Building Partner Aviation Capacity Through Training

By
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The United States Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) recently held its first iteration of a new course designed to promote a specific and sometimes overlooked aspect of security cooperation, the development of partner nation aviation assets and infrastructure. It is listed in the USAFSOS course catalog as the "Building Partner Aviation Capacity" Course (BPACC).

Air Force Special Operations School (AFSOS) has taken a progressive approach in the development of this course. In keeping with the 2008 National Defense Strategy, the course emphasizes cooperation between the Department of Defense (DOD) and other federal, state, and local government agencies as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in assisting in foreign nation security sector reform and capacity building. The BPACC brings together instructors and guest speakers from various U.S. Government agencies, NGOs, and private commercial enterprises. Using classroom lecture, field study events, and practical exercises, these mentors provide foreign students with a solid introduction to methods and programs that can be used for the coordinated, comprehensive, and long-term development of civil-military aviation resources.

I was given the opportunity to assist in the refinement of this course during its dry run in April 2009 and was impressed with its potential to fill a training niche sometimes ignored in security cooperation: the practical improvement of aviation capabilities and capacities in developing nations. In the past, too much focus has often been placed in security cooperation and security assistance on building nascent ground forces and coastal/riverine units, while ignoring the need to also establish at least basic aviation capabilities. Although the cost and complexity of operating and maintaining aircraft may certainly limit the creation of independent air forces in many countries, as the BPACC demonstrates, developing countries may be able to pursue joint civil-military solutions that can be tailored to the size, budgets, and needs of a particular country.

For example, during the April dry run, the U.S. instructors and guest speakers invited to USAFSOS (who doubled as students) were exposed to three different "tiers" of airport operations and infrastructure through tours of airports in the local area around Hurlburt Field. These tiers ranged from a very simple municipal airport consisting of a single runway and small operations building to a large, dual-use/commercial-military regional airport. In addition, the course's syllabus incorporated lectures on: U.S. security assistance and security cooperation programs available to help countries fund aviation capacity building; operational case studies and historical models of U.S. civil-military aviation cooperation; U.S. national policy and aviation regulations; and different military, commercial, and academic perspectives on aviation development.

The first BPACC was successfully held in July 2009 with a mixture of international and U.S. attendees; USAFSOS plans to conduct up to three BPACCs per fiscal year with classes comprised of approximately ten U.S. students for every twenty international students. Further information on BPACC offerings can be obtained at the AFSOS web site: http://www.afsoc.af.mil/usafsos/index.asp, or via e-mail contact with the school at: usafsos.bpacc@hurlburt.af.mil.

About the Author

Lieutenant Colonel James Toomey is the Deputy Director of International Studies and an Assistant Professor at DISAM. He has worked as a Sub-Saharan African (48J) Foreign Area Officer (FAO) for the U.S. Army for over ten years with tours of duty at three U.S. embassies abroad including service as a Defense Attaché in Haiti and Liberia and an assignment as the Chief, Central Africa Branch at the U.S. European Command (EUCOM). He possesses four degrees related to international business/political affairs, including master's degrees from Columbus State University and the University of Florida, where he also obtained a certificate in African studies.