INSTITUTIONALIZING THE ADVISE AND ASSIST MISSION

BY

COLONEL ROBERT A. SNYDER, JR.
United States Army

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### ABSTRACT

The United States Army has been involved with combat advising as well as training and assisting Foreign Security Forces for most its history. This paper will examine the current Advise and Assist missions being conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, analyze their effectiveness and provide insight on future mission sets. I will explore the universal, timeless truths for effective advising. I will then examine how combat advise and assist missions will manifest themselves in the future and make recommendations as to how to institutionalize the mission of Security Force Assistance with regional partners as opposed to the current ad hoc arrangements undertaken by combat formations. Our Nation’s future conflicts will require adept professionals for this crucial advisory mission. Therefore, the U.S. military needs to examine the scope of the mission and determine the methods of effectiveness required for success.
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Colonel Robert A. Snyder, Jr.
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Dr. John Bonin
Project Adviser

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Arguably, the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries. How the Army should be organized and prepared for this advisory role remains an open question, and will require innovative and forward thinking.

—Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, 10 October 2007

The United States Army has been involved with combat advising as well as training and assisting Foreign Security Forces for most its history. This paper will examine the United States military history of Advise and Assist missions conducted in Korea and Vietnam, analyze their effectiveness and how these missions provide insight on future mission sets. I will explore the universal, timeless truths for effective advising. I will then examine how combat Advise and Assist missions will manifest themselves in the future and make recommendations as to how to institutionalize the mission of Security Force Assistance with regional partners as opposed to the current ad hoc arrangements undertaken by combat formations. Our Nation’s future conflicts will require adept professionals for this crucial advisory mission. Therefore, the U.S. military needs to examine the scope of the mission and determine the methods of effectiveness required for success.

The United States Army is currently engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan and the key to the exit strategy in both theaters is the United States Army training and assistance commands that enable and empower the Foreign Security Forces (FSF) to manage the security of their own countries. With that in mind, it is logical to believe that the U.S. Army has institutionalized a process to deal with the complexities of this robust and enduring mission. On the contrary, the U.S. military, particularly the Army, has made
this mission a secondary, peripheral mission choosing to concentrate on combat operations vice the less glamorous advisory role. After a visit to Fort Riley, Kansas in late 2007, Army Chief of Staff General George Casey stated, “We will not succeed in our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan without the Iraqi and Afghan security forces being able to secure themselves. While Foreign Internal Defense has been traditionally the primary responsibility of the Special Forces, training foreign forces is now a core competency of regular and reserve units in all services.”

While the concept of having this mission set as a core competency is novel, it is certainly not new. As a military, we cannot afford to continue to relearn lessons after each advisory mission undertaken and must anticipate with the adaptation of our force to address the inevitable next time.

The history of training and assisting Foreign Security Forces goes back to the beginning of United States military. Baron Von Steuben’s guidance during the Revolutionary War-era to the then fledging U.S. Army was instrumental in the development of our current staffs, Non-commissioned Officer Corps and Officer Corps. Intuitively, the need for conventional military advisors in an enduring role is easy to see and should be formalized. To explore why there is entrenched U.S. military reluctance, it is important to examine past experiences with the advise and assist mission set.

In the 20th century, the United States military has been involved in multiple training and advising missions of indigenous forces. From the Philippines at the turn of the century to the French in Northern Africa during World War II, we have recognized that the achievement of goals cannot be undertaken by our own force but rather by enabling and empowering others in an economy of force effort. More recent training and advising missions include the Military Advisory Group in Korea, commonly referred to as
KMAG. This effort, still ongoing today, is a palatable example of what true partnership entails – time and patience. After almost sixty years of partnership, the South Koreans, with few exceptions, are capable of defending against external threats and any internal instability. This is in part, due to the enduring relationship fostered in building partner capacity.

Another prime example of the U.S. military advisory mission is in Vietnam. This was the longest, largest, and most complex advisory mission in our history. Begun in 1950 when the United States provided logistical support to the French in Indochina, the Military Advisory and Assistance Group, Indochina became the Military Advisory Assistance Group, Vietnam (MAAG-V). The sheer magnitude of the endeavor can best be described in the numbers – 8.65 division equivalents in Non-Commissioned and Officer Corps strength at its height in 1970. The United States Military had advisors working in intelligence, operations and training, psychological warfare, civil affairs, communications, medical and administrative affairs. Due to the distaste of the aftermath of the Vietnam experience, many of the hard-earned lessons learned during the Vietnam advisory mission drifted far from the mainstream of U.S. military concerns. For the U.S. military, “no more Vietnams” meant, among other things, no more advisory efforts on the scale or of the duration of that conflict. This reality has hampered efforts to develop a foundation of the advise and assist type efforts with the current military institution.

The post-Vietnam effort turned to the new Special Operations Command and to Special Forces as a branch of the Army in 1987 for Foreign Internal Development (FID). Although SOF had great success in Central and South America, current and potential
operations around the globe will quickly subsume special operations forces capacity and capabilities. There are two important factors that must guide the development of a larger advisory force. The first is that America does not have enough ground forces to meet all security threats everywhere and must rely on upon strategic leverage that foreign troops provide. This can be viewed as a preventive force so that the United States never has to engage in direct conflict. Secondly, the United States must recognize that the forces trained will have more local legitimacy than do the American troops who can be perceived as occupiers. There is no question that throughout the history of the United States and its military those advisors have been enormously efficient and effective combat multipliers. It is now time to institutionalize this enduring advisory role in a unified effort to address the enduring mission.

Before contemplating the potential establishment of an advisory command, it is important to review the timeless truths about advising. Based on my experience as an advisor in Iraq during this last year, the following are ten commandments for effective advising. Clearly, this is not an all encompassing list however; if these truths are maintained, then the advisor will have a strong foundation. T.E. Lawrence, in his Twenty-Seven Articles, states, “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. It is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them.” This is first and foremost, the most important factor that I learned as an advisor. Every opportunity that I had to provide influence started with listening to my counterparts requirements and helping them come up with an Iraqi solution to the problem. Many times, the solution was not necessarily the most effective way or the way that I would have tackled the problem, however it was a solution promulgated by my counterpart. Even if it was my
recommendation to him, I always made it his solution thus crediting his rapport as the leader of the organization. The transference of the mission responsibilities is human nature for any environment which an advisor operates in. If you do the work for them, they will let you. At the end of the day, it is about how to establish an effective working relationship with your counterpart to improve the host nation military effectiveness in addressing its security problems.

**Advisory duty is a complex, difficult and thankless job, even more so in a counterinsurgency environment.** Working with host nation forces guarantees a different culture, unknown language, strange customs, and varying degrees of corruption or perceived corruption. The advisor, in dealing with issues of integrity, must stay mission focused and try not to be judgmental towards his/her counterpart. The key is to take a long term focus and understand that the answers to the problems may take longer than you believe they should. The advisor should recognize that the standards of the United States military are much different than that of any country that is supported. Always maintain a sense of humor, try to gain progress in your efforts, but never let progress dictate the expense of the relationship. The Foreign Security Forces must want the solution more than the advisor does.

**Every good soldier is not necessarily a good advisor.** Many soldiers have an aggressive, immediate mentality. It is part of the nature of a U.S. military member to want an immediate solution, thus sometimes not making for a good advisor. Soldiers and leaders that have focused on multiple lethal operations and cannot overcome their preconceived notions of the Foreign Security Forces should not be placed in an advisor
role. With the recently instituted three-month training iterations at Fort Polk, Louisiana, leaders should have ample time to determine if an individual is suited for this duty.

**There should be an extensive training and educational programs subsequent to embarking on in an advisory role.** Training should focus on the basic skills necessary for effective advising. As opposed to basic technical and tactical focus, the advisor training should address host nation cultural, language, interpersonal and military institutional understanding. Clearly, the advisor must have professional competence in his/her area of expertise, however building a rapport is based upon mutual respect. The only way that a counterpart will react in a positive manner is if he feels the advisor is trustworthy and is able to produce positive results for the host nation. Insight is a learned behavior that is gained by an individual who is an active listener, open to alternative viewpoints and is humble. Self doubt is essential equipment for a responsible advisor; the man who believes he has the situation entirely figured out is a danger to himself and to his mission. 

The advisory effort should focus on how host nation organizations, institutions, systems, capabilities and limitations – not U.S. organizations – can be harnessed to address host nation problems. The advisor must spend the requisite time with their counterparts to ensure they understand how things get done in that host nation environment. Situations are always different, but again host nation solutions to host nation problems are the right answer in most cases.

**Longer, repetitive advisory tours increase the effectiveness of advisors.** The work that United States Central Command has currently undertaken with the Afghanistan/Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands program to thoroughly indoctrinate the members
of this organization into the intensive study and subsequent multiple deployments to the region is an example of innovative thinking addressing this issue. Advisors who generally have multiple tours as advisors are more effective as they understand the nuisances of a particular theater and they come back with automatic credibility with his/her counterpart. Generally, it takes two to three months for an advisor to development a working relationship with his/her counterpart in order to affect significant change.

Another constant is the importance of communication by, with and through an advisor’s counterpart. Equally important is that communication is maintained throughout the advisor chain to ensure unity of effort. There were many times when insight can be gained or provided to another advisor in order to accomplish the mission. The open lines of communication will ensure unity of effort in an extremely complex environment. This is a thinking game that requires strategies to ensure a synchronized effort in order to accomplish the mission.

Equally important is know where the enemy is in your Area of Operations. Sun Tzu says, “Know your enemy and know yourself.” As an advisor, you must be the expert in everything that happens within your area of operations. In most cases, there is no monolithic threat; however, there are unsavory characters who wish harm to you or at the very least, to your counterpart. Remember, the enemy can attack you if he so desires to. He has multiple means to do so and will act when you least expect it. As an advisor, it is essential that you empower the host nation leaders so that they protect you as one of their own. If you reach that status, then you know that you have developed
your rapport to a degree that makes you an effective member of their team – a true partner.

Another constant across advisory missions is to be mission ready. Being mission ready means many things to include, do not become complacent and always have your gear ready to go. In a risk adverse climate, the advisor must understand when it is worth the risk not to wear full-up body armor, when to ride in Foreign Security Forces vehicles and when it is necessary to conduct a no-notice meeting with individuals without prior U.S. coordination. The advisor is asked to balance the acceptable risks in order to build rapport and credibility in the eyes of their counterparts and local leaders. Make no mistake, your counterparts and their subordinates are always watching to see how the U.S. military deals with certain situations. It is unacceptable to present yourself or your team as a soft target, however there is a balance in humanizing yourself with your counterparts.

Never give orders as if you were commanding the organization that you advise. Reserve your advice to behind closed doors to ensure that there is never a misunderstanding in the hearts and minds of the host nation subordinates. I always found it effective to go to my counterparts’ deputy to ensure that he understood what we had discussed. This enabled him to be the executor of the boss’ guidance and I stayed out of the official chain of command, but had a special relationship with my counterpart as his personal confidant. If your counterpart feels as if he is the sole executive of your joint plans, then you are effective. Your ideal position is when you are present and not noticed.
Recommendations to a Permanent Structure

Now that we have reviewed some universal truths about advising, I will examine how the Army might institutionalize the mission of advising and assisting to augment the general purpose forces provided by the Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs) to the Combatant Commands. John Nagl writes in the Military Review in late 2008 that the Army should, “Develop an Advisory Command and should have a standing force of 20,000 soldiers.” Although I agree with the premise of establishing a force responsible for coaching, teaching and mentoring host-nation forces around the globe, I do not think this size force is currently required.

Using Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership/Education, Personnel and Facilities (DOTMLPF) framework as a backdrop, the following is a recommendation for a feasible Course of Action for implementation of the Army’s advisory mission.

_Doctrine_. Building partner capacities and fostering relationships is the way the U.S. military will fight moving forward in the 21st century. Currently without a near peer competitor to challenge the U.S. military in a direct force-on-force war, the United States must use its valuable military resources to enable and empower regional actors to manage their own challenges. The best and only approach, in an economy of force effort, is the advisory mission. It is counter-intuitive for many in the military to understand their role as coaches, teachers, friends or allies; however developing this as a primary mission is clearly necessary to provide standards across the force. FM 3.0 espouses the concept of adaptability in full spectrum operations – advising is a full spectrum operation. Currently in Iraq and Afghanistan, the advisor mission is helping to build the military and the police from the ground up to address internal and external
security. On the other end of the spectrum, Advisor teams are partnering in Africa to provide basic combat needs such medical training, intelligence and navigation in an effort to make them self sufficient.

Another important factor reference doctrine is to determine a clear delineation between the conventional and Special Operations Forces (SOF) responsibilities. Due to the historical responsibilities SOF has taken on in the past, it should remain the primary force of choice for anything involving counter-terrorism and unconventional warfare. SOF does not wish to own the general purpose Army’s advising effort, however it does wish to have a role. This schism, already mentioned above, between current and future mission sets will accentuate the divide of the SOF FID mission and the broad Security Force Assistance conventional mission. This divide must be addressed to ensure maximization of both conventional and special operations forces.

Organization. I do believe that a cadre force that works for the Army Service Component Commands (ASCC) is prudent to augment those staffs and tailor force packages to support missions as required. This structure would address future perceived threats to regional stability by providing the Combatant Commands a force capable of managing the advisory programs, and as a force that could address immediate requirements.

In the current construct of ASCCs, I propose a cell of 35 to 100 personnel lead by a LTC to augment the United States Army Africa (USARAF), United States Army Central Command (ARCENT), United States Army Europe (USAREUR), United States Army Pacific (USARPAC) and United States Army Southern Command (ARSOUTH). Their responsibilities would encompass all Army general purpose advise and assist
missions within their Combatant Command Area of responsibility. It would be particularly effective to have this cell co-located with the Army Service Component Commander so that the commander could impart guidance and the Advisory Cell could garner valuable insight to that particular theater. They, in essence, would become the resident expert in all aspects of mission requirements and would have expertise in a cross section of military functions. The LTC in command must be centrally selected with expertise in the Area of Responsibility and would be the conduit to the country team military attaché for execution of a mission. The key is that the ASCC plugs would evaluate the situation, validate requirements and request forces to augment efforts as required.

In addition to the Army Service Component Command plugs described above, I agree with MAJ Michael Jason who proposes a three star command under Forces Command called the “Advisor Command.” This command would partner closely with the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to ensure soldiers and officers coming to the command have the required training requisite for this mission. The Advisor Command would be responsible for the advising, training and equipping of forces based on the requirements and in concert with the ASCC plugs. If required, the Advisor Commander could deploy to a particular mission if it required his level of responsibility similar to the current mission of United States Forces – Iraq Deputy Commanding General for Advising and Training (USF – I DCG A&T) or he could deploy his subordinates depending on the size of the mission set.

This Command would consist of five operational teams with enough advisors to advise an entire division simultaneously. Each operational team would be habitually
postured to support each of the 5 ASCCs, but could readjust to support requirements. An important note is this cadre would need a more seasoned, mature force capable of handling the breadth of responsibilities.

When not deployed, these soldiers would study their respective theaters, conduct language and cultural training. During a three year stint to the Advisor Command, the soldiers should expect to deploy once. A potential cycle would entail preparation for a year (set phase), deploy in the second year (deployment phase) and return to the command to re-integrate (reset phase) with family and provide lessons learned as a trainer during the last year in the command. The idea of continuing to remain engaged throughout the process will ensure the best utilization of the soldiers in the Advisor Command.

*Training.* The Advisor Command would require a basic course to include, but not limited to, combat life-saving skills, foreign weapons and interpersonal relations. During the training, instructors would evaluate the individuals in order to place them within a team to best utilize their strengths and limit their weaknesses. Throughout their first year prior to deployment, the teams would be exposed to scenario based training in order to enhance the ability to adapt to various situations.

MAJ Jason also proposes that the Advisor Command be placed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in order to maximize the fact that it would be co-located with the United States Army Special Operations Command allowing for transfer of over 50 plus years of experience in advising foreign forces. Clearly, there would be synergy gained in this arrangement. Another option that I contemplated was co-locating the teams with the Special Operations Forces groups that support the different Combatant Commands.
Having the command located at Fort Bragg has the other positive aspect of a being on a base with the mentality of rapidly deploying units from its confines. Locating at Fort Bragg would also have another unintended consequence which is recruitment of individuals within the ranks of some of the best at the brightest the Army has to offer.

Material. The material solution would have to address equipment requirements for the teams going into a specific theater, and would also have to address foreign military sales. Within the Advisor Command staff, the commander would have to have partnership with Army Material Command and Department of State representation in order to streamline the process of providing equipment to foreign governments. This is an area that would require deep research to ensure that best practices from Iraq and Afghanistan are being utilized to lash up the training and equipping lines of operation for synergistic effect.

Leadership and Education. These two factors are the most important to the entire advisor mission. To break it down into three distinct categories, I believe that how the Army views this mission will dictate its future success or failure. The first category is COL/LTC positions. These billets are now board selected in order to ensure the best and brightest are leading these formations of adaptive leaders. This selection as an advisor leader should not disqualify these officers for future 06/05 branch commands, but instead enhance their files for future leadership roles. Currently, it is a one or the other proposition thus not many of the best officers are inclined towards the advisor position. It a secondary option for those officers whose files are not strong enough to singularly compete for command positions.
Secondly, senior CPT/MAJs would be given “key developmental” credit for holding one of these advisory jobs. General Casey states, “The tasks associated with transition advisory teams will be a major part of full spectrum engagement in theaters of interest now and for the foreseeable future. I want to ensure that these officers that lead these teams are recognized and given credit they deserve.” Again, this should not disqualify these officers from filling MAJ level developmental positions such as S3 or XO, but would put these officers on equal footing with their contemporaries not going the advisory route. As an example, after a CPT has completed his/her company command tour the opportunities in recruiting, reserves, ROTC could be expanded to fulfilling an advisory position. Although this key developmental policy has been in place since June 2008, many view this as a peripheral branch qualification that is not career enhancing. Again, currently it is career changing decision to take the advisor route or the combat route – it should not be one or the other.

Lastly, the best way to incentivize soldiers to come to an Advisor Command billet would be to provide an Army Skill Identifier (ASI) to soldiers that successfully complete a tour within the Advisor Command. In addition, professional pay should be allotted for those soldiers that complete language training and hardship duty pay (and potentially combat pay) for those soldiers deployed would make these positions more palatable. Regardless of rank, these type training and assisting missions must be viewed in a positive light towards promotion as this mission set will become the norm rather than the exception. These bold moves in how the Army views these missions will send a strong signal that this is our future relevancy.
Personnel. This mission is currently viewed as a passing fad that has potential to go away waiting for the next mission. The Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Pete Chiarelli while serving as the 1st Cavalry Division Commander, took hundreds of his soldiers from their assigned units to create 70 small teams who lived, ate and trained with the Iraqi Army. Truly partnering – like this example - with a foreign security force has a quality all of its own. Shared privations and successes makes for a brotherhood between an advisor and a unit. This illustration demonstrates the challenge that a tactical commander has when he can see the mission that he needs to undertake, but does not have the resources to address mission requirements. The officers and soldiers would have to know that retaining a job in this command would be not only support mission accomplishment, but would also enhance their professional development.

Another important factor that the Advisor Command would address in regards to personnel is that it would stabilize a family for a three year assignment with more predictability of schedule. Many of the soldiers and officers that have reached their mid-grade level after one to two deployments need to be removed from units in the Army Force Generation Model (ARFORGEN). Most soldiers do not have a problem with deployment; however most would like some predictability for their family knowing when they will be gone and when they will be home. The expeditionary nature of our profession will not change, however providing a soldier with the broadening experience to serve as an advisor as an alternative would help with retention and resiliency.

In addition to the special pays, an ASI and incentivizing mentioned earlier, the awarding of a Combat Advisor Tab would further incentivize the role of an advisor. The
question is one of priority. Many of the same quality NCOs would be superb candidates for drill sergeant duty, recruiting duty and ROTC duty. The advisor job, as a profession, would have to be viewed on equal terms with other broadening experiences to become a legitimate option. Additionally capability might be available within the National Guard and Reserve Structure. The current State Partnership Programs (SPP) could also be leveraged to augment the Advisor Command as resident experts with selected countries.

Facilities. Fort Bragg has many positive reasons for success as already enumerated. Regardless of the locale, it would be important to permanently assign forces to one facility in order to support readiness and resiliency. One of the most difficult tasks for a leader in the current ad hoc structure is to provide guidance to the members of the team, develop a rapport and cohesion throughout the team and provide families the opportunity to truly understand everything about the mission that their soldier will undertake.

In regards to the Army Service Component Command members, it is logical to assign the USARAF cell to Vicenza, Italy; the USAREUR cell to Heidelberg, Germany; the USARPAC cell to Fort Shafter, Hawaii; the ARCENT cell to Shaw AFB, South Carolina and finally the USARSOUTH to San Antonio, Texas. These cells again would augment the current ASCC staffs so that commands would not have to pull other staff from their jobs to address the Advise and Assist mission as is the current reality. This course of action could work, however clearly requires intensive study.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, the Military Assistance and Advisory Course was jokingly referred to as the "Mill around until ambushed" course. The Army has moved towards
formalizing the responsibilities far beyond this early reality experienced during the Vietnam era with highly successful missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are still many strides to be made. Another inhibitor to success for this mission is that one has to wait months and sometimes years to see the results of their labor. This enhances the thankless nature of the job as the only time you are recognized is when the host nation units are not reaching their measures of effectiveness set forth by Department of Defense.

Throughout this paper, I have examined some historical examples that have brought the U.S. Army to where it is today. Next, I reviewed some universal and timeless truths on effective advising. Lastly looking at DOTML-PF as a backdrop, I proposed a viable course of action for Army Service Component Command support and the stand up of an Advisor Command. Clearly, this is not the only option but is intended to inform and promote the discussion of what I believe to be the primary mission of our future Army. Promoting regional stability through partner capacity building and teamwork with our Allies is the most efficient and effective use of our valuable resources.

Andy Krepinevich quotes an Army officer during the Vietnam era with the following, "Our military institution seems to be prevented by its own doctrinal rigidity from understanding the nature of this war and from making the necessary modifications to apply its power more intelligently, more economically, and above all, more relevantly." This sounds all too familiar. The Army prides itself on being a learning organization. We must continue to move forward – we cannot afford not to.

As the United States moves forward in this era of persistent conflict coupled with the dwindling resources for the Department of Defense after a decade of massive
expenditures, the United States military must take a reflective look at the importance of the Security Force Assistance mission. Economy of force, preventive assistance missions will be required in order to make the best available use of the resources still remaining. The humanitarian nature of the United States population will continue to propel the military into situations where it must provide partner capacity building in order to ensure sovereign nations can take care of their own security. This, in turn, will ensure that future conflicts don’t arise that requires United States combat involvement. In essence, with this approach, the military is husbanding its resources while at the same time providing assistance to ensure regional and global stability. The institutionalization of the advise and assist role as a core mission set within the United States Army is essential to that future stability.

Endnotes


7 Ramsey, Advising Indigenous Forces, 65.

8 Sun Tzu, The Art of War (Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

10 Jason, “Integrating the Advisory Effort in the Army,” 27-32.

11 Ibid., 27-32.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.


