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Security Force Assistance: Just Do It

Appendix to Accompany CRS Report 41817 "Building the Capacity of Partner States through Security Force Assistance"

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In February 2009, a sudden ice storm blanketed Washington D.C. and Andrews Air Force Base significantly complicating military and commercial traffic into and out of D.C. On the eve of the 4-star irregular warfare (IW) summit--the culmination of 6 months of effort from the cross-MAJCOM IW task force--Major General Stephen Mueller (now LTG) found himself fielding a call from one of the MAJCOM commanders who asked, "Why are we having this meeting? It is really even necessary?" The weather adequately reflected this commander's frosty interest in the Air Force endeavor to "institutionalize" IW. Unfortunately, his candor represented a majority disinterest of the MAJCOM commanders and Air Staff leadership that attended the summit. Over two years later, the AF, while wholeheartedly supporting the ongoing counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan, has only marginally developed an enduring capability to prepare itself to counter irregular threats through the security force assistance (SFA). Getting the Air Force to embrace SFA as an enduring mission today is akin to the Navy shifting from the battleship as the lead in surface warfare circa 1940.

Background and Discussion

The attendees at the 2009 meeting found common ground on the premise that the AF had the onus to organize, train, and equip, IW-focused airpower assets to provide to the CENTCOM commander against irregular adversaries. However, it became soon evident that many of these GO participants had either been poorly prepared by their staffs, or held unabashed disregard for the precept of committing the Air Force to the indirect approach to IW. The summit rehashed the consternation of tired recurring excuses about terminology. The idioms, building partnerships, building partnership capacity, foreign internal defense, training/advising/assisting, were bantered about with ambiguously associated "responsibilities" for stove-piped and pigeon-holed organizations. Though the strategic intent is consistent across terminology, today's piecemeal approach to security force assistance (SFA) underscores the still-prevailing glacial pace of developing and preparing the force.

In preparation for the summit, Maj Gen Mueller's staff had diligently canvassed and coordinated across MAJCOMs to create an ala carte "Chinese menu" of scalable options for institutionalizing IW. Alternatives ranged from the tepidly sublime to the unconstrained grandiose. Mueller intended to "water-board" the attendees so as to reach a level of consensus wherein the recommendations met the NSS intent of rebalancing the force for IW, yet still reflected realistic resourcing constraints. However, despite a tenacious effort, he was rebuffed on nearly every proposal. The few endorsements that came out of this summit and went on for

CORONA consideration were primarily dedicated to kinetic IW operations (e.g. increasing TACP training and throughput). Yet, two proposals associated with the indirect approach quietly survived the gauntlet of scrutiny. In true kick-the-can-down-the-road fashion, the first was the approval of an IW Tiger Team charged with analyzing the material requirements and “demand signal for IW” as conveyed by the combatant commanders’ air components. Second was the approval of an Air Advisor Academy with the responsibilities of: (1) Providing a permanent schoolhouse for airmen enroute to deployed advisory duties in Iraq and Afghanistan, (2) Developing a regionally oriented syllabus and resident course for air component staffs responsible for coordinating the indirect approach at an operational level and, (3) Increasing annual training capacity to a level of ~2000 students.

Two years after the results of the Tiger Team study were briefed back to the IW Task Force, the Air Force is apathetically moving forward with SFA. Unfortunately, in corporate Air Force Pavlovian fashion, the response has been to frame the solution as “what type of flying machine do we need to do this mission?” The indirect approach of the future is summed up in the acquisition of a dozen each light mobility (LiMA) and light attack (LAAR) aircraft for training partner nation security forces. Conversely, the Air Advisor Academy initiative, though touted publicly by CSAF and SECDEF, is without thrust or vector. There is no permanent facility, throughput has only marginally increased, and training is available for Air Advisors preparing for Afghanistan or Iraq deployments only (no regional curriculum exists for air component staffs, et. al.).

Resistance to incorporate the indirect approach / SFA into the Air Force is at all levels. Directorates within the Air Staff and Office of the Secretary of the Air Force shun SFA initiatives and pay lip service to the annual OSD analysis of SFA. Three years after having been directed to do so, HQUSAF still has not established a personnel tracking mechanism to identify airmen who have BPC/advisory experience. With a few minor exceptions, MAJCOMs have strenuously resisted developing the force for an enduring capability. According to a recent interview with USD/Policy, and supported by GAO analysis, a persistent problem also still exists with ill-prepared and poorly trained air component staffs who are responsible for coordinating the operational level of SFA. Moreover, some GOs assert that “we already do that” through coalition exercises and contingency operations, hence discounting the importance of developing long-term regional relationships and indigenous capabilities with critical nations identified in the GEF.

Since 2008, the Air Staff agency responsible for leading the IWTF has been Director of Operational Capability Requirements for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Plans and Requirements (HQ USAF/ A5R). This has posed a significant obstacle for institutionalizing IW in HQ/USAF and SAF. The IWTF evolved out of the IED-Defeat Task Force, and much of the critical analysis and proposals lent themselves to material solutions. Hence, it was appropriate that such an effort would be lead from within the A5R. Initially, this relationship worked well when the IWTF focused on rapidly fielding, platform-centric solutions against irregular adversaries, (e.g. getting the MC-12 quickly online and into theater). Later it was an efficient relationship for defining the strategy for bringing LiMA and LAAR to bear.

Yet, this arrangement did not fit well within the Air Force corporate structure when it comes to making the investment in human capital for SFA. Though the A5R chairs the IW task force, IW/SFA priorities compete with fighter force structure, KC-X, next generation bomber, and a host of other high-profile programs that demand the lion’s share of the directorate’s time

and attention. Moreover, despite the seemingly urgent role of the VCSAF-formed task force, the group is a respite of perpetual stagnation and devoid of unity of effort. Though the mandates in its charter are far from accomplished, the group is nearly defunct. In the words of an official who requested non-attribution, “the IW window of opportunity is gone, it’s passé.” Perhaps this is best exemplified in the fact that the task force, while not formally dissolved, has not met since October 2009. Despite the recent re-alignment of the Air Staff Irregular Warfare office to be under the A3O (A3O-Q) and a council of colonels diligently churning away at the recommendations from the Tiger Team, cross-MAJCOM GO-level coordination and consensus is still notably absent. Instead, USD/P recently described an ambiguous role for a new entity with similar responsibilities, the Theater Security Cooperation Task Force. Another staff level task force that will do the trick.

If the IW task force or (any subsequent Air Staff entity) is to be a mechanism that expands beyond material solutions, its Chair should be shared between HQ AF A3O and SAF/IA with each holding the position for alternating 6 month periods. There are several benefits to this. First, the Air Force institutional repository for expertise in training foreign security forces is within the special operations community. A3O should leverage the foreign internal defense expertise resident in A3O-AS (Special Operations and Personnel Recovery). Further, A3O-AT (formal training) should have bear the onus to bear the responsibility for developing Air Advisor education and training policies commensurate with the charter of the Air Advisor Academy. They should also serve as the PEM for the program amidst corporate AF deliberations. Additionally, there would be much gained in having SAF/IA alternate holding the reigns of SFA. Foremost, the Global Partnership Strategy and supporting country plans would be vertically and horizontally integrated into the Air Force’s efforts to OT&E for SFA. Equally as important would be the coordinated parallel effects of strategic SFA (in the form of Security Cooperation and Security Assistance, i.e. FMF, FMS, IMET, MPEP) along with operational and tactical SFA (i.e. AFSAT, MTT’s, JCETS, and AVFID).

But the lethargy associated with institutionalizing SFA is not confined to the Pentagon. An example of the misdirected interpretation of CSAF’s IW intent is evident in ACC’s lack of commitment to the Coalition Irregular Warfare Center (CIWC) and the ensuing decision to disestablish the organization. The CIWC was originally established with a mandate to become the Air Force’s conduit for IW. It was to be manned with fast-burners, PME DG’s and SAAS graduates. These IW ninjas would refine AF TTPs and doctrine. Most importantly, they would be the nexus of strategic assessments of the aviation capacity of partner nations that are identified for potential training partnerships. In actuality, ACC manned the organization with what it could afford to spare. It was never was resourced to become the Center of Excellence as intended. Eventually, in 2010, CIWC was broken up and its manning was distributed throughout the Air Force Warfare Center to accomplish other roles. Though some in ACC attest that this was to spread IW across the entirety of the AFWC, such interpretation ignores the critical role CIWC undertook in accomplishing airpower assessments of prospective training partners. More importantly, this “dispersal” rationale only further perpetuates the narrow emphasis of airpower’s kinetic effects against irregular adversaries and completely dismisses the critical element of developing nascent aviation capacity, and in the process, sculpting the human terrain.

Ironically, while CIWC was being summarily dismantled, simultaneously AETC was struggling to source the manpower to expand the Air Advisor Academy to meet its charter. As basing decisions dragged out, the option to use contractors as instructors became increasingly

improbable. The lack of a permanent location made AETC unable to advertise GS jobs or enter into modifications of existing contracts. These obstacles would not have been as insurmountable were the AA Academy sourced with active duty billets that could serve in a provisional TDY status until basing is solidified. Moreover, a far-sighted, expedient approach would have been for ACC to return the CIWC assets back to AETC. These personnel, already versed in SFA, could have, with minimal effort, formed a cadre of instructors and experts that would continue to do strategic country assessments as well as developing regional courseware. Hence, the Academy would finally meet its order to expand training to meet operational long term needs for engagement well beyond contingency operations in CENTCOM. In a 25 April interview with Air Force Times, Brig Gen Allvin (NATO Air Training Command – Afghanistan) resonated this theme, reflecting that the commonalities for Air Advisors must be sorted out so that they can be applied to other countries and organizations.

While, AETC, HQ USAF, and other actors share responsibility for the lethargy in establishing the Air Advisor Academy, by far the biggest obstacle has been the unwillingness to make a decision on basing the schoolhouse. The basing decision process is managed by HQ USAF A8P. It is a very deliberate process primarily because of the political scrutiny associated with basing. As such, decisions are made at the highest levels of Air Force leadership. Yet, over the past 4 years, several courses of action have been created, evaluated, and re-evaluated based on criteria corresponding to the Academy's charter. Yet, AETC leadership and the A8P have vacillated repetitively. What was initiated with a 2009 funding addition to AETC's budget has been deemed only sufficient to meet current CENTCOM requirements. Moreover, today AETC still executes an ad hoc AA course at Joint Base McGuire/Dix/Lakehurst using shared facilities at the Expeditionary Center and the basing decision has been slipped to FY 13 POM consideration. These deliberations lack any sense of priority or urgency and, in future budgets with increasing competition for resources, leaves one to doubt the institutional commitment to establishing the Air Advisor Academy, further wondering if it is doomed to the same fate as CIWC.

Perhaps the sole exception to proactive institutionalism to SFA resides within AFSOC. AFSOC continues to grow the 6th SOS and is expanding its aviation FID training resources. Unfortunately, this is evidence to a lingering testament conflicting with OSD's and senior AF leadership's vision to spread the responsibility for the indirect approach beyond the special operations community. But this is not to imply that AFSOC has attempted to keep the train/advise/assist mission to itself. To the contrary, MG Kurt Cichowski (now LTG), while AFSOC CV, was conceivably the most proactive IW task force participant. He and his staff were diligent in providing white papers, courses of action, lessons learned and cross-tell from AFSOC's FID experiences to help develop proposals that shared responsibility and epitomized unity of effort across MAJCOMs.

But AFSOC's model for sustained SFA is lost on the larger Air Force. The headquarters has been remiss to institutionalize SFA experiences and MAJCOMs continue to reclaim any official position that implies their organizational commitment. At the headquarters level, the investment that has been made through contingency budgets to develop airmen as trainers is not captured or reinvested into future generations that will be expected to conduct SFA. For example, an airman will receive ~ 3 months of training before deploying to instruct Afghani counterparts to fly MI-17s. After a year deployment, that same airman slips back into this primary AFSC as if his tenure as an Air Advisor was not any unique qualification to be

harnessed afterward. Nearly 4 years after being given a mandate to do so, the A1 has not developed a special experience identifier or secondary AFSC to identify this hard-earned skill. That much of the resources and talent invested are lost, should be of considerable concern to AF leadership as defense budgets continue to come under additional scrutiny. Additionally, MAJCOM staffs, (most vociferously amongst functional managers), bristle at the suggestion that SFA/BPC is a peacetime mission they could/should embrace as part of a preemptive strategy. When AMC developed a CONEMP to use CRGs as a mechanism to conduct engagement and training at an operational level, nearly every career field manager non-concurred professing they were already critically stressed. Somehow CSAF's direction to "tweak" existing organizations so shape the force for the IW was diluted, if not lost, on MAJCOM staffs.

Unfortunately, the reticence by the Air Staff and other MAJCOMs may have detrimental effects on AFSOC's efforts to expand its train, advise, and assist capacity. Included in the recent markup by the HASC Emerging Threats and Capabilities (ETC) sub-committee of the FY2012 defense budget, is a \$50Million decrease in AFSOC's proposed Aviation Foreign Internal Defense (AVIFD) proposals. The rationale behind the ETC mark was incongruity with the AVIFD program and the Air Force's LiMA program, the latter still struggling to define its concept of employment. Though the language was not included in the full HASC version of the bill, it highlights the disparity of AFSOC's proactive approach towards SFA and the Air Force's platform-only solutions. Moreover, it portends continued resistance on Capitol Hill towards the Air Force's SFA/BPC way ahead. Unfortunately, this, combined with a recently proposed cut in the LAAR program, only highlights the lack of an effective communications plan (another bygone recommendation from the Tiger Team), and this omen should energize Air Force public affairs and legislative liaison offices to proactively convey the way ahead and engage the congressional committees lest they suffer the consequences.

Yet, the contradicting approach of AFSOC with the Air Force at-large effort highlights a much larger flaw in the foundation of the Air Force SFA organizational structure. Specifically, without a proponent MAJCOM, SFA/BPC/IW will continue to languish. For it to be successful, an overarching GPF SFA organization it must be resident in a MAJCOM with accompanying DOTMLPF roles, responsibilities, and programmatic resources. Without a lead MAJCOM, SFA/BPC/IW efforts continue to be disjointed and the "additional duty" of SFA will never have the support from leadership. Making AFSOC lead MAJCOM for IW/SFA/BPC would alleviate this. AFSOC has the preponderance of expertise in FID. It is well versed in the legislative authorities for training foreign forces. It has relationships and experiences that could already be leveraged into preparing theater air component staffs.

Yet for AFSOC to be successful in assuming lead command would require a larger commitment from the Air Force. However, this does not mean that topline budgets or manning must increase. The mechanism for AFSOC to conduct SFA on a larger scale is to return Rescue back to the command and leverage those assets as the vehicle to do SFA Missions. First, AFSOC already has a relationship with Rescue/Personnel Recovery that it assumed ~2003 whence, it took over a depleted community. In a short span, AFSOC assigned quality leadership and dedicated resources to rejuvenate the force. Rescue's "SOF-like" missions blended well with AFSOC. Secondly, by using Rescue, the Air Force avoids the pitfalls of the "Irregular Warfare" moniker. Whereas a partner nation may be hesitant to invite a special operations unit or an "IW" unit into their country because of the appearance of their presence; conversely, training provided by a Rescue unit would come across as less threatening and mutually beneficial to US and

partner nations. Third, combining Rescue with AFSOC in an SFA capacity would leverage the already existing synergy of SOF/Rescue proponentcy at the Air Staff level resident in A3O-AS.

Security Force Assistance is a mission entrenched in the National Security Strategies of current and previous administrations. It is a priority for OSD and likewise by SECAF and CSAF. It is now up to HQ Air Staff and MAJCOM leadership to follow through on developing the force to employ the indirect approach. CSAF's 2010 Vector clearly communicated commander's intent, and the onus is now on the Headquarters and MAJCOMs to follow through. So just do it.

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This addendum accompanies the paper written for the Congressional Research Service to fulfill the academic requirements of the Air Force Fellows program for 2011. It is provided to include opinions and recommendations gleaned from the research associated with the CRS report. As a matter of policy and legislation, and in a fashion to ensure unbiased and non-partisan analysis, CRS reports are absent of recommendations and opinion. This appendix reflects the opinions of the author and is not representative of the Congressional Research Service, Air Force Research Institute, Air University, or the United States Air Force.

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