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Building the Culturally Aware Combat Airman: How
Effective is Pre-Deployment Training for Air Force Air
Advisors?

by

James L. West, Maj, USAF

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Advisor: Dr. Gregory F. Intoccia

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PREFACE

In April 2008, I volunteered to deploy to Iraq to work as an Air Advisor (AA) in an *in lieu of* (ILO) position for the Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Transition Team (INCTF-TT). I immediately began searching the Air Force's "AEF Online" website in search of a job description. After numerous phone calls and e-mails and two months of inquiring, I still had no guidance on what I needed to do to prepare or what I needed to study to arm myself for success. INCTF-TT's director of personnel did not know which duty position I would be filling until three weeks prior to my report-no-later-than date.

Prior to deploying, I attended five weeks of Combat Skills Training (CST) at Ft McCoy, Wisconsin. There I learned a variety of Army ground-combat maneuvers. While in Iraq, I never used my newly acquired ability to calibrate a .50 caliber, M2 "Ma Deuce," clear a building, or conduct base-perimeter defense. The time spent learning these technical "hard" skills would have been much better spent developing "soft" skills geared toward increasing my cultural literacy. While deployed, and since my return, I have found a vast number of resources to better prepare an AA. Hopefully my lessons will help equip future AAs for success.

ABSTRACT

The Air Force (AF) is making major contributions in conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan through the work of air advisors (AA). AAs are Air Force airmen from a variety of AF career fields, who are sent to interact with US partner nations (PN) in an effort to build, rebuild, and improve the PN's air force. The cultural and language differences between the United States and these PNs are numerous and are not being adequately addressed. Providing pre-deployment training that teaches cross-cultural competence through foreign language and cultural education is essential to AAs' success. A review of the history of AA operations, reports from language and anthropology experts, and a description of current AA missions provides an understanding of some of the skill sets necessary for AA success. An evaluation of current pre-deployment training programs was conducted by interviewing past and presently deployed individuals on the perceived applicability of the training they received and whether or not they were adequately prepared for the AA role. Interview results confirmed that language and culture training needs improvement; however, the current AF AA Course in Ft Dix, New Jersey received some good reviews. Recommendations for improvement include incorporation of successful training methods used by Army Special Forces, the Air Force's 6th Special Operations Squadron and the AA Course.

INTRODUCTION

The continual need for rebuilding, rehabilitating and reconstructing our partner nations' (PN) air forces demands uniquely skilled airmen to fill positions as air advisors (AA). These AAs assist PNs' air forces to develop infrastructure; organization; concepts; tactics, techniques, and procedures; and training programs to promote interoperability with US and Coalition air forces."¹ AAs are often required to interact with the local populous in unfamiliar territories, necessitating that they quickly adapt to PNs' cultural and language differences.

Unfortunately, AAs are frequently arriving at overseas-deployed locations lacking the appropriate culture and language training. These inadequacies immediately reduce their ability to effectively interact with their PN counterparts. The concern here is that a simple culturally ignorant error could hinder an AA's progress for the remainder of his or her six to twelve-month deployment. Compounding these already serious shortfalls is a lack of adequate job-specific knowledge as a result of the Air and Space Expeditionary Force (AEF) Center requesting individuals with Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) who are not trained to accomplish the job they are tasked to fill. In addition, the AA is being asked to develop a relationship that fosters the growth of the PN's air force in as few as six months.

Recent interviews with current and past AAs focusing on mission preparedness and mission accomplishment demonstrate the need to (1)

develop appropriate and region-specific training for deploying AAs, (2) determine the type of job the AA is going to fill with appropriate time to accomplish adequate training, (3) allocate appropriate resources to complete training, and (4) conduct mid- and post-tour progress reports to improve training for future AAs. Faced with such feedback, the Air Force must determine the best use of available and developing resources to equip airmen with the skills to accomplish the AA mission.

In the development of these skills, what standards should be required of airmen who fill the AA role? Specifically, what should be their requisite level of training in cultural knowledge, foreign language, and task-specific skill sets prior to deploying to locations such as Iraq to participate in the stabilization and reconstruction phases of conflict, and how can this training best be conducted? This paper is intended to answer these questions.

Current deployed AA positions are demanding of AAs certain cultural, foreign language, and task-specific skill sets to which they are not adequately trained. The implementation of appropriate pre-deployment training, based on task-specific job descriptions, and region-specific culture and language training, will result in significant improvements to the success of the AA mission.

Numerous AAs returning from Iraq have reported their pre-deployment training did not adequately prepare them for the jobs they were asked to do upon arrival. AA success in other regions, such as

operations in Columbia, has occurred as a result of a long-term presence, significant language training, and the cultural training provided by the AF's primary foreign internal defense unit, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS). Such training by the 6th SOS, "a combat aviation advisory unit that specializes in training foreign air forces to defend against internal security threats," suggests the level and type of training that is necessary to foster future success in areas such as Iraq.² This training should emphasize culture and language, be developed by professionals from the anthropology and linguistics fields, and include feedback from recently deployed AAs.

This research paper examines the current use and productivity of AAs in recent years and attempts to bring forth solutions to improve their productivity for the future based on an evaluation of current AA training. The paper will examine the environment our AAs find themselves in when deploying, and the missions they are expected to accomplish while in theater. A description of available pre-deployment training and an assessment of this training identify shortfalls. A look at multiple training solutions will provide a starting point for the suggested implementation of future training programs, and recommendations to improve the current AF AA Course.

Interviews with past and presently deployed AAs evaluated current pre-deployment training methods, and their applicability to the AA mission. The individuals interviewed were Coalition Air Force Training

Team (CAFTT) members, and Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Transition Team (INCTF-TT) personnel working within the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq (MNSTC-I). CAFTT airmen in Iraq work primarily with other Air Force members to rebuild the Iraqi air force. While, INCTF-TT airmen interact with a large proportion of Army Special Operations Forces (SOF) in developing Iraq's Counter-terrorism Command capabilities. The interviews solicited feedback from AAs working with multiple services at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of operation.

Interview questions focused on each individual's perception of how prepared he was to accomplish the mission upon arrival, and how his preparedness was helped or hindered by pre-deployment training. An analysis of the Army's Combat Skills Training (CST), Department of Defense contractor training, and the Air Force AA Course was conducted. Additionally, the Air Force's International/Regional Affairs Strategist program, the cultural and foreign language training administered by the Army's SOF Selection Course, and the culture and language training of the 6th SOS were reviewed to develop ideas for improving AA training. All of this is brought together to provide an evaluation of current training and to suggest considerations and improvements for the future.

BACKGROUND

Character of Current Conflicts

The idea that airpower would be playing a critical role in Iraq would hardly have been predicted in December 2006, when the Army and Marine Corps issued a completely revised—but air power “lite”—counterinsurgency (COIN) manual commonly known as Field Manual (FM) 3-24.³ However, airpower has made significant contributions in Iraq since the 2007 American “surge” effort in Baghdad and the implementation of FM 3-24. In fact, air operations have increased and airpower “is now often the weapon of first recourse in COIN operations, even in urban environments.”⁴ Proof is in the form of reports such as one made by CNN that the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr ordered a stand down of his Mehdi Army with a “nine-point statement [that] followed US airstrikes” after receiving punishing blows around Baghdad.⁵ With the promise that US forces will leave Iraq in the near future, it is paramount that the Iraqi air force develop their own capabilities to counter insurgent groups and terrorist networks. The AA’s job is to provide guidance in developing these capabilities.

Role of the Air Advisor

Specifically, AAs “assist [a partner nation’s] air force to develop infrastructure; organization; concepts; tactics, techniques, and procedures; and training programs to promote interoperability with US

and Coalition air forces.”⁶ In 2008, the USAF was required by the Department of State, Department of Defense, and geographical combatant commanders to send AAs, officer and enlisted, to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq. Lt Gen Frank Helmick, Commander of MNSTC-I, stated in a January 2009 personal interview that one of his top priorities was improving the placement of appropriately trained individuals into jobs matching their skill sets. Every airman is expected to bring their own unique set of tools and skills to the fight. It is in the best interest of the AF and in line with the US National Security Strategy to appropriately arm these airmen with the language skills and cultural literacy necessary to cooperate with and better understand the global partners of the United States.

Directives for Culture and Language Development

Developing language and cultural skills is also in line with the 2008 National Defense Strategy’s emphasis on strengthening and expanding alliances and partnerships.⁷ Furthermore, the Quadrennial Defense Review stresses the importance of “developing broader linguistic capability and cultural understanding. . . .”⁸ In the ongoing effort to achieve these goals, the Air Force developed the *AF Culture, Region & Language Flight Plan* (CRLFP).⁹ One of the desired end states of the CRLFP is “a total force infused with cross-cultural competence (3C),”¹⁰ The CRLFP defines 3C as “the ability to quickly and accurately

comprehend, then appropriately and effectively act, in a culturally complex environment to achieve the desired effect.”¹¹

Defining Culture

In order to determine the best method to develop the culturally competent airmen, the definition of culture must first be analyzed. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines culture as:

the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations **b** : the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; *also* : the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time <popular *culture*> <southern *culture*> **c** : the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization <a corporate *culture* focused on the bottom line> **d** : the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.

The Air Force definition of culture is “the creation, maintenance and transformation across generations of semi-shared patterns of meaning, sense-making, affiliation, action and organization by groups.”¹² Anthropologist, Dr. Brian Selmeski further explains culture as:

- Learned, shared, patterned, and transmitted across generations;
- Multi-leveled, including:
 - Surface: material and verbal and non-verbal behavior
 - Middle: physical and symbolic structures; and
 - Deep: values, beliefs, expectations, emotions, and symbols that range from the commonly recognized to those that are taken for granted;
- Performative, expressed in many forms (enacted as behaviors, embodied as feelings, and embedded as meanings);

- Influential (but not necessarily predictive) regarding what, how and why do things, as well as the way they think and feel;
- Relatively stable but not static; elements change over time and these modifications often affect other (seemingly unrelated) aspects;
- Adaptive to human needs (e.g., biological, environmental, social, political) but not always as expected when viewed from a different culture;
- Dependent on the whole or system rather than isolated parts (i.e., holistic).¹³

The idea conveyed by Dr. Selmeski and the definition of culture itself is that the concept is complex, and therefore, it is no surprise that it is not easily understood. Half-hearted attempts at understanding culture provide an airman with enough information to be dangerous. Selmeski expands on this notion in a statement about Foreign Area Officers who claim to be experts on the cultures of 20 or more different areas after three years of training. In contrast, Selmeski only “grudgingly admits” to being claimed an expert on two countries that he has lived in for nine years and studied for over twelve.¹⁴

The Role of Anthropologists

The development of an anthropological level of cultural understanding for AAs is not realistic; however, the contribution of their relevant knowledge is essential. Sun Tzu directed one to “know thy enemy,” and the famous T.E. Lawrence of Arabia suffered tremendous hardships to integrate and understand the cultures with which he worked. US National Security is dependent on the foreign interactions of

AAs, whose success is directly related to their level of preparation. Some ill-prepared, yet highly motivated AAs begin their work with the best of intentions, but their attempts to formulate schedules, timelines, and work practices in accordance with western constructs does not usually prove successful when working closely with a foreign culture. Charles Clover, in an article concerning UK troop frustrations in Basra, Iraq accurately stated, “We deal with what exists. In the five months we’ve been here, we’re not going to change the culture of Iraq. We have to work with what there is.”¹⁵

Knowledge of a PN’s culture is “what there is” and a way to bring about this understanding is through the utilization of anthropologists in military training. Current cultural training includes the Air Force’s Special Operations School, Air Advisor training, Naval Postgraduate school, and the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School to name a few. Anthropologist Montgomery McFate states that this “training focuses on the do’s and don’ts and language basics. . . .”¹⁶ The AA Course Plan of Instruction encourages self-study, but this alone is not adequate. Access to timely cultural and social knowledge is essential, and without tapping into the resources and knowledge of the anthropological field, airmen are not appropriately prepared for their specific areas of responsibility (AOR).

Developing AOR-specific training requires these professionals to translate their knowledge into usable information. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall states, “Much of our difficulty with people in other

countries stems from the fact that so little is known about cross-cultural communication.”¹⁷ Training focused on language, history, government, and customs is a step in the right direction, but exposure to “the silent language,” as Hall refers to it, allows a better understanding of the nonverbal communication conveyed differently in every culture.¹⁸ The time invested in learning another language and its culture helps to understand the way our PNs think. Success in the Iraqi Security Forces has shown the benefit of a host nation taking ownership of methods that fit into their own cultural context. Continued progress in this area is a delicate and important job that requires a sufficient commitment of time and resources to accomplish. “Unless we are willing to select and train personnel, we simply waste our time and money overseas.”¹⁹

History of the Air Advisor

Historically, AF personnel selected for AA operations belonged to the 6th SOS. The emphasis on cultural and language training demonstrated by the 6th SOS and other Foreign Internal Defense (FID) units provides an example of the investment required to produce the most productive AAs. FID units specialize in the development of PN capabilities to defend against internal conflict inside the PN’s borders.²⁰

The United States Special Operations Command officially adopted the FID mission in 1986, and the first FID aviation deployment was conducted in Ecuador in 1994.²¹ From that time on, the 6th SOS has

continued to specialize in the FID mission throughout the world. This unique squadron of personnel is in high demand due to their specialized skills in educating foreign forces, foreign language skills, and cultural awareness as well as their familiarity with the nuances of irregular warfare (IW) and COIN.

One example of the potential impact of culturally competent AAs is evidenced by the 6th SOS operations in Columbia. Here, the rebel group known as the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (known as “FARC,” by its Spanish acronym) is facing accelerating desertions, raising the possibility that the entire insurgency may unravel. According to interviews with former rebels, “the sheer terror of being bombed by Colombian fighter planes” was a crucial factor in their decision to desert.²² AAs from the 6th SOS trained the pilots flying these Colombian fighter planes, and their contributions to Columbia’s internal security forecast the potential influence of AAs in Iraq.

AIR ADVISOR MISSIONS TODAY

Units such as the 6th SOS regularly practice the AA role; however, current operations now demand that airmen outside of the special operations career field take on these challenges. The effectiveness of an AA depends on his ability to adapt to new situations, develop relationships, and to understand the goals of the organization with which he is working. AAs’ roles within the CAFTT and the INCTF-TT are

reviewed here. This review provides some examples of the AAs' duties, and the subsequent skill sets required to best prepare them for the advisor role.

Coalition Air Force Training Team

CAFTT is charged with “building the foundation of a credible and enduring Iraqi air force.”²³ Airmen at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels are needed to accomplish the goals of this campaign. In addition to building the foundational airpower capabilities necessary to support the near-term COIN fight in Iraq, these AAs must “develop the institutional capacity and leadership” necessary for the Iraqi air force's self-sustainment.²⁴ The development of foundational capabilities requires AAs from multiple Air Force career fields, to include, but not limited to: logistics, aircraft maintenance, medical staff, professional military development instructors, recruiters, intelligence, and a variety of aircraft pilots.

Each airman must have the technical expertise necessary to set a professional standard for mission accomplishment. This technical expertise is only effective if conveyed in a context that is comprehensible to the AA's Iraqi counterpart. Even this technical expertise is subject to cultural interpretation. For example, cultural differences might lead to different interpretations of intelligence information received during an airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) mission.

These differences are challenging when teaching technical skills such as aircraft maintenance, flight instruction, or ISR collection. The differences are even more pronounced when advising at the operational and strategic levels. Examples of operational and strategic levels in CAFTT include advising on the topics of COIN and counter-terrorism (CT). AA feedback reveals some of these differences and their associated challenges and is addressed later in this paper.

Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Transition Team

AAs working with INCTF-TT are quickly faced with these strategic, operational, and CT nuances. INCTF is Iraq's primary CT unit. The critical AA roles within INCTF range from the tactical to strategic level operations. The tactical level requires advisors to perform roles similar to those in CAFTT, with an emphasis on CT. Within INCTF, Iraq's Special Operations Forces (ISOF) conduct operations at the tactical level. This is an area appropriate for the 6th SOS, and the FID mission. AAs at the operational level advise Iraqi officers from Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Command (CTC). Strategic level operations are conducted at Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Bureau (CTB). AA operations within INCTF-TT require cultural familiarity with Army, Air Force, and Special Forces operations, in addition to the inherent challenges of operating in the unfamiliar territory of Iraq. These unique cultural challenges demand cultural knowledge in a variety of areas, and the adaptability to function in a diverse environment.

AIR ADVISOR PRE-DEPLOYMENT TRAINING (AN EVALUATION)

These diverse AA missions require specialized training. Interview results show that many recently deployed AAs received a variety of training from a variety of institutions with vastly different syllabi, course lengths, and culture and language emphasis. CST and the AF Air Advisor Course are two of the most common pre-deployment courses that AAs attended. Other AAs were sent to contractor-run training program, which will also be addressed. The emphasis of CST is geared more toward tactical movements than the cross-cultural competence (3C) mentioned earlier in the paper. The AA Course curriculum addresses 3C in greater detail, yet there is significant room for improvement. Other courses are usually task specific, but not necessarily appropriate for the AA role. Time and budget constraints demand the most efficient training programs possible. An evaluation of these programs, utilizing AA interviews highlights the deficiencies and strengths of each program as related to AA preparation.

Combat Skills Training

The CST course content varies depending on the location of the training. The majority of airmen receive ancillary training at their permanent base prior to deploying, and this is sometimes referenced as combat skills training. The CST described in this paper is separate from the training administered at an airman's home duty station; rather, it refers to the training administered by the Army. CST is most commonly

attended by individuals in a joint operations assignment, or those assigned to *in-lieu-of* (ILO) positions with the Army. As of December 2008, the ILO positions were labeled Joint Expeditionary Taskings (JET). ILO/JET policy allows airmen to fill ground combat capability gaps.²⁵ Some airmen filling ILO positions are also filling AA positions in a joint environment.

Airmen filling ILO positions attend CST training, which takes place over a period of four to six weeks and is administered at variety of Army bases, including Ft McCoy, Wisconsin; Ft Bragg, North Carolina; and Ft Dix, New Jersey. The training administered during CST focuses on the following core competencies: base defense, urban operations, convoy operations, improvised explosive device detection, gun-truck crew skills, reaction to sniper fire, and a platoon live-fire exercise.²⁶ These competencies provide airmen deploying with a tactical Army unit the basic skills to survive and to be familiar with basic Army maneuvers. The culture and language training includes a one-hour PowerPoint presentation on either Iraq or Afghanistan, depending on the location of the deployment tasking. A native Arabic speaker, but not necessarily a native Iraqi briefs the Iraq-focused PowerPoint presentation. The length and quality of this training is dependent upon the instructor and his familiarity with the dialect of the region he is instructing. Three interviewees who attended CST stated that the combined total of their language and culture training consisted of approximately two to four

hours of a generic overview of Arab culture and language. The language training provided is not tested and is not region specific.

The three AAs who attended CST were asked to assess the applicability of their training to the jobs they were asked to perform in Iraq. All three AAs reported that the training was not applicable to their duties. They all listed the primary deficiencies as a lack of useful language training and insufficient cultural training. When asked if any of the training they received was used, they unanimously stated that the one hour of cultural training was the most useful training received but mentioned that it still severely lacked sufficient content. The comments on the language training were even more critical with one AA stating that it was a “complete waste of time.”²⁷ All AAs agreed that language training is paramount, but one hour of training did little for their Arabic language skills.

Air Force Air Advisor Course

The AA Course addresses some of the deficiencies noted in the CST program and is constructed specifically for the AA mission. The now mandatory, 21-day AA Course is administered by Air Education and Training Command (AETC) and executed by the USAF Expeditionary Center at Ft Dix, New Jersey. The AA Course Plan of Instruction provides the following purpose statement:

The Air Advisor Ground Training Course provides just-in-time pre-deployment ground centric training for USAF personnel in advanced weapons handling, combat lifesaving, enhanced force protection, improvised explosive device awareness, high threat driving, language, cultural awareness, Irregular Warfare, counterinsurgency, convoy and other combat/advisor critical ground skills.²⁸

The plan of instruction totals 171 hours, with 30 hours of language training, and approximately ten hours of culture training.²⁹ The amount of information delivered in just 21 days is impressive to say the least. A brief look at the plan of instruction provides an overview of pertinent topics for AAs' success, with an ambitious timeline. Part of the training includes briefings from returning AAs, who have recent operational experience. An appropriate question in the context of this paper is, how effective is the language and culture training? Specifically, is enough time allotted for AAs to develop a functional level of language skill and cultural awareness? The AAs who attended the AA Course had mixed responses.

The two advisors who attended the AA Course were instructor pilots teaching Iraqi pilot-trainees at the tactical level. Both AAs stated that the English skills of the Iraqi student pilots were sufficient to allow for adequate mission execution. However, these same AAs stated that there were many cultural lessons that should have been emphasized in their cultural classes, which they otherwise learned by trial and error. Overall the AA Course seemed well suited to the tactical level AA mission.

Other Training Options

Before the AA Course at Ft Dix was formalized, a mix of contractor, DOD, and AF professionals provided pre-deployment training to AAs. Four of the eight AAs interviewed attended these courses. The courses were all two weeks in duration with a focus on small arms tactics, marksmanship, and tactical driving for the first week. The second week focused on language and culture and included guest lecturers from the Defense Language Institute (DLI) and the 6th SOS. Additionally, the curriculum included critical courses such as the combat lifesavers course and high risk of capture course were planned for, but not always accomplished due to a lack of instructor availability.

The DLI instructors were well versed in the Arabic language and culture; however, the AAs reported that they were general-area experts without specific knowledge of the dialects of the regions they were briefing. An AA attending this course in October 2007 stated that the lessons for Iraq and Afghanistan were “clumped together,” which resulted in the omission of many important regional specifics.³⁰

CST and the AA Course are the most prevalent courses that AAs attend prior to deploying. Each course is geared toward a slightly different mission. The AA Course, as expected, has a more appropriate plan of instruction for an AA than the Army’s CST. Unfortunately, not all AAs are identified early enough to attend the AA course. An airman filling a JET may not know he or she is filling an AA position, in which case

CST is likely the only training course completed prior to deployment. All of the training reviewed reported deficiencies in region-specific language and culture training. The severity of these deficiencies was much less for the AA Course at Ft Dix; however, there is room for improvement. The performance analysis section highlights specific areas for improvement and the recommendations section provides suggestions for reducing these deficiencies.

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

Interviews with individuals from strategic, operational, and tactical levels of CAFTT and INCTF-TT were conducted. The interviews focused on questions relating to pre-deployment training and its effectiveness in accomplishing the AA mission. Both AAs from INCTF-TT functioned at the operational and strategic levels, and attended CST prior to deploying. Two CAFTT AAs operated at the operational and strategic levels, while three others were instructor pilots working at the tactical level. Interviewees were asked to describe what they deemed the most critical skill sets for mission accomplishment, and if their pre-deployment training contributed to these skill sets. AAs were asked for ways to improve the development of these skill sets, including recommendations for curriculum changes in AA training courses. For a list of interview questions see appendix A.

Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Transition Team

AAs working for INCTF-TT had the harshest criticism of their pre-deployment training and subsequently provided many recommendations for improvement. Both INCTF-TT AAs attended CST prior to arrival in Iraq. Neither of them received an accurate job description until being contacted by their predecessor. The job they were tasked to fill was the G3 Air Advisor for Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Command. Capt Matt Harting served in this position from January through July 2009. He stated that the key to effective advising was "patience," and understanding that the Iraqi way of doing things is often different than what most US advisors are accustomed to dealing with. Captain Harting referred to this as understanding the "*inshallah*" attitude. *Inshallah* translates to "God willing," and is often used to reply to the American AA when the AA begins asking for things that the Iraqi may or may not deliver.³¹ He stated that an AA is often tempted to lose patience and begin doing a job the "American way," and this is a critical mistake. Captain Harting also mentioned that simply making an effort to speak Arabic, and spending time with the Iraqis produced some of the most noticeable positive results.³²

Captain Harting and his successor, Capt Elliot Nelson, both noted that the US Special Forces (SF) field experts they worked with taught them some of their most valuable lessons, with respect to cultural interactions. Consequently, they recommended the incorporation of

experienced SF operators as an invaluable addition to pre-deployment training. The SF operators would be used to convey stories of personal successes and failures to the AA trainees prior to their deployments. Moreover, both AAs recommended additional language training, stating the language training they received in CST was of no value. Overall, the AF airmen assigned to ILO/JET positions in INCTF-TT received inadequate training at CST, were not presented with an accurate job description, and felt focused, region-specific training in the areas of culture and language would have significantly improved their productivity as AAs.

Coalition Air Force Training Team

The AAs working at the staff-level of CAFTT were less critical of their pre-deployment training than the INCTF-TT AAs; however, their recommendations for improving training were similar to those of the AAs from INCTF-TT. Capt Matthew Warner was the CAFTT Director of Iraqi AF Combat Operations from January 2008 to January 2009.³³ While functioning at the operational and strategic levels, Captain Warner stated the number one key to success was “the ability to speak the Arabic language.” Attempts by members of the CAFTT staff to develop policy and create new programs were often lost in translation, which severely hampered forward progress. He expressed cultural interaction as the next most-important factor to success as an AA.

The cultural instruction Captain Warner received from DLI instructors was part of the two weeks of training provided by Armor Group International/International Training Institute. While the instruction was accurate, the PowerPoint briefing format of instruction prevented classroom student interaction. Captain Warner recommended the addition of interactive training scenarios to the AA course. He stated taking part in a simulation of an Iraqi staff meeting or practicing the social custom of drinking tea with Iraqi actors would have been excellent preparation for the type of interactions he experienced while advising. Overall, the staff-level CAFTT AAs stated their pre-deployment training did not enhance language and cultural interaction skills, which were decidedly the most useful skills in the advisor role.

The language training deficiencies were not as evident in the interview responses from the CAFTT AAs, working at the tactical level. Maj Wes Smith, an AA who instructs Iraqi flight training in Kirkuk, attributed successful language interactions to the extremely high English language standard required as a prerequisite for Iraqi pilots.³⁴ Major Smith stated speaking slowly and avoiding colloquialisms usually resulted in very few mission-degrading miscommunications between AAs and Iraqi students.

Ironically, the AAs who stated language training was not mission-critical received more language training than any other AAs interviewed.

These AAs attended the AA Course, and reported they received two to three hours of language training every morning for a two-week period. Their recommendations to improve the AA Course included the addition of region-specific experts, who are able to teach the specific dialect of language, particularly the silent language of hand gestures, body language, and cultural differences.

AAs from the tactical, operational, and strategic levels all made the same request for regionally oriented cultural training. The need for language training was very pronounced at the strategic and operational levels, but less pronounced at the tactical level. One limitation of these results is that all tactical-level AAs interviewed served as instructor pilots, and not all Iraqi air force personnel possess the same English skills as the Iraqi pilots. Consequently, other AAs may find Arabic language skills are more important to their mission's success. AAs frequently reported patience coupled with a desire to understand and investigate the reasons behind Iraqi decisions as the most important factors in contributing toward mission success. There are many different methods of learning and practicing these skill sets. Some of these methods are explored in the next section.

INTEGRATING OTHER TRAINING OPTIONS (AN EVALUATION)

The need to develop airmen with international and cultural awareness, as well as proficient language skills is a recent hot-topic. Past and current emphasis on such development provides examples of training administration and successful developmental practices. The initiation of the International Affairs Strategist (IAS) program, integration of anthropologists into the development of cultural training, and the continued successes of cultural/language programs utilized by the 6th SOS along with SF soldiers should all be reviewed and applied, when applicable, to AA training.

International/Regional Affairs Strategist Program

On 6 April 2005, Gen John Jumper sent out a document titled the “Chief’s Sight Picture,” addressing the need for the IAS program.³⁵ The intent of this program was to “develop a cadre of Air Force professionals with international insight, foreign language proficiency, and cultural understanding.”³⁶ In the past, these types of professionals existed as Foreign Area Officers (FAO) and were identified only if they had acquired on their own, the cultural and linguistic skills necessary for specific international duties. Recognizing the need to deliberately develop these professionals, the Air Force started two tracks of IAS; Regional Area Strategists (RAS), and Political-Military Affairs Strategists (PAS). The RAS program produces an officer with a regionally focused graduate degree; in

addition to beginning and advanced language training.³⁷ This training spans a total of three years. The PAS program develops line officers by providing a one-year international affairs-related degree and increased awareness of the application of air and space power in the international arena.³⁸

It is not realistic to send all AAs through three years of RAS training. The PAS program, one year in length, is likely to increase cultural competence but does not include sufficient language training. Neither the RAS nor PAS programs could currently support the 578 students sent through AA training in fiscal year 2008.³⁹ Since fiscal and time constraints prevent AAs from receiving this lengthy training, RAS and PAS leaders could be present in deployed locations and available to provide counsel, routine instruction, critiques, and to administer on-the-job training to AAs on a daily basis. These specialists would be most useful at the operational and strategic levels of advising.

Army Special Forces Cultural/Language Training

The time allotted for the language and cultural training to Army SF soldiers is similar to that provided to students in the RAS program. SOF training includes four to six months of language and culture training, depending on the complexity of the language being taught. This training culminates in a graduation exercise referred to as *Robin Sage*. *Robin Sage* is a high-stress environment where students' language skills and

cultural awareness is tested. The evaluator is experienced in advising foreign cultures in an environment similar to those the SF soldier will encounter when deployed for a real-world operation. The instructors are cultural experts acting as guerilla fighters and are usually retired SF operators with extensive real-world experience. If a trainee does not communicate his point appropriately to the acting guerillas, he does not successfully accomplish the mission.⁴⁰ Feedback from professionals experienced in the field is invaluable to the understanding and application of cultural and language training. AAs returning from Iraq could be used in a similar way to act out realistic scenarios with AA trainees.

6th Special Operations Cultural/Language Training

The 6th SOS has been regularly requested to provide training and advice in the AA courses. Unfortunately, their availability is limited due to real-world assignments. Their intense language training and real-world experience makes them an extremely unique unit within the AF. Students training in the 6th SOS take part in four to eight months of language school. Students are currently required to attain a proficiency score of 1/1, on a scale that ranges from 0/0 to 4/4, with a 4/4 being the highest score attainable.⁴¹ The students receive their scores after taking an oral proficiency interview (OPI) that tests communication skills. Some students receive immersion training after completion of their OPI. For immersion training, the student spends one month conducting daily

activities with a local family in his region of interest. Another initiative designed to improve language skills include a pilot program, utilizing a direct method approach, which is administered by Global Language Systems (GLS). An interview with a representative from the AF Special Operations Training Center revealed that 21 days of Arabic training using GLS resulted in scores of 0+. In comparison, students using current training programs normally achieve a 0+ after at least six months of training. Therefore, innovative developments in language instruction should continue to be considered, particularly those that focus on functional oral communication.

The cultural and language training provided to Army SF soldiers, 6th SOS airmen, and AF RAS trains individuals targeted to work in the international arena as a career. This level of training may not be necessary for AAs instructing pilot training to English speaking Iraqis. On the other hand, AAs operating at the operational and strategic levels have noted in their interviews that this is exactly the type of training they needed to achieve greater successes in their jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The AA interviews pointed out many deficiencies in AA training while providing suggestions for improvement. One of the significant findings in the evaluation of the effectiveness of current AA training is that specific AA positions require correspondingly specific training. There is not a suitable “one size fits all” approach to AA training. Some training currently administered should be removed altogether, while other training should be expanded upon. AAs working at the strategic and operational levels require different training than those at the tactical level. Moreover, all AA training will benefit from the integration of academic experts and field experts that must be utilized to convey the appropriate knowledge to AAs prior to their deployments.

Advisors tasked for ILO/JET positions need immediate attention. The most influential step toward enhancing their training is the development of an accurate job description. This deficiency precludes these AAs from completing appropriate training and wastes their time learning inapplicable ground-combat maneuvers. CST is not appropriate for AAs and continuing to send ILO/JET airmen to this training prior to establishing the needs of their deployment duties lowers morale and is an inefficient use of skilled airmen. Further discussion on the shortfalls of ILO/JET deficiencies is outside the scope of this paper.

Assuming AAs have been properly identified, they should be sent to the most appropriate training currently available. At this time, the AF

AA Course is the best AA training available. Course improvements should be considered in order to make the most efficient use of the limited pre-deployment training time available. One method of improving training is by dividing the students into specific training groups or “tracks.” Courses developed by anthropologists will help emphasize cultural differences, cultural awareness, and cultural complexity. While some courses are general enough to apply to all students, designating students to specific tracks will allow further specialization in the jobs they are assigned. Tracks should be selected based on variables such as: deployment location, deployment job description, level of operations (strategic, operational, or tactical), and prior experience.

Division of classes by deployment location allows training in the specific verbal and non-verbal dialect of the area to which the AA will deploy. By using job descriptions to divide AAs, relevant job-specific scenarios can be designed for interactive cultural exercises. The level of operations and the job description help determine how much language training an AA should acquire and what level of proficiency he needs to effectively advise. Interview results emphasized that AAs working with Iraqi pilots do not need significant language training. This may not be the case if AAs are deploying to a location where foreign pilots do not possess the same level of English skills. AAs at the operational and strategic levels reported that language skills were extremely important. AAs tasked to these positions should receive intense language training similar to the

training provided to SF soldiers and 6th SOS advisors. A reduction in training time may be possible by using innovative teaching techniques, such as those developed by GLS. Ideally, these AAs would be able to attain a DLPT OPI score of 1/1 after six months of training. The combination of basic language skills and qualified linguists would address many of the language issues referenced in AA interviews.

Accomplishing six months of language training is a significant investment of time and money. This training could be credited toward professional military education (PME) completion, and the subsequent AA tour at the operational and strategic level will likely provide valuable staff experience. Credit for PME and staff duty would need to be addressed by AF assignment personnel at the Air Force Personnel Center. Increasing the number of airmen trained as RAS/PAS, and utilizing them in AA roles is another possible course of action.

The fortunate airmen who do gain this cultural training and these valuable cultural experiences are an investment for the Air Force. Using returning AAs to lecture, teach, and develop relevant scenarios, which could be presented in the AA Course will demonstrate rapid returns on this investment. In addition, feedback should be gathered from AAs before, during, and after their pre-deployment training, as well as before, during, and after their actual deployment.

CONCLUSION

The feedback gathered in this paper demonstrates that most AAs deploying to Iraq are not receiving enough region-specific cultural and language training to appropriately accomplish their mission. The character of current conflict and recent emphasis on the relevance of cultural and language skills to national security demand an evaluation of current AA preparation. A review of past and present AA operations throughout the Air Force provided an idea of the various skill sets needed for AA success. Furthermore, evaluation of the most common pre-deployment training pointed out the lack of region-specific cultural training, and the need for additional language training for most AA positions. The positive feedback received for the AA Course did not overshadow the need to address the deficiencies described by past and presently deployed AAs. Additionally, potential remedies for these deficiencies were explored in an evaluation of the culture and language training provided in specialized courses such as AF RAS/PAS training, Army SF training, and the AF's 6th SOS training. Finally, recommendations for improvement incorporated AA feedback and aspects of the specialized culture and language training provided throughout other Department of Defense schools. By considering these changes the AF will build upon the initial successes of the AF AA Course at Ft Dix. Successful engagement of widespread insurgencies, through

the actions of appropriately trained AAs, provides the airpower essential to promote stability in turbulent regions of the world.

APPENDIX A: AIR ADVISOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Where were you an Air Advisor, and for what organization did you work?

When were you an Air Advisor?

What formal pre-deployment training did you attend (Combat Skills, Air Advisor, etc.)?

Where was your pre-deployment training?

How long was your pre-deployment training?

What were the most important skill sets you used to effectively accomplish your duties?

Did your pre-deployment training enhance these skill sets?

Did your pre-deployment training effectively prepare you for the position you were assigned to fill?

Did you have an accurate job description prior to your deployment?

Were you able to accomplish self-study prior to deploying?

What, if anything would you add to pre-deployment training?

What, if anything would you remove from pre-deployment training?

APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS

AA Air Advisor

AEF Air and Space Expeditionary Force

AOR Area Of Responsibility

AFSC Air Force Specialty Codes

CAFTT Coalition Air Force Training Team

COIN Counterinsurgency

CRLFP Culture, Region & Language Flight Plan

CST Combat Skills Training

CT Counterterrorism

CTB Counter-Terrorism Bureau

CTC Counter-Terrorism Command

DLI Defense Language Institute

FAO Foreign Area Officers

FID Foreign Internal Defense

FM Field Manual

GLS Global Language Systems

IAS International Affairs Strategist

ILO *In-Lieu-Of*

INCTF Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Task Force

INCTF-TT Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Task Force-Transition Team

ISOF Iraqi Special Operations Forces

ISR Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

IW Irregular Warfare

JET Joint Expeditionary Tasking

MNSTC-I Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq

OPI Oral Proficiency Interview

PAS Political-Military Affairs Strategist

PN Partner Nation

RAS Regional Area Strategist

SOF Special Operations Forces

SF Special Forces

END NOTES

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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7. US Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, 13.
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9. US Air Force, *AF Culture, Region & Language Flight Plan*, 5.
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13. Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence*, 2.
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17. Hall, *The Silent Language*, ix.
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