



COMBAT AVIATION ADVISORS

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While most Air Force units could conduct [foreign internal defense](#) (FID) operations, a small number of Air Force personnel are specifically focused on training and maintaining readiness for this mission. Leveraging their capabilities increases the probability of success when conducting FID training and advisory operations. Air Force Special Operations Command provides specialized, structured training and certifies Air Force special operations personnel as combat aviation advisors (CAA). CAAs provide specialized FID skills and capabilities to accomplish the assess, train, advise, and assist mission on a routine basis are referred to as combat aviation advisors.

Commanders should employ CAAs when FID operations take place in remote, forward operating locations and there are no other US military forces present. CAAs should also be employed when training, advising, and assisting involve politically sensitive partnerships or special operations-oriented tactics, techniques, and procedures, or when operations are conducted jointly with or in support of other US special operations forces.

CAAs, organized into operational aviation detachments (OAD), assess, train, advise, and assist foreign aviation forces in tactical and operational-level airpower employment and sustainment. Tactical OAD teams facilitate the availability, reliability, safety, and interoperability of air combat and combat support forces, and help integrate those forces into joint and multinational operations throughout the range of military operations.

Each CAA represents a highly specialized collection of capabilities. Taskings for this capability can materialize quickly, and it cannot be put together *ad hoc*. The team's training is directed towards enabling the individual to operate successfully on the ground in the fluid conditions and sometimes autonomous structures inherent in FID operations.

CAAs can mission plan, execute, and recover in a variety of FID scenarios with little assistance, accomplishing this within legislative and military guidance. CAAs generally deploy and operate alone. In most cases, they provide their own tactical communications and force protection when deployed.

Specialized Characteristics of CAA Forces

Although CAA personnel are not the only forces capable of training, advising, and assisting foreign aviation forces, the peculiar demands of this mission have led to the development of unique and specialized skills. These forces train, plan, and conduct operations to maximize several specialized characteristics of the organization: foreign language skills, tailored force packaging, and competency in nonstandard aircraft and aviation support programs. CAAs are distinguished by such attributes as cultural and political astuteness, adaptability to field conditions, and an in-depth knowledge of US and foreign [command and control](#) (C2) structures. Teams receive extensive training in CAA peculiar field-craft, advanced weapons and survival, tactical communications, security assistance law, academic instructor methods, and area/theater orientation.

Most CAA personnel are volunteers who are qualified instructors in a particular Air Force specialty code. Approximately six months of advisor-related, individual- and team-oriented training equip them with area orientation, field-craft, and “move, shoot, and communicate” ground-combat operating skills that prepare them to function successfully in the joint, special operations forces, multinational, and interagency arenas. [CAA teams](#) generally deploy and operate alone with what they have. In most instances, the CAA teams provide their own force protection when deployed.

CAA employment characteristics include minimal strategic airlift requirements and limited go-it-alone capability for operating from austere operating locations. Minimum bulk plus simplicity and ease of operation equal tactical agility for CAA team members. CAA characteristics include a small logistics footprint, fast in-theater pick-up-and-go mobility, and communications equipment capable of maintaining critical connectivity among OAD teams, and between the teams and higher C2 elements, e.g., a [joint special operations air component](#).

CAA Employment

CAA personnel do not train foreign personnel in basic military skills, although they do provide weapon systems upgrade training under special funding arrangements. Accordingly, the term adaptive training is used to distinguish between instruction in applied tactics, techniques, and procedures tailored to specific tactical needs and types of aircraft and more basic types of instruction provided through such agencies as undergraduate pilot training and the Inter-American Air Forces Academy. The adaptive training approach advances these basic skills through advice or instruction in the host language and is provided in the host country using the equipment at hand. This approach helps foreign air units adapt their basic skills to specific environmental and tactical conflict situations.

Assistance to foreign aviation units can be provided through mobile training teams (MTTs) programmed and funded under [security assistance](#) or performed in conjunction with other programs conducted by the geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) and by various agencies of the US government. CAA forces conduct MTT activities in

fulfillment of US Government and GCC security assistance objectives, but must operate in accordance with security assistance law, which restricts MTT members from taking part in combat operations. Combat restrictions, or constraints, governing CAA activities in such programs are provided under security assistance law and the established rules of engagement.

As part of their overall mission capability, CAA teams provide direct assistance to Department of Defense (DOD) and non-DOD agencies on foreign aviation issues. This is an inherent capability of any Air Force CAA unit. Commanders should employ CAA teams for assessments of foreign aviation capabilities, liaison with foreign aviation forces, and assistance in air campaign planning. CAA personnel can also be employed to perform surveys aimed at identifying opportunities and requirements for joint and multinational operations, contingencies, exercises, and training.

CAA teams can perform their missions with various types of foreign air force units. The CAA mission focus is developing and improving foreign aviation special operations capabilities to complement all other joint and multinational operations. Developing and maintaining indigenous special air operations capabilities is important to countries that must deal with internal, asymmetric threats that do not qualify as traditional military targets, e.g., guerrilla insurgency, criminal subversion, terrorism, illicit drug production and trafficking, environmental pillage, and poaching.

The need for Air Force special operations forces in lesser-developed countries is steadily increasing, primarily for [counterinsurgency](#) (COIN), counterterrorism (CT), and counter-narcotics operations. Where such units do exist, or where special operations-oriented skills can be created from existing conventional resources, the CAA objective is to help indigenous aviation forces provide their governments tailored options and greater flexibility, stealth, surgical execution, speed, and surprise.

An experienced CAA team member with advanced skills should be armed with the relevant strategic issues surrounding the FID task. Such issues include:

- ✦ How a threatened nation applies its instruments of national power to counter an internal threat and how strategic ends, ways, and means differ from previous strategic models.
- ✦ The joint and interagency opportunities, tasks, and players.
- ✦ The threat posed by terrorist organizations radicalizing religion or ideological beliefs (such as Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups).
- ✦ The political, economic, informational, and military tools.
- ✦ In the military realm, how host-nation land, maritime, and airpower function, and how military forces gain and maintain currency and relevancy in the

CT/COIN fight.

- ✦ How coalition operations for CT/COIN affect the way CAAs train as a joint, inter-agency team.

CAAs should understand these strategic issues to help determine appropriate solutions at the operational and tactical levels.

CAA mission capabilities are built around the need to provide foreign forces specialized tactical training and advisory assistance in such skills as helicopter alternate insertion and extraction, remote operations, aerial gunnery, night vision device usage, fixed-wing aerial delivery, air-land insertion and extraction, personnel [airdrop](#) techniques, air-ground interface, [military information support operations](#), and [close air support](#). These skill sets, which represent critical capabilities in CT and COIN, happen to fall mostly within special operations mission boundaries.
