



## Mission and Morality:

### Tough Choices for Advisors, Mentors and Teams Leaders

by Gene C. Kamena

In a recent article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Robert M. Gates, our Secretary of Defense, stated "Within the military, advising and mentoring indigenous security forces is moving from the periphery of institutional priorities, where it was considered the province of the Special Forces, to being a key mission for the armed forces as a whole."<sup>1</sup> The number of military advisors, mentors and special team leaders, directly involved in training our allies continues to grow and will be of keen interest for some time to come.

Advisors and team leaders undergo specialized training and for the most part are prepared to face the challenges of their duties.<sup>2</sup> However there is one shortfall, a gap so to speak, in the training of advisors, mentors and team leaders (grouped and termed "advisors" for the purposes of this article.) Advisors often confront crime, corruption and immorality (CCI) on the part of our host nation partners – a task requiring more attention, research and resources.<sup>3</sup>

For the sake of discussion and clarity, it is necessary to define, or at least categorize, the words crime, corruption and immorality (CCI) in the context of advisory duty:

- **Crime:** Typically theft of property, but it may include the harassment of civilians, the physical punishment of prisoners and the intimidation of fellow host nation military members. This is the easiest category to detect in so much as usually something is missing or someone is hurt.
- **Corruption:** Institutionalized or condoned acts conducted for personal gain. For example, the taking of bribes, pay-offs, or skimming a percent of a subordinates pay.... Corruption is typically not done in the presence of advisors and it is sometimes difficult to determine the extent to which it is conducted and allowed.
- **Immorality:** Immoral acts by host nation partners to include, but not limited to, adultery, child abuse, homosexuality, and the brutality of woman. One example in Afghanistan is the resurgent tradition of "bacha bereesh," loosely meaning "boy play,"<sup>4</sup> which has led to the sexual abuse of young boys.<sup>5</sup> Immorality on the part of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Gates, "Helping Others Defend Themselves," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, Volume 89, Number 3, May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The Army has built Brigades that specialize in training transition teams and leaders. Additionally, Fort Dix New Jersey provides training to members of others services before deployment.

<sup>3</sup> The author was a Border Team Leader and special advisor to the Iraqi Minister of the Interior from 2004-2005.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, "Afghan boy dancers sexually abused by former warlords,"

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL1848920071119>, Sunday, November 18, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> PBS, Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/dancingboys/>

those whom we mentor is one of the hardest aspects of CCI because it is often conducted away from American advisors and while the host nation participant is on personal time.

The dilemma for advisors comes in balancing mission success while adhering to engrained professional ethics, personal values and morals. One may ask whose ethics, values and morals? The answer is ours and theirs. For advisors, the heart of this issue is deciding where and how to draw a line: what is tolerable and when to place relationships on hold to enforce moral and ethical behavior. We need a framework to assist in scoping the problem and achieving the best solution possible. No two situations will be the same because advising is the business of people.

Why is this important? CCI affects advisors, host nation partners, and the mission. For advisors, CCI can be the cause of stress, guilt and shame. While for our host nation partners, CCI may lead to short term gains or personal satisfaction, in the long term, they may become victims of the same system if left unchecked. In regard to mission accomplishment, CCI has both short term and long effects:

**Short Term:** Loss of capability through theft of equipment and by loss of trust in the partner unit's chain of command. The perceived benefits of CCI, if left unchecked, become the reason for being, the unspoken, but main mission for our partners. Diminished capability places American Advisors at risk.

**Long term:** For the U.S. military there is guilt through association. The character of the organizations we build, directly reflects upon us as a nation and our military. Corruption degrades everyone and everything it touches – ultimately, the people of our partner nation will suffer.

The following may provide our military leaders insights for consideration and action:

- Increase the institutional focus on CCI; advisors require training and tools to successfully cope with this challenge.
- Conduct research to determine possible links between advisory personnel confronted with CCI and instances of increased stress, violence and PTSD.
- Link the establishment of ethical host nation units and leaders with mission success.

The American military cannot look the other way. The problem of CCI within our partners falls squarely on the shoulders of frontline advisors. We owe them the best weapons, equipment and training to confront crime, corruption and immorality.

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