

TWT Gazette

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TWT

Trans World Technologies (TWT) is a commercial network with contacts and project experience in many countries around the globe

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Afghanistan Air Mobility – inspect the teeth of a given horse?

Are BEST program, pre-1990 production, modified UH 60 A (+) Blackhawk helicopters compared to the AAF existing, more modern MIL Mi 8/17's really the better solution for Afghanistan AM?

Many experts doubt the soundness of the Obama Administration's decision to fully replace the existing Russian made helicopters supporting the RS Mission in Afghanistan. They fly with the Regular and Special Mission Wing air units of the Afghanistan Air Force. The US (taxpayer) over the past years not only has invested and sponsored the AAF Mi 8/17 helicopter fleets, but DoD managed all and everything around and about their operations as the backbone of local Air Mobility. After long (economically legitimate *but neither really transparent nor aboveboard*) US helicopter industry lobby against purchase and sustainment of the Mi 8/17's, the US Army itself end of September 2017 finally entered into a PR campaign to mark the beginning of the transition from Russian to US made transport helicopters under the previously conceived Afghanistan Aviation Transition Plan (AATP).



Photo © RSM

The Afghans obviously have little choice except to be formally grateful to the US for their gifts. They anyway way have little to say in this affair. Just for comparison: The UH 60 transports 11 passengers and 2,640 pounds cargo. The Mi 17

transports 30 passengers and more than 8000 pounds cargo with better hot and high performance. The US as mentor/manager of AAF after 2005 originally thought it should be a good idea to equip the new Air Force with a helicopter best suited to local conditions i.e. Afghanistan's high altitudes and desert landscapes. Rightfully it chose modern models Mi 8/17. Procurement of the state-of-the-art modern Mi 8 MTV-1 and Mi 17-V5 models for AAF unfortunately happened not the best way. DoD tried to organize effective product support via the US Army but at least partly failed proper. In 2013 US Congress on initiative of the US anti - Mi 8/17 Lobby managed to pressure the US Army and the Administration into a policy change facilitating the industry's interest in the so called Blackhawk Exchange & Sales Transaction (BEST) program which since 2015 drives to modernize or better to replace i.e. the original 297 US Army National Guard's in average 34,5 year old Blackhawk UH 60 A model fleet. So when the US this autumn advertises that with the phase out of the AAF more modern Mi 8/17s the true modernization of AAF begins, one should keep in mind that the transition and new investment into UH 60 A + models is based on old platforms which were actually produced prior to 1990 with most likely very intensive maintenance and inspections. With the 159 x USD 8 million price tag for their refurbishment with upgrade to UH 60 Plus models and considering their life-cycle cost *the winner is the US Industry and its Profits*. Regardless of the good business for US Industry it should be sensible to keep and sustain also the already invested AAF Mi 8/17 complementary to the above AAF "new" Blackhawks. *Dirk P. Schneider*