

INSTITUTIONALIZING ADAPTATION *It's Time for an Army Advisor Command*

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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 2007.¹



This article is a revised and updated version of a paper originally published as Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps by the Center for a New American Security in June 2007. These views are the author's own.

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PHOTO: During a 45-minute firefight with insurgent forces, members of the 3-8th Iraqi National Police Brigade stood shoulder-to-shoulder with their U.S. counterparts, 28 February 2006 in Baghdad. (U.S. Army, CPT Brian Moore)

ARMY DOCTRINE and recent events on the ground in two wars have demonstrated that the achievement of American goals in Iraq and Afghanistan will increasingly depend on the performance of the security forces of those countries themselves. U.S. Army and Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, describes the many complicated and interrelated tasks that should be conducted simultaneously to defeat an insurgency and then notes, “Key to all these tasks is developing an effective host-nation (HN) security force.”² In recognition of the enduring need for American advisors to coach, teach, and mentor host-nation security forces in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in dozens of other countries around the globe, the Army should create a permanent standing advisory command with responsibility for all aspects of the advisor mission—from doctrine through facilities. An advisory command is essential to enable and empower the security forces of our allies to defeat extremism. Most importantly, any advisor command should have responsibility over a standing force of some 20,000 soldiers.

It has been argued that foreign forces cannot defeat an insurgency—the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to do so.³ The most important contribution the U.S. Army makes to the development of security forces like the Iraqi Army (IA) and Afghan National Army (ANA) is embedded advisory (or “transition”) teams. These teams coach, teach, and mentor host nation security forces, training them before deployment and accompanying them into combat; the mission is described by the acronym FID, for “foreign internal defense.” Advisors bring important combat multipliers to the fight: artillery and close air support; medical evacuation and support; and, perhaps most importantly, a culture of leadership and training, two crucial pillars of success for all effective armies. From a strategic perspective, competent advisor teams also communicate a commitment to legitimacy.

Since host-nation security forces have important cultural awareness and linguistic advantages over U.S. forces and are likely to be far more palatable to the local public whose support is ultimately the key in any counterinsurgency

campaign, the advisory role of U.S. forces has become increasingly important. Strategic outcomes now hinge on advisor mission competence and success for at least two reasons. First, because America does not have enough ground forces to meet all security threats everywhere and must therefore rely upon the strategic leverage foreign troops provide; and second, because those forces have more legitimacy than do American troops who can be perceived as occupiers. American advisors serve as enormously efficient combat multipliers; the whole is far more than the sum of its parts, and effective host-nation forces, enabled and empowered by dedicated combat advisors, are now the foundation of U.S. strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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In Iraq, years of hard work to train, equip, and mentor the Iraqi Security Forces are beginning to show results. After effective U.S.-led counterinsurgency operations dramatically improved security in Iraq in 2007, consecutive Iraqi-led operations in Basra, Sadr City, and Mosul in the spring of 2008 have, following a shaky start, led to further gains that dramatically increased confidence in the government and Iraqi Army.

However, news from the other major front in the War on Terrorism is not as positive. General Daniel McNeil, outgoing commander of the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan, noted in his farewell speech that the war against the Taliban is “under-resourced.”⁴ The United States cannot afford to substantially increase its forces in that country in the near future, while its NATO allies have, to date, proven unwilling to do so.⁵ To provide the forces Afghanistan needs to defeat a determined enemy in a difficult counterinsurgency campaign, Secretary of Defense Gates recently decided to double the size of the Afghan National Army—a

long overdue decision that will require the Army to produce even more advisors for a theater that is already critically short of that resource.⁶

As General George Casey, the Army’s Chief of Staff, stated on a visit to Fort Riley in 2007, “We will not succeed in our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan without the Iraqi and Afghan security forces being able to secure themselves. So these missions for the transition teams are absolutely essential for our long-term success.”⁷ Field Manual 3-24 recognizes the importance of the advisory mission to success in counterinsurgency campaigns and states clearly that FID is a “big Army” responsibility: “The scope and scale of training programs today and the scale of programs likely to be required in the future has grown exponentially. While FID has been traditionally the primary responsibility of the special operating forces (SOF), *training foreign forces is now a core competency of regular and reserve units of all Services.*”⁸

Ad Hoc Solutions to a Permanent Problem

Unfortunately, the Army—and the U.S. government as a whole—has a poor history of placing the proper emphasis on the advisory teams it embeds in host nation forces and ministries, tending toward an ad hoc approach. The advisory effort in Vietnam was widely criticized as “the Other War,” lacking in the priority given to the main force war. Peter Dawkins and Andrew Krepinevich have both noted the often poor quality of Army advisors in Vietnam and the slapdash nature of the training they received before deploying to Vietnam.⁹ An Army officer of the time concurs that the advisory effort was crippled by the Army’s inability to adapt to what should have been its main effort in that war: “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.”¹⁰

Some have argued that the Army and the Marine Corps have repeated many of the same mistakes from Vietnam while implementing combat advisory efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past six years.¹¹ The teams were initially selected from National Guard, Reserve, and active duty forces on an ad hoc basis, while the quality of the training they received varied widely in different geographic

locations. Doctrine for the mission is only now being written.¹² Even the size and composition of the teams headed to Iraq and Afghanistan vary considerably; most Afghan teams consist of 16 soldiers with no medic, while Iraq teams consist of 11 soldiers including a medic. All internal and external studies of what are now termed “transition teams” in this war have concluded that the teams are far too small for the tasks that they have been assigned. Many of these ad hoc teams must be augmented in theater by additional security forces, again on an improvised basis.¹³

The first step to solving problems is recognizing them, so the Army’s increasing institutionalization of the advisor mission is an example of organizational learning in progress. For example, in 2006 the Army decided to centralize training for transition teams at Fort Riley, Kansas, initially giving the training mission to two cadre-heavy brigade combat teams (BCTs). The training mission was later consolidated as the responsibility of just one brigade, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division. This unit has created a 60-day training model that includes both advisory skills and combat survival skills.¹⁴ Although the fact that few of the cadre

members had been advisors themselves initially made the training more difficult, this situation is improving. One of the four battalions conducting the training now boasts 13 former advisors among its 96 soldiers, most of them in critical field grade, company command, and first sergeant positions.

A recent decision by General Casey to increase career incentives for those who serve on advisory teams is another huge step in the right direction. Majors who lead transition teams will now be granted “key and developmental” credit; lieutenant colonels and colonels who lead teams will be centrally selected, as battalion and brigade commanders are currently, and will be given similar credit in recognition of the importance and difficulty of their missions. According to Casey, “the tasks associated with transition 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 the officers that lead these teams are recognized and given the credit they deserve.”¹⁵

Although the execution of the advisor mission has improved (and General Casey’s decision will further help in both training and execution), because of the importance of the mission, there is still more



U.S. Army, MAJ Josh Polter

Fort Riley Training Mission Class 38 discusses logical lines of operations and how to apply them on their 12-month long deployment into Afghanistan as Embedded Training Teams, 25 February 2008, Fort Riley, Kansas.

to be done. The need for well-trained, professional combat advisors is unlikely to diminish any time soon. FM 3-24 states that “counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment.” The average counterinsurgency campaign in the twentieth century took nine years to come to a conclusion; the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns are likely to be on the long end of the counterinsurgency time spectrum. And long after the vast majority of conventional U.S. BCTs have gone home, the majority of the American commitment to those wars will be embedded advisory teams. It is long past time for the Army to institutionalize and professionalize the manning and training of combat advisors in the permanent Army force structure. The most important thing the mission needs is one person in charge of this national-level priority, and that person must be a general officer.

Developing an Advisor Command

“The Department [of Defense] has recognized that stability operations, including developing indigenous security forces such as the Iraqi Security Forces, are a core U.S. military mission. However, the services lack sufficient standing military

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advisory capacity to meet current, and potential future, requirements for that mission.”

—House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, 2007

One answer to the problem of insufficient advisory capacity, for now and in the future, is the creation of a U.S. Army advisor command led by a lieutenant general. This command would be the proponent for all aspects of the advisor mission: doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel, and facilities. It would oversee the training and deployment of 25-Soldier advisory teams organized into three 200-team advisor divisions, to be commanded by major generals who would deploy with the teams on their yearlong advisory



U.S. Army, CPT Brian Moore

A U.S. National Police Transition Team conducts short-range marksmanship training with its Iraqi counterparts—the 3d Battalion, 8th National Police Brigade, 18 February 2006, Al Dora district, Baghdad, Iraq.

tours. This chain of command would simplify the in-theater command relationships with conventional forces that have limited the effectiveness of advisory teams now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁶

The lieutenant general leading the advisor command would have overall responsibility for all combat advisor training and employment in the U.S. Army—a Title 10 “force provider” role. He would command a staff and school that would develop doctrine for combat advisors and train them for operational employment. He would also have an advisory role to combatant commanders employing his combat advisors, and could conceivably deploy into theater to serve as the senior advisor to a foreign ministry of defense (the role now played in Iraq by Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq, another ad hoc organization). Most important, he or she would be the advocate for all aspects of the advisor mission within the institutional Army.

Stephen Peter Rosen’s *Winning the Next War* shows that innovation only takes root when it is part of a changed organizational culture that includes a pathway to flag rank for advocates of change. The development of strategic bombing and close air support in the U.S. Air Force, submarine and carrier warfare in the U.S. Navy, and armored warfare

in the U.S. Army demonstrate the importance of flag-level mentors supporting lower-level innovators.¹⁷ The increased importance of advisors in the current operational environment is as important a change in the nature of warfare as were these previous innovations; it requires a similar degree of institutional advocacy.

As shown in figure 1, three major generals would command combat advisor divisions of 200 advisor teams. They would be responsible for the teams’ preparation for combat and for deploying with them into combat. These general officers and their staffs would fill the role currently filled by the Iraqi Advisory Group in Iraq and the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) in Operation Enduring Freedom, two more ad hoc formations that currently play the important role of overwatching the deployment and employment of military transition teams in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A combat advisor division would include eight division advisory teams (DATs), each commanded by a colonel. Some of these DATs would be organized to train combat skills and advise combat divisions; others would advise logistical units (the greatest weaknesses of the Iraqi and Afghan armies). Service as a DAT commander would be the equivalent of brigade command for colonels and the position would be a key, centrally selected developmental billet.

Each DAT would consist of five brigade advisory teams (BATs), commanded by centrally selected lieutenant colonels. Some of the BATs would be organized to train combat skills and advise combat divisions; others would advise logistical units. Each BAT would consist of five battalion advisory teams (BnAT), each led by a major who would earn key developmental credit for his or her service. In addition to their team leader and team sergeant, all the teams would include advisors to focus on personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, medical support, and maintenance support for their own team and for the unit they are assigned to advise.

This organization (figure 2) would solve the vast majority of problems afflicting embedded combat advisors—providing them with doctrine, training, and a permanent home. Advisors would transfer to the advisor command for a standard three-year Army tour of duty. During their tour, they should expect to deploy for one year and then hand off the mission to the next set of advisors, facilitating right-seat

Advisor Command Commander and Staff

- Lieutenant General Commander
- Includes responsibility for Combat Advisor School and Doctrine Development

Division Commander and Division Staff

(3 per Advisor Corps)

- Major General Commander
- Provides logistical support for teams in theater

Division Advisor Team

(8 per Advisor Division)

- Colonel Commander

Brigade Advisor Team

(5 per Division Advisor Team)

- Lieutenant Colonel Commander

Battalion Advisor Team

(5 per Brigade Advisor Team)

- Major Team Leader

Figure 1. Proposed advisor command composition and organization.

Team Leader
Team NCOIC
Team Adjutant
S1 NCOIC
Team Intelligence Officer
Team Intel Sergeant
Team Intel Specialist
Team Ops Officer
Team Ops Sergeant
Team Logistics Officer
Team Logistics Sergeant
Team Medical Officer
Team Medical Sergeant
Team Light Wheel Mechanic
Infantry Squad (Personal Security
Detachment/Infantry Trainers)

TOTAL STRENGTH: 25

Figure 2. Advisor team composition.

rides and the consolidation of lessons learned. At the end of their combat tours, some advisors could remain at the home of the advisor command, serving as trainers and doctrine writers, while others could return to the conventional Army sporting their new “combat advisor” tab—which should give them an advantage in competition for promotion as the advisory mission becomes the main effort in both Iraq and Afghanistan over the next few years.

A considerable advantage of this plan is that the combat advisors’ families would be able to create a family support group comprised of members living primarily in one geographic location, rather than scattered across the United States as is currently the case. This is a major issue for deployed transition team members today; it preys on their minds when they are deployed and interferes with their focus on their missions.

Building the advisor command would require that the Army build four fewer BCTs than it currently plans to build, which would represent a serious degradation of our conventional military capability. However, rather than focusing exclusively on conventional wars that may or may not occur in the future, the Army might better serve our Nation by building the most effective capabilities to win the wars of today. The number of advisors required in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention other important security-cooperation efforts that comprise the Global War on Terrorism, will only increase over time relative to the number of conventional units we deploy, outstripping the capacity of the Special

Forces and straining current improvisational measures. Current practice takes Soldiers from BCTs and the institutional Army to create ad hoc advisory teams that are less effective than they could be at accomplishing what will, in the future, be the main effort of our Army in Iraq and Afghanistan. The alternative is to build the Army our country needs now, and will need far more urgently in years to come—an Army that includes an advisor command dedicated solely to the mission of raising, training, employing, and sustaining host-nation security forces that can defend freedom abroad. As Andrew Krepinevich has argued, “Their success will determine whether we win this war, and at what cost, and how soon.”¹⁸ **MR**

NOTES

1. Robert M. Gates (remarks as delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at a meeting of the Association of the United States Army in Washington, DC, 10 October 2007), <www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181>.
2. U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 6-1.
3. John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiv.
4. BBC News, “NATO ‘needs more’ in Afghanistan”, 3 June 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7432700.stm>.
5. “NATO says 6,000 troops urgently needed in Afghanistan,” *International Herald Tribune*, 23 June 2008, <www.ihf.com/articles/reuters/2008/06/23/europe/OUKWD-UK-AFGHAN-NATO-TROOPS.php>.
6. Thom Shanker, “Gates Pushing Plan for Afghan Army,” *New York Times*, 8 August 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/world/asia/08military.html>.
7. Dustin Roberts, “Army Chief of Staff Visits Fort Riley,” *Fort Riley Post*, 17 May 2007, 1.
8. FM 3-24, 6-3. Emphasis added.
9. Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986); Peter Dawkins, *The U.S. Army and the “Other War” in Vietnam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Doctoral Dissertation, 1979). Dawkins served as an advisor in Vietnam during one of his two tours there.
10. U.S. Army officer in Vietnam, cited in Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 269.
11. Greg Jaffe, “Problems Afflict U.S. Army Program To Advise Iraqis,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 2006; Scott Cuomo, “It’s Time to Make ETs our Main Effort in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2006, 63-67; Yochi Dreazen, “Training: Mission Unaccomplished,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 February 2008; Eric Navarro, *God Willing: My Wild Ride with the Iraqi Army* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008); Daniel Helmer, “Twelve Urgent Steps for the Advisor Mission in Afghanistan,” *Military Review* (July-August 2008): 73-81.
12. As of this writing in June 2008, there is still no doctrine for Army general purpose forces configured as military transition teams, although Chapter 6 of Field Manual 3-24 is useful in this regard. The Air-Land-Sea Center is planning to publish *Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Training Security Force Advisor Teams* in November 2008. The Center for Army Lessons Learned published *The Combat Advisor Handbook* (No. 08-21) in April 2008; this book was written by former combat advisors for current and future combat advisors and would be a good foundation for a stand-alone doctrinal manual.
13. The opinion of a Marine Corps Reserve officer assigned to an advisor support team is that “The ten-man AST was simply too small to engage all of the appropriate Iraqi leaders at the same time. The number of advisers necessary was more than double the number of advisers assigned.” See Navarro, 136, 138. The most comprehensive analysis is the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Stand Up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces* (2007), Chapter 7.
14. The Training Model can be downloaded at <www.riley.army.mil/view/article.asp?id=775-2006-04-10-35086-69>.
15. General Casey cited in Yochi Dreazen, “Army To Promote Training As Career Path,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 June 2008, 3.
16. See Greg Jaffe, “A Camp Divided,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2006, for a description of the chain of command problems that have limited the effectiveness of advisory teams forced to rely on neighboring U.S. units for their logistical support. Chapter 6 of *The Combat Advisor Handbook* also notes these problems, as does anecdotal evidence from advisor teams currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.
17. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991).
18. Andrew Krepinevich, “Send In The Advisers,” *The New York Times*, 11 July 2006.