experience they are going to be respected for it.

CONCLUSION

The Hungarian Mi-35 Air Mentor Team has been providing a support for the Afghan Air Force rotary wing airmen for almost two years. During this short period the AMT reached a level of respect which is extremely high both from the mentored personnel and the coalition supervisors.

The AMT established the individual, crew and formation training program for the Afghan Air Force 377th Rotary Wing Squadron. Developed the system of evaluation which is accepted by the Afghan chain of command, and also by the NTM-A standardization and evaluation team.

The members of the AMT have been very successful in motivation of the Afghan rotary wing aircrews. The Afghan pilots started to ask questions, they are now willing to learn from the mentors. This was the hardest target to reach, and it is done.

After the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan, the training units will still remain there. That is why the mentoring duty is to be a long range, very high value, and extremely cost effective way of taking part in the NATO training efforts. That fact is strongly recommended to be taken into consideration by the decision makers.

APPENDIX

- [1] [1] http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-6E5E8C26-D398FE90/natolive/topics_69366.htm?; time of downloading 07. 10. 2011. 14:00 CET;
- [2] [2] Expeditionary Airman Field Guide – US Air Force Culture & Language Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.