

## ENHANCING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE: ADVISOR SELECTION, TRAINING, AND EMPLOYMENT

BY

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| 14. ABSTRACT<br><br>The United States has employed military advisors since our founding as a nation. The U.S. military may have captured the lessons learned from throughout its history of association with advisory missions, but mismatches remain in our current Department of Defense (DoD) directives, doctrine, and guidance regarding the execution of Security Force Assistance (SFA) operations - specifically in relation to the selection, training, and employment of advisors, a key executor of this strategic mission. The U.S. experience in Vietnam and resulting lessons learned (or not learned) from contemporary SFA operations form a basis for improvements for the current identification, preparation, and utilization of advisors serving in overseas contingency operations (OCO). This research project then recommends how the military should select and assess advisors. It further recommends a training program for them and proposes they can be best employed as part of a unified, well-coordinated contingency operation. |                             |                                             |                                             |                                          |                                                           |
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**ENHANCING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE:  
ADVISOR SELECTION, TRAINING, AND EMPLOYMENT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The United States has employed military advisors since our founding as a nation. The U.S. military may have captured the lessons learned from throughout its history of association with advisory missions, but mismatches remain in our current Department of Defense (DoD) directives, doctrine, and guidance regarding the execution of Security Force Assistance (SFA) operations - specifically in relation to the selection, training, and employment of advisors, a key executor of this strategic mission. The U.S. experience in Vietnam and resulting lessons learned (or not learned) from contemporary SFA operations form a basis for improvements for the current identification, preparation, and utilization of advisors serving in overseas contingency operations (OCO). This research project then recommends how the military should select and assess advisors. It further recommends a training program for them and proposes they can be best employed as part of a unified, well-coordinated contingency operation.





## ENHANCING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE: ADVISOR SELECTION, TRAINING, AND EMPLOYMENT

Under conditions of active conflict where we have direct responsibility for security - as in Iraq and Afghanistan – tactical commanders will have a security force assistance mission to train, advise, and assist tactical host nation forces

—General Martin Dempsey, May 2009<sup>1</sup>

Assigning, training, and employing soldiers to provide security assistance and to contribute to other nation building tasks is a challenge for militaries that are primarily oriented on the conduct of major combat operations. Pursuing advisory duties in theaters and local areas of operation while friendly units simultaneously conduct primarily lethal operations is an ever greater challenge - but one that must also be understood and overcome. Our nation will need to provide advisors in foreign lands for the foreseeable future as we seek to build partner capacity in militaries that will either take over a fight as we exit a region, or assist us in other coalition operations. This very visible assistance is incredibly meaningful for all who are involved in it. Done correctly it will pay strategic dividends well into the future.

Based on lessons learned from the American experience in Vietnam and those gained from our current practice around the world, this Strategic Research Project (SRP) assesses the challenges of the military advisory mission, a key component of Security Force Assistance (SFA). It then offers recommendations designed to improve our advisor practices, and which have become a relevant and vital capability of the U.S. military. The U.S. Army is performing the majority of the current advisory missions. Accordingly, this SRP focuses on Army programs. However, its analysis and recommendations pertain to the larger joint force.

## Background

SFA is not a new task. Militaries and nation states have employed military advisors throughout recorded history, such as the French and German advisors who aided the American Colonial forces as they fought the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. In its more recent application of SFA over the past fifty years, the United States has used different terms to explain why the nation deploys military advisors and to explain the purpose of the force used - to include the employment of an advisory force in sequenced or phased operations. Today, there is a standard DoD definition for SFA:

The Department of Defense activities that contribute to unified action by the U.S. Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions. Also called SFA. (JP 3-22)<sup>2</sup>

There is also attendant doctrine that has evolved based on our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. These documents have clarified how to balance combat operations while assisting a host nation as it develops its ability to provide for its own security. Our latest counterinsurgency doctrine in particular places a premium on SFA, identifying it as vital in the current environment and for the foreseeable future.<sup>3</sup>

Doctrine does not solve everything, however, as there are frictions that arise in execution. Our Department of Defense (DoD) Directives and Instructions can say one thing, but our actions don't always match the intent.

One reason is that we are trying to match doctrine with an evolving force structure. Our force structure of the military has evolved considerably since Vietnam. This structure has served us well in a multitude of operations across the spectrum of conflict, but it has undergone a fundamental change in the past decade, one that has implications for the performance of SFA missions. In March 2004,<sup>4</sup> the Army, under

then-Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker, changed the base structure of our ground maneuver fighting force from a division-centric force to one built around individually-deployable brigade combat teams (BCTs). The change in structure added a wide range of lethal and nonlethal capabilities to the BCTs that were not previously organic to their predecessor maneuver brigades: essentially the BCT is a fully formed all-arms and self-contained task force. With these capabilities have come a myriad of responsibilities, including those of advisory duties when that mission is called upon. Now colonels in command of BCTs, without the previously available aid or advice of a major general division commander, must maintain considerable awareness of the interagency and military goals of the contingency operations in which their BCTs are participating. The larger Army (and joint force) has to be prepared to fight across the spectrum of operations. And it has to ensure that its main tactical level elements, those charged with advising, have a holistic view of the fight, to include strategic objectives and implications. So in the Army's new BCT-oriented structure, BCT commanders are charged with operating independently and, when necessary, conducting advisory missions. To succeed, they must think strategically and operationally, even as they are directing tactical actions.

Another friction point is that SFA operations range far beyond tactical boundaries and single ownership of simple problems. Our military is but one portion of the overall effort of host nation assistance. In supporting a host nation with the training and development of their military force (or, to the extent required, the various departments of the government), the advisory role assumes strategic importance and can contribute to the overall successful outcome of the campaign. In Vietnam, as well as in current

operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. exit strategy is based on leaving behind a secure and stable government. One of the key strategic components of this exit strategy requires development of a competent military loyal to the newly formed government and capable of providing security for the host nation. Properly trained military advisors facilitate this goal. This is not always easily accomplished.

Fortunately, we have two points of reference, one historical, and one contemporary, and that is in the form of lessons learned. The U.S. military makes every effort to quickly capture and disseminate lessons learned so we can learn from our current mistakes and capture successful practices. This institutional learning process enables our military to implement immediate and long-term changes for the future benefit of the force in such critical areas as manning, equipping, and doctrine, so that our soldiers can learn how missions have been executed or how problems were solved as they prepare for their own upcoming individual and organizational duties.

The Vietnam conflict and today's overseas contingency operations (OCO) exhibit similarities in the mission preparation (particularly in training) for the deploying force and in tactical execution, as well as the needed command and control structures required for all military operations. The Vietnam experience should have provided a solid basis for us to fight the counterinsurgency fights we are now executing, and as such remains a valuable reference period.

In the case of the Vietnam conflict, U.S. military advisory activities began while the French were still executing combat operations there. Our involvement quickly accelerated after the Indochina cease-fire agreement (Geneva Accords) of July 20, 1954. The United States deployed more advisors to the South Vietnamese Forces. The

initial deployment of U.S. advisors, in support of the French effort in Vietnam, was established under what was termed the Military Assistance Advisory Group - Vietnam (MAAG-V). MAAG-V grew over the years, undergoing consolidations and changes of structure as the U.S. command and control evolved and the situation on the ground developed<sup>5</sup>. The initial mission in Vietnam was limited to separate training and advisory teams tasked to teach proper use of the U.S.-provided equipment and to provide operational advice to the French forces. The personnel selected for this mission were different from those required to train combat forces at the tactical level, being educated in the host nation's language and culture. At least initially, they were carefully selected and thoroughly trained to advise host nation counterparts. Indeed, the U.S. war in Vietnam began with this advisory mission. The escalation of the U.S. combat role diminished the priority of attention and resources awarded to the advisory effort, which handicapped us greatly in the end in that country. On the other hand, the war in Iraq began with a major combat operation and added an advisory effort that commenced later in our involvement there. The contemporary challenge became the same as in Vietnam, however: we had to figure out how to prioritize sometimes simultaneous combat and advisory efforts within a common theater, if not common battle space, and we had issues supplying the best prepared personnel for their advisor roles.

Following the Vietnam War, our strategic leaders had the enormous task of restructuring and re-training an all-volunteer force. Our recent senior leaders' biographies (mostly written following retirement from the military) offer views and lessons learned that guided these strategic leaders through the rest of their service. In his biography, General (Retired) Colin Powell highlights his Colin Powell Rules that he kept on his

desk to ensure he provided proper advice and leadership as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Tommy Franks, in his biography written after he retired from command of U.S. Central Command, reports that his experience in Vietnam had a role in his future positions as well. These, and many more of our leaders who served at the tactical level in Vietnam, vowed to not repeat the mistakes they observed in the field. General Gordon Sullivan's "No more Task Force Smiths", composed while he served as the Army Chief of Staff who guided the restructure of the Army after Operations Desert Shield and Storm, focused on lessons learned from the hollow force that conducted the initial U.S. ground response at the start of the Korean War. This literary trend evolved to "no more Vietnams" regarding the employment of America's military power.

Capturing and remembering the key lessons of the past should guide the military in the future, but our lessons learned are not solely based on senior leaders' observations. The institutional Army also has the power and commendable professional interest to direct that lessons be captured through field surveys. In the case of Vietnam, the RAND Corporation, under the auspices of the DoD's Research and Development Field Unit, Advanced Research Projects Agency, deployed in country in 1964 to evaluate and recommend improvements to the advisory effort there.<sup>6</sup> In the subsequently produced report, RAND author and researcher Dr. Gerald C. Hickey stated that the results were not meant to serve as a precise blueprint for the future, but he hoped that his findings would "contribute constructively to ongoing efforts for increasing the effectiveness of the advisory program."<sup>7</sup> His 84-page report concludes that the problems identified could be remedied at the macro level "through a more careful selection of personnel; improvements to their training; and a variety of

administrative changes.”<sup>8</sup> This 1965 RAND report contains important findings relevant to today’s employment of advisors, and will be highlighted later within this SRP.

Aside from historical lessons learned the other source of lessons to be considered and applied within SFA come from contemporary observers. The discussions occurring today amongst our communities of practice and interest, those junior through senior leaders who are veterans of SFA, are incredibly encouraging, and are key to solving some of our thornier advisory challenges now and in the future. Former advisors are now writing multiple blogs, essays, and articles in professional and scholarly journals. Much of the active information-sharing comes at the company grade and junior field grade level - among those who have served as advisors at the tactical level. But the dialogue is also being conducted at the highest levels. General Martin Dempsey, current Commander of the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and new designee as the Chief of Staff, Army (CSA), characterizes advising other nation counterparts as “an enduring mission” in his May 2009 article in *Small Wars Journal*. The article, titled “Security Force Assistance,” has lent legitimacy “from the top” to the advisory effort within the Army and the wider defense community.

An additional formal forum for information-sharing within the advisor community exists in the *SFA Forum*, a professional blog site hosted and maintained by the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>9</sup> This forum was created to provide a means of professional communication and knowledge-sharing within its designated community, and an examination of its activity affirms that current advisors not only desire considerable satisfaction from their

duties now, but are very interested in bettering the advising structure and practice on a widespread basis.

Within the overall structure of the effort of sharing lessons learned and updating SFA doctrine, there has to be an organization that makes sense of the information, ensure lessons are placed into practice, and speak for the mission on a responsible basis. The Army's proponentcy for SFA is the Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCOE), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>10</sup> Proponentcy at the DoD level is provided by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), as directed by DoD Directive (DoDD) 5100.01. Proponentcy at the highest level is invaluable. For example, the DoD is doing a tremendous job of utilizing study groups and lecture series to encourage the public as well as other departments within the government to support contingency operations and SFA, and also benefit from our lessons learned.

Clearly, there is an abundance of information to be found in our information forums addressing how to better ourselves in the advisory realm, but not all of it is helpful. For example, ideas abound about how the advisory effort should be further organized, to include proposals for standing up a new command or a dedicated advisory force. This idea is supported by several Army War College SRPs and Command and General Staff College Master of Military Arts theses that argue for the establishment of a new force structure for the military's advisory mission. This is an example of how some initiatives need to be considered wisely, and reined in where needed. In this case, DoD does not need to establish a completely new structure to improve its ability to conduct SFA. Special Forces soldiers and teams already operate world-wide under the direction of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and in support of



the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs). They conduct missions to support democracies around the world and to affirm the inherent rights of citizens to voice their concerns, in accordance with the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS)<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, geographic combatant commanders, through their theater security cooperation plans, conduct numerous military peacetime engagements on a daily basis, and have done so for years. There is a structure in place at the top end: not everything we do requires overhaul.

The bottom line is that there is a large body of historical and current information that can inform our civilian and military leaders in the security assistance realm, and there is as much active interest in the advisory mission from across the DoD community as we could wish for. There is also certainly room for improvement for SFA and the advisor mission, and a need for the best-selected, trained and employed force possible. There are also methods to approach this challenge without making the advisor mission a “single-track” or stand-alone “craft.” For example, a ranger-qualified soldier or leader can serve in the Ranger Regiment or in other positions, because he possesses skills that enable him to perform well in many military roles. Likewise, providing individual training for advisors improves the overall force, whether those individuals serve as advisors or not.

This leaves the discussion of how to enhance the advisory spectrum so that it is complementary to all of the Army’s and DoD’s potential missions and capability aspirations. Examination of the methodology of selecting advisors, training them to perform advisory roles, and then having the requisite command and control structure in place to lead them, forms a logical sequence so that the advisor mission fits in with our

larger defense scheme. In effect, this evolutionary process implements and integrates into the force the doctrine written as a result of lessons from recent advisory experiences gained from past and current assignments around the world.

However, the entire SFA mission begins with selecting the right soldiers to perform as advisors.

### Selecting Advisors

There are currently no established DoD criteria for advisor selection. Since the 1970s, the military has learned that a volunteer force is a more motivated force capable of defending our nation because its soldiers elect to do so. They are not forced to serve. They also tend to be more ready to volunteer for greater challenges within the profession. And the Army provides opportunities for these willing individuals. The Army airborne community is an example of further volunteerism. It offers a special qualification and capability that extends beyond the average expectations of a member of the Army. As two-time volunteers, paratroopers undergo specialized training and are also compensated financially and ritualistically. They wear the coveted maroon beret and airborne wings. They stand taller and act with more confidence than those soldiers not airborne qualified. The Army continues to rely on willing volunteers as its first criteria for assignment to an airborne unit. But today there is little prestige associated with volunteering to be an advisor, to the detriment of the mission and the success of the advisor team and the overall military objective. There is also no current additional skill identifier, badge, or tab to recognize those trained for advisory duty, nor any particular incentive for promotion. Hence, there is no recognition for such special service as there is with being a paratrooper.

The lack of prestige associated with advisory duty is not a new phenomenon. The Vietnam RAND report noted that as the U.S. involvement continued in Vietnam in the early 1960s, soldiers preferred duty with combat forces rather than duty with units with an advisory mission. "MAAG-V duty was not a high priority. No particular selection criteria were required except for rank, MOS, and vulnerability to overseas tour."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, our policy for selecting advisors for Iraq and Afghanistan has not changed. There is no special cachet associated with advisor duty. We still select advisors based on rank, military occupational specialty (MOS), and the requirement for overseas tour equity across the force.

The 1965 RAND Report recognized that voluntary service as an advisor would provide a more motivated and dedicated advisory group through a "careful screening process":

...devised to test the candidate's suitability from the point of view of (a) professional equipment [language dictionaries, cultural books]; (b) adaptability to foreign cultures; (c) a temperamental disposition, especially in the case of prospective field advisors, to share dangers, hardships, exotic food, and primitive shelter with members of an oriental civilization; (d) existing linguistic skills or the ability to acquire languages easily; (e) the possibility of "cultural fatigue" in a man who, though otherwise qualified, has had too many overseas assignments and is not keen for another.<sup>13</sup>

These criteria are as applicable today as they were in 1965.

The current selection criteria for advisory duty in Iraq or Afghanistan very much remains a selection of "who is available" versus "who is the right person to advise" in a particular country. The U.S. Army continues to select advisors virtually by default. The 2009 lieutenant colonel command selection board centrally selected commanders to lead advisory teams in Iraq, but this action was flawed because it addressed just one advisor position within the average advisor team made of multiple ranks and specialties.

Major General (Retired) John Cushman, former Commanding General of Delta Regional Assistance Command, U.S. Military Assistance Command - Vietnam (USMAC-V), in a 1972 senior officer's debriefing report from Vietnam declared that, "The qualities which might make for an effective, or even outstanding, performance as a battalion or brigade commander are not necessarily those which make the best advisor."<sup>14</sup> In short, the unique skills and attributes of an effective advisor differ from those needed for command.

We do not have advisor selection criteria for advisor positions, except for commanders at the level of lieutenant colonel. Otherwise, we rely on Human Resources Command (HRC) to fill requests for forces with whoever is most available for assignment. Using established criteria, assignment personnel could better identify the right officers and noncommissioned officers to fill advisory billets. Potential criteria for screening and selection include:

- Successful ratings as noted on Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs) and Non-Commissioned Officer Evaluation Reports (NCOERs);
- Successful combat experience related to the tasks on which they will advise;
- Key experiences in a variety of assignments;
- Success as a teacher, instructor, or observer/controller at one of the Army's Combat Training Centers, in subjects germane to host nation needs, including doctrine and practice;
- Direct experience in the host nation or region;
- Former experience as an advisor, or foreign area officer, preferably in the host nation or region; and

- Appropriate linguistic capabilities.

Policy decisions are needed to implement this screening and selection process: Should advisor nominees' overall manner of performance as reported on evaluations equal those of the overall force, or should they reflect a qualitative cut above the norm before selection for advisor duty? These and other matters will have to be clarified as we create a candidate pool populated by personnel with as many of the desired criteria as possible.

Finally, not all of the attributes desired in an advisor are easily found in records checks. For example, advisors are going to have to live and operate closely with an indigenous force. But the Army's general purpose forces have little opportunity for such experience, so their evaluations will offer no evidence pertinent to their advisory capabilities. Additional basic human skills criteria should be established. The advisor should also have the capacity to operate largely on his own. He must trust the host nation to provide security for his team. He should also be able to understand and translate U.S. guidance as well as doctrine, using language and methods that the host nation will accept. Some characterize this as negotiation, while others call it professional dialogue with counterparts. In any case, advisors must engage in professional discussion that results in an optimum end state: the advised force uses its own techniques while accepting input from an advisor. Army senior leaders may highlight the requirement to hone human interaction skills such as these in written guidance, but assignment officers may not be able to note whether a potential advisor can "pull them off." Perhaps only formal professional training and education can produce effective advisors.

## Training of Advisors

The required base of training must address the complete spectrum of possible advisory missions to prepare advisors for any operational eventuality. Prior to both Vietnam and our current conflicts, the U.S. military focused on training large formations in conventional warfare. But as these conflicts evolved, our military perceived the need to review, adapt, and train for operations in a counter-insurgency environment. In Vietnam, beginning in January 1950, the North Vietnamese were trained by Chinese advisors. Chairman of the Communist Party of China Mao Zedong "created the Chinese Military Advisory Group and sent some of his best officers to help organize and train the Vietminh armies and plan strategy."<sup>15</sup> The North Vietnamese were taught to execute a "War of the People", while the U.S. trained the South Vietnamese in conventional tactics and doctrine. The U.S. advisors' reliance on the wrong doctrine had an obviously negative effect on the South Vietnamese forces' ability to counter the insurgency war that the North Vietnamese forces were prosecuting. It was as if the U.S. advisors wanted to prepare their South Vietnamese counterparts to play American football, but they later found themselves in a mixed martial arts fight. Fighting an insurgency requires a different focus - disparate small unit formations working among, and gaining support from, the people. Vietnam was ultimately found not to always involve large force-on-force fighting. In the similar vein, we launched our current conflicts as large conventional operations, but learned quickly that this was not going to be the norm throughout our in-country involvement. As a result, we have rewritten our counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine, and disseminated Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, in June 2006. COIN doctrine helped us focus our attention on fighting among the people. It has refined our notion of what our advisors should concentrate on in training and actual operations.

As the wars progressed in both the Vietnam conflict and in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army recognized the need to train advisors in the local cultures, language, and other key attributes, and Army schoolhouses were established to prepare advisors. For the effort in Vietnam, the Military Assistance Training Advisor Course was established in 1962 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to provide “a working knowledge of the duties of a military assistance training advisor in counterinsurgency operations.”<sup>16</sup> For the advisory mission in support of Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. Army established a training center at Fort Riley, Kansas (subsequently moved to Fort Polk, Louisiana), that focused mostly on training in culture and language of the forces with which the advisors would work.

The Vietnam RAND Report recommended key areas for the training of advisors. Its summary identified language as “the single most important factor in breaking down cultural barriers”<sup>17</sup> and recommended language training focused on the level at which the advisor would serve. The report also identified the importance of teaching advisors about cultural identity and taboos, as well as Vietnamese “history, economics, government, sociology, ethnic composition, major religious sects, and general customs.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, the report recommended that advisors should be trained on the structure of the Vietnamese military, so they could understand the organization of the military of the host nation's soldiers. The U.S. military learned from the RAND report and their experience in Vietnam. The current training curriculum incorporates many of those same recommendations.

Contemporary doctrine and guidance has also been produced by our Department of Defense. DoD Directive 1322.18, *Military Training*, published on January 13, 2009, directs “cultural awareness and language training shall be embedded in accession

training, professional military education, and pre-deployment training, and integrated across the Total Force.”<sup>19</sup> This DoDD tasks the secretaries of services to conduct training for personnel authorized specific billets within their respective forces. DODI 5000.68 makes no specific direction of language training standards, but it does require DOD subordinate activities develop appropriate language instruction, along with incentives and tracking mechanisms. In response, the Army implemented the 09L (Interpreter-Translator) course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for native speaking enlisted soldiers serving as linguists. These soldiers are playing critical roles in missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. But they do not provide all of our language needs, nor are they all assigned to advisory missions. Advisors have a larger challenge. Host nation language and culture must be essential components of advisor courses. Indeed, all soldiers and leaders should be familiarized with relevant languages and culture throughout their careers.

An Army-wide, All Army Activities (ALARACT) 222/2010 message published in 2010 declared, “The Army does not have adequate, consistent, and coherent culture and foreign language pre-deployment training standards for the GPF (General Purpose Forces).”<sup>20</sup> This deficiency was identified by the Army after eight years of conflict and seven years of continuous operations in foreign regions. It is particularly true in the case of advisors. The need for training standards was published in subsequent ALARACT messages identifying the most important training requirements for advisors. ALARACT 014-11, published on 20 January 2011, directs the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to develop the language program. It then directs the Army's force provider, Forces Command (FORSCOM), to support and implement the program once it



has been developed by TRADOC. So far no standards have been established.

ALARACT 222/2010, published on 23 July 2010, focused on language training requirements and established baseline proficiencies for deploying units. It advocates cultural knowledge training for all soldiers, not just advisors.

The Army unit currently assigned to train advisors is the 162nd Brigade, based at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Its program exceeds the cultural training requirement outlined in the ALARACTs. It provides language training, but awaits final approved requirements for levels of proficiency, and luckily advisory teams are configured to include interpreters. An advisor's use of host-nation language, even at a basic level, lends more credibility to his role, and should be able to take advantage of multiple available sources of language training - whether internet or classroom-based. Advisors should be afforded abundant opportunities to acquire considerable proficiency in host-country language. It aids in basic communication, and knowledge of a country's dominant language offers a window into its culture.

How well is our training apparatus suited to the training of the large numbers of advisors we need in the current operating environment? It should be more robust. The Afghanistan Pakistan (AfPak) Hands Program, implemented in June 2009 by then-Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Commander U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), General Stanley McChrystal, and endorsed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Admiral Richard Mullen, is an exemplary program that meets the linguistic and cultural requirements for key advisors. However, this Washington, D.C. based program is wholly focused on the operational level of

advisory activities. It has relatively few participants and it does not serve the larger advisory training mission.

For the force at large, there is currently no DoD-consolidated joint training site for training advisors for the general purpose force. In 2006, in order to handle our tactical advisory needs in Iraq and Afghanistan, the advisor training mission was established at Fort Riley, Kansas. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (1/1ID) created and delivered the initial tailored program of instruction. The 162nd Brigade, Fort Polk, Louisiana, now trains Army personnel and selected civilians and members of other military services who will be working with Army forces in advisory activities. The 162nd Brigade is a FORSCOM unit with a TRADOC mission, training security assistance (USSOCOM) tasks. The Brigade, as with 1/1ID previously, is fully engaged in advisor training and is actively involved in forums and discussions on how to best refine advisor training. But its advisor training mission conflicts with its parallel mandate to meet the myriad of FORSCOM training requirements as a potential deploying combat unit. No senior leader at the general officer rank has the singular responsibility for the advisory training mission. This is not to say that the senior leadership at Fort Polk, FORSCOM, USSOCOM, or the MCCOE do not “care” about the 162nd Brigade and its advisor training mission, or fail to give appropriate guidance.

Advisor understanding of the doctrine, the culture, and language of the region to which he is deploying is critical. But there are also additional universal skills worth considering, such as social tolerance and negotiation techniques. These capabilities are needed in any theater for all ranks. For example, newly arrived advisors should be good listeners. Gaining an understanding of the host nation forces’ needs is of paramount

importance. Advisors should not rush into a host-nation site and quickly tell the indigenous force leader what the advised units' areas for improvement or needs are, or what the leader is doing wrong. Interpersonal and listening skills are critical to gaining the trust of the advisor's counterpart. They are essential for successful advising.

In summary, advisors need a large gamut of skills. Trainers of advisors must constantly re-examine their curriculum to assure that their programs are properly prioritized and are servicing the advisory corps well. The combat training centers or online methods may provide supplementary means if those are deemed acceptable. But one central training site perhaps stands the best chance of success. It provides a responsive environment that provides accessible command oversight for multiple locations. It is a single point of success for the application of resources so it can accomplish the advisor training mission adequately and comprehensively. Quality training of advisors sets the conditions for their successful employment in support of the overall strategic objectives in the area of operations to which they are deployed.

### Employment of Advisors

A dedicated chain of command that provides unity of effort and purpose across the force facilitates the successful outcome of the overall mission. These are core components of military operations. They are imbedded in the Principles of War that are standard in the military's doctrinal courses.

After the signing of the Geneva Accords and the withdrawal of the French forces from Vietnam in 1954, there was still a need to deter the North Vietnamese from their goal of expanding their influence into South Vietnam. The U.S. advisory effort split into two components: Military Advisory Group Cambodia (MAAG-C) and Vietnam (MAAG-V). MAAG-V was given the task of developing "the military capabilities of the Republic of

Vietnam armed forces through planning, developing, and administering military assistance.”<sup>21</sup> What began as support to the French changed to direct support to the South Vietnamese government in order to counter the insurgency in Vietnam. Then the U.S. military commitment to support the South Vietnamese Government continued to expand. As time went on, the number of U.S. advisors in Vietnam grew and the expectations of their success grew as well. An increased responsibility was placed on the shoulders of the MAAG-V mission. Unfortunately, personnel selection and training were deficient. General Cao Van Vien, former Chief of the Joint General Staff, Army Republic of Vietnam, in *Indochina Monographs: the U.S. Advisor*, explained this deficiency:

The advisors assigned to MAAG had little or no information about Vietnam, its culture, or its people prior to their arrival in Saigon. The subject of teaching U.S. advisors Vietnamese or French was never brought up. Owing to the short tour of duty for advisors, those assigned felt that it was not worth it to try to learn the language, a problem that increased as U.S. involvement deepened.<sup>22</sup>

The U.S. national command authority was hesitant to deploy combat forces; it was equally unsure of how to move forward in support of countering the communist expansion into Vietnam. The true ground war in Vietnam began after the introduction of an advisory effort in 1965, when Commander MAC-V, General William Westmoreland’s request for combat force was approved.<sup>23</sup> On March 8, 1965, Marines from 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Force landed ashore in Da Nang to guard the U.S. bases there.

Unlike in Vietnam, the U.S. effort in Iraq began with combat operations in March, 2003 and then transformed to an advisory and assistance role as the situation developed. The need to train new Iraqi police and military forces was realized as post-combat operations got underway. The initial training remained at the tactical level as

U.S. combat forces worked alongside the locally formed militias, and the advisory mission grew as the U.S.-led Coalition established training centers for the new Iraq Security Forces. These initial advisors were combat force-assigned personnel working alongside the Iraqis; they had not received any specialized or focused training on the Iraqi culture or language. If the advisor mission had been identified sooner and training established earlier, the reconstruction of Iraq and building of a new Iraqi military could have begun immediately, and the host nation could have conducted independent operations sooner. Better post-war planning would have shortened the lengthy U.S. mission.

In Vietnam, the U.S. government increased the size of the advisory forces and changed their mission guidance, but failed to address the South Vietnamese government's needs. The lack of clear guidance and flawed U.S. policy, along with lack of close collaboration with the host nation, caused misunderstandings about the role of the advisors and negatively affected the advisors' performance of their mission. U.S. advisors often found themselves unsure of the strategic direction in which to advise the South Vietnamese headquarters due to differing ideas within the U.S. leadership, as well as lack of agreement between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments.

In the current OCO, the U.S. leadership has learned this lesson and is now focused on providing strategic direction and a unified "whole of government" approach in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the U.S. leadership might not always agree with decisions that the host nation makes, we should nevertheless advise the host nation on the best way to achieve its own goals rather than imposing our own beliefs on them. A competent and confident advisor who is focused on the operational end-state is capable

of advising his counterpart while embracing their doctrine, organization, and tactics, techniques, and procedures. The U.S. has generally employed its advisors well in the contemporary setting, even though the initial advisor needs were not sufficiently anticipated.

The command and control, unity of effort, and unity of advisory command in Iraq has changed from a dedicated chain of command provided by the Iraqi Assistance Group (IAG) to the Assist and Advise Brigade (AAB) structure in 2010. This new command structure places the whole advisory effort under command of the already over-tasked BCT commander. Now the BCT commander commands his brigade as well as the whole advisory effort within his area of responsibility. Formerly, the IAG headquarters provided the advisor teams a single chain of command and command information, since they were directly subordinate to Multi-National Forces, Iraq. This clearly defined chain of command enabled advisor teams to cross-talk and understand the strategic direction the Iraqi Army was headed. Now that the IAG construct has gone away, the cross-talk and strategic situational awareness functions have to be performed within the BCT structure.

The “old” structure with IAG as the overarching headquarters provided a separate chain of command from that of the BCT commander’s, which left him free to command and control his combat force independent of the advisor effort. The commander typically focused on the employment of his brigade, while the advisory team focused on the training and development of the host nation forces. This separate chain of command did not preclude integrated efforts by the BCTs and advisory teams, but it also did not require it. The current intent of area of responsibility task integration comes

with the clear understanding that the BCT commander is the senior U.S. commander in the area, and he and his staff must provide the local direction and reinforce the more focused advisory mission. The advisor team still requires communications, logistics, and force protection support, and the BCT commander must rely on the advisors to provide the inputs required for coordination of joint patrols and input for the daily actions of the advised force. The BCT commander has to ensure that the advisory mission is accomplished in complementary fashion, and that the advisors (and the rest of the BCT) understand how their mission supports the overall strategic objectives of the U.S. forces in the theater.

### Recommendations

This SRP offers recommendations in the three critical advisor areas it has previously addressed: advisor selection; advisor training; and advisor employment.

*Advisor Selection.* Success of the advisor mission begins with selection of advisors. First of all, advisors should be volunteers. Secondly, USSOCOM, as the DoD SFA Proponent, has the requisite knowledge to specify the initial requirements for an advisor. USSOCOM should share its experience in selecting individuals capable of operating in an uncertain environment. The selection criteria recommended in the RAND Report of 1965 is a great start; it should be reviewed with updated selection tools that USSOCOM and its subordinate units use to select our Special Operations Forces. Third, senior leader after-action reviews (AARs) and out-briefs following operational deployments should be reviewed to discern what attributes the theater, corps, and division commanders observe in high-quality and effective advisors. Fourth, commanders must recognize quality advisor performance (and the best performers) in the field during actual operations. Lieutenant General Robert Caslen, Commander of

TRADOC's Combined Arms Center (CAC), provides the example of a leader who appears to have recognized the impact and effectiveness of advisors that served under him as Commander, Multi-National Division (North) in Iraq from 2008-2009. LTG Caslen held weekly commanders' updates with the senior advisors in his sector. These sessions were structured as two-way communication opportunities, which enabled advisors to understand his perspective and receive first-hand guidance, but also to report on their situations and provide useful feedback.

As a final recommendation within the advisor selection category, senior leaders should consider a wide range of incentives for advisory duty that will set this duty apart, identifying it as special in nature. Such consideration may include: financial rewards, visible uniform devices such as a tab or a badge, awarding a permanent additional skill identifier for trained advisors, and ensuring advisors have promotion and selection opportunities at least equivalent to those of their peers.

*Advisor Training.* Well-designed training ensures advisors have the individual skills required to survive and succeed in the host nation environment. Individuals selected to serve as advisors should attend a mandatory advisory training course. The advisor training curriculum should focus entirely on the requisite skills advisors need to perform their duty, without distraction or dilution. The 162nd Brigade, Fort Polk, Louisiana, is currently constrained in its efforts to train advisors by the parallel requirement to train across the multitude of tasks required by FORSCOM for all deploying forces. If the 162nd is to continue as the Army's, if not DoD's, advisor training base, it must concentrate solely on training advisor tasks. USSOCOM, as the DoD



proponent, can provide insight into the concentrated training methodologies used for SFA advisor training for our highly qualified Special Operations Forces (SOF).

Additionally, qualified advisors (those who have had the training and remained in the “community”) should remain active within the community, maintaining their acquired skills through language and cultural awareness gained through on-line instruction and professional discussion forums. Establishing the 162nd as the “Center of Excellence” and DoD training proponent (required for all assigned to advisory role) will strengthen and focus its role. JCISFA would maintain its role as the knowledge center, with USSOCOM as the DoD proponent.

*Advisor Employment.* Our employment of advisors in theater should be standardized in two ways. The first is advisory team structure. Several current templates may work. The combat training centers provide one example of a rank and force structure for advising the training of a military. In addition, USSOCOM, given its years of experience in selection, training, and in particular employment of advisors across the globe, should continue to be the DoD overall lead for SFA. It should particularly assist with the employment of advisors, placing more priority and effort into the general purpose force. This would move our entire national capability forward. Secondly, a responsible operational-level headquarters should be designated to provide command and control for the employment of the advisors and their teams. This “responsible headquarters” could be as a staff function that is imbedded in the operational command headquarters to facilitate the information flow and cross-talk. Advisory teams should be formed, trained, and deployed as cohort elements. These teams should also be placed under a dedicated chain of command with ties to the operational theater headquarters in

order to maintain visibility and connectivity; they should offer continual advice on training requirements, both for individuals and for teams. They should also monitor equipment and personnel resourcing, and tactical employment of host nation forces. Employment of advisors is the final challenge. This is the point at which advisor and advised meet and achieve mutual success - or failure.

*Additional Anticipated Recommendations.* There are other recommendations outside the purview of this SRP that should be considered for implementation as soon as they are made available to the force. RAND is in the final stages of producing a research project on the advisor mission, and the Army Research Institute has also been conducting research on advisors, but neither agency has made their final report available yet. Both of these organizations, under a request from TRADOC, should collaborate and make recommendations to improve the overall SFA effort, specifically the most important piece - the selection, training and strategic level employment of advisors and advisor teams.

### Final Thoughts

Lessons learned should result in useful knowledge gained from direct experience. Hopefully, these lessons enable us to avoid repeating mistakes. It is not always easy to honestly review events and critique failures after they happen, but it has to be done, so we can contend with an unknown future.

In the case of Vietnam, our national military and civilian leadership guided us through the aftermath of this war with wisdom gained from personal lessons learned. Lessons applied manifested themselves in the structure and employment of military force in the 1990s (in Kuwait, Iraq, Panama, Somalia, and Haiti) and contributed over the past decade to the success of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

As a professional military, we must continue to look critically at past performances and seek methods to enter the next conflict better prepared than the last, and we continue to make progress. The Vietnam experience provided the U.S. military with valuable lessons learned as regards SFA, enabling positive changes in training, doctrine, and force structure. Much progress in SFA in the current day has been achieved, in such areas as doctrine, but there is still room for improvement on the selection, training, and employment of advisors. Documents such as Army Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, are great guides for building partner security forces, but doctrine is one thing - practice and results are another. Failure to complete appropriate refinements on the ground will doom us to repeat the mistakes of the past.

There is a barometer of success for the future that we should pay close attention to. In the coming years, how many of our recent, current, and future advisors will be selected for our senior-most non-commissioned and commissioned officer ranks, to include flag rank, and fill our most senior command and leadership positions?

### Conclusion

The military advisory mission has become a key component of U.S. military operations - for the Army in particular - and we need to be good at it. This is a strategic issue for the nation. We advise counterparts from foreign countries not just to make them more proficient as military technicians, but with the goal of gaining and maintaining lasting personal and professional relationships that may benefit us greatly during future operations. We will do well to apply the lessons we have learned in the past and apply them in the current environment to build a structure and doctrine for advisors that will serve our best interests for years to come. Our nation deserves no less.

## Endnotes

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