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Afghan Air Force accepts more O&M responsibility

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers turned over operations and maintenance responsibilities for 10 more buildings to Afghanistan's 205th Air Wing on Kandahar Airfield July 7.

As part of the overarching goal to equip Afghanistan's military with the training necessary to perform basic facilities O&M, this latest round of turnovers marks a milestone in the five-phase turnover plan, said U.S. Air Force Maj. Stephen O'Leary, the 443rd Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron commander who deployed from Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. He and his team meet regularly with their Afghan Air Force counterparts to develop the Afghans' engineering management and technical skills.

Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, the Afghanistan Engineer District-South commander, said that this turnover of guard towers, storage facilities and other buildings was significant because preparing for the day was a collaborative effort between the Afghan Air Force, USACE, the U.S. Air Force's 777th Expeditionary Prime BEEF Squadron and the training contractor, ITT Exelis.



U.S. Air Force Col. Benjamin Wham, Afghanistan Engineer District South Commander and Kandahar Air Wing Vice Commander Lt. Col. Mohammad Isreal exchange greetings July 7 at the 205th Air Corps Cantonment on Kandahar Airfield. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, together with the U.S. Air Force and ITT Exelis, trained and mentored the Afghans who will assume facility operations and maintenance responsibilities on the Air Wing cantonment. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Photo by Karla Marshall)

“USACE and ITT Exelis provided classroom and on-the-job training for the Afghan O&M technicians,” Wham said. “Prime Beef provided mentorship for the Afghan engineers and technicians who are responsible for ensuring these buildings are functioning and properly maintained.”

In his remarks to the audience, Kandahar Air Wing Vice Commander Lt. Col. Mohammad Isreal, said (speaking through an interpreter) that he looked forward to assuming control of O&M functions for more of the buildings at the Kandahar Air Wing. He also thanked USACE, the 777th Expeditionary Prime BEEF Squadron and ITT Exelis. “On behalf of Afghans, our military, and me, thank you for all the mentoring and training you have done to make Afghanistan's military better. This day will stay a memory for us long into the future.”

During the first week of July, the South District turned over the 10 buildings at the cantonment on Kandahar Airfield, 73 buildings at Camp Shorabak, 25 buildings at Qal-e-Naw and 10 buildings at Camp Zafar. Also, in mid June, the district turned over 28 other buildings to the Afghan National Army at Camp Hero near Kandahar City.

“This training is an ongoing effort and we have been training Afghans in the southern region since January to operate and maintain buildings on their bases,” said Christine Florea, the project manager responsible for O&M training. “There have been and will continue to be numerous challenges to successful transition – manpower, procurement of tools, parts, and equipment – but we have come a long way since the program kicked off earlier this year.”

The Afghanistan Engineer District-South is turning over O&M responsibility for facilities on Afghan military installations across southern and western Afghanistan to Afghan National Security Forces in a multi-phased approach that includes an aggressive training schedule. Training begins with fundamentals of safety, then progresses to six months of skilled-trade and technical training in 10 disciplines, followed by two months of validation and any required remedial training, said Florea.

“Camp Hero [in Kandahar province] and Camp Sayar [in Helmand province] were the first locations where we had training sites,” said Florea. “To date, we have turned over more than 400 buildings in the Afghanistan Engineer District-South’s area of operation. It’s exciting to be a part of this chapter of the coalition mission.”

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