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ADVISING INDIGENOUS FORCES

Captain Ryan T. Kranc

INTRODUCTION:

As the Long War continues, reaching its tactical, operational, and strategic objectives requires training and advising the security forces of Iraq and Afghanistan to take control of their country from insurgents, sectarian violence, and lawlessness. General George Casey said in September 2005 that "The sooner we can shift [to Iraqi security forces] the better. A smaller U.S. footprint, that is allowed to decline gradually as Iraqi forces get stronger, actually helps us."¹ The November 2005 National Security Council publication, *The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* emphasized that point, quantifying victory in Iraq according to three distinct time metrics:

IN THE SHORT TERM

An Iraq that is making steady progress in fighting terrorists and neutralizing the insurgency, meeting political milestones; building democratic institutions; standing up robust security forces to gather intelligence, destroy terrorist networks, and maintain security; and tackling key economic reforms to lay the foundation for a sound economy.

IN THE MEDIUM TERM

An Iraq that is in the lead defeating terrorists and insurgents and providing its own security, with a constitutional, elected

government in place, providing an inspiring example to reformers in the region, and well on its way to achieving its economic potential.

IN THE LONGER TERM

An Iraq that has defeated the terrorists and neutralized the insurgency.

An Iraq that is peaceful, united, stable, democratic, and secure, where Iraqis have the institutions and resources they need to govern themselves justly and provide security for their country.

An Iraq that is a partner in the global war on terror and the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, integrated into the international community, an engine for regional economic growth, and proving the fruits of democratic governance to the region.²

The result of this command emphasis on developing indigenous forces capable of taking the lead in security and stability operations within their country stimulated the parallel development of 200 Military Transition Teams (MiTT) by February of 2005. Each MiTT has 12 officers and NCOs advising Iraq battalions, brigades, and divisions. According to a February 2006 media event regarding MiTT structure and future, there were somewhere in

¹ *A Shift on Iraq*, *Washington Post*, David Ignatius, September 26, 2005

² *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, National Security Council, November 2005, p. 3

the arena of 2000 US soldiers on MiTTs, with 5,000 as “a fair estimate”³ for those who will eventually serve in the MiTT capacity.

We have done this before. On 1 July 1949 the United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG) was established in order to replace the Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG) and tasked with continuing to improve the competence of the Republic of Korea Army.⁴ In September 1950 Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina was established to advise the French in their fight with the Viet Minh. By 1968, the peak of the Vietnam conflict, the number of advisors at the battalion or below level had reached an apex of 9,430 soldiers. Additionally, before deployment, potential advisors were schooled through the Military Assistance Training Advisors (MATA) course, a four-week course that incorporated both language and counterinsurgency training.⁵ Indeed, the United States has in excess of fifty years experience as advisors in Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador, and a number of other countries around the globe.

JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines the US Army Special Forces (SF) mission of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.”⁶ Additionally,

³ *Military Transition Team Training Shifts to Riley*, *Army Times*, Michelle Tan, February 23, 2006

⁴ Ramsey, Robert D III, Occasional Paper #18, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador*, 2006, p. 15

⁵ Krepinevich, Andrew, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1986, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press

⁶ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, pg 212, 2006

the Department of Defense (DoD) defines Internal Defense and Development (IDAD) as “the full range of measures taken by a nation to promote its growth and to protect itself from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. It focuses on building viable institutions (political, economic, social, and military) that respond to the needs of society.”⁷

Given the need for SF units outside the theaters in Iraq and Afghanistan and the tremendous need for FID/IDAD inside those theaters, conventional forces and conventional Soldiers have had to take on what was an unconventional role, training and advising foreign security forces. Moreover this has become a role for joint conventional forces with JCISFA serving as it the DoD proponent. Certainly conventional forces faced a steep learning curve in the past four years taking on missions that in the past centered on SF’s core competencies of intercultural communications (to include both language proficiency and area and cultural orientation), warfighting, and training of foreign security forces. The establishment of consolidated MiTT training facilities at Fort Riley, Kansas under one command boosted progress in this arena over the past few years. Shifting that MiTT training to the Joint Readiness Training Center so that MiTTs can train alongside their U.S. conventional unit partners will further improve it.

But no matter how good the training, nothing can match the value of actual advisor experience when it comes to training and advising another human being in a cross-cultural environment. You cannot train “experience”; you can share that experience in training others. In this paper, I will share of my

⁷ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, pg 275, 2006

experiences as an advisor to an Iraqi Army brigade and as the commander of a multi-national troop containing one Iraqi Army platoon.⁸

THE LAW OF REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Realistic is defined by Merriam-Webster as “interested in, concerned with, or based on what is real or practical.” Expectation is defined as “the degree of probability that something will occur.” To compare a 6th grade geometry student with a high school senior calculus student is mixing apples and oranges. Chances are the indigenous force you have been tasked to advise (the apples) through no fault of their own are not of the caliber you would expect in US Army units (the oranges). Clearly one can make a nice dessert using both; just don’t expect pure orange juice.

The advisor’s role, as Dr. David Kilcullen has so eloquently stated, is not to have the indigenous force mirror our forces, but for them to mirror the enemy.⁹ The Law of Realistic Expectation calls for progress, however slight, over a period of time; the objective is improvement. This law recognizes that the infantry battalion you advise during your tour will not transform into SEAL Team 6 or 3-325 AIR at the end of your 12- month advisory tour. Violating this Law by thinking in those terms will not only frustrate the advisor, but the advised force as well. The Law of Realistic Expectations focuses on the improvement and refinement of procedures as a vehicle to the desired end state without

sacrificing standards. Forward progress is the engine. A good working relationship and partnership is the fuel. In our eagerness to do well, often we will place unrealistic expectations upon our partnership unit, which turns out to be unfair and frustrating. Understanding where you wish to be in twelve months will place into perspective where you should go with your training tomorrow.

IGNORANCE IS NOT STUPIDITY – DON'T STUPIDLY ASSUME THEY ARE IGNORANT

Often, we Americans erroneously equate ignorance with lack of intelligence. Ignorant people can learn and be taught; stupid people cannot be taught and will not learn. The wise advisor separates these two fundamentals to reduce misinterpretation or stereotyping by either advisor or advised. Understand that the ignorance you perceive in the partner unit is nothing compared to your actual ignorance of their way of life. It is virtually certain that those who you have been tasked to advise do not come from the same social, religious, political, or economic background as do you. It so follows that their customs and everyday activities will be dissimilar to anything you have seen before. As such, remember that in your everyday activities you will probably make mistakes that may be termed offensive to your partner force. The higher the quality of pre-deployment training is, the lower the proportionality or frequency of these occasions. Understand that they are much more tolerant of your inevitable social mistakes in their country than you will be of their tactical mistakes in training.

⁸ For additional techniques, see FM 3-05.202, Special Forces Foreign Internal Defense Operations, Appendix F - Advisor Techniques, February 2007

⁹ David Kilcullen, *28 Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency*, March 2006

YOU WILL LEARN MORE THAN YOU TEACH

If you approach your advisory role with the misconception that you know it all and are there exclusively for the purpose of teaching anyone who will listen, you will have a disappointing and unproductive year. A method of introduction is to tell your partner force commander up front that you look forward to learning as much from him as you can. Advisory roles can be flipped quite easily. As a young captain advising battalion and brigade commanders in Iraq, I would have been foolish and arrogant to assume that I could learn nothing from them. Truthfully, at the end of my time with my partner unit, I had learned far more from them than I ever could have taught them.

AL-TIKRAR YI'ALLIM AL-SHUTTAR – REPETITION TEACHES THE CLEVER

The quoted Arabic proverb has as much application for an advisor as it does on the high school football field. Repeating any act over and over instills muscle and behavioral memory. Rehearsals are the most overt method of teaching, which require both advisor and partner unit to go through the steps to achieve a task. In repetitive actions good and bad habits are formed. Repeating the same drills not only will increase your partnership unit's proficiency, the unit will begin to correct its own mistakes. Few successes will be as sweet as seeing your partner unit begin to train to standard on tasks that you have been training their leaders.

TREAT THEM AS YOU WOULD YOUR OWN SOLDIERS

Understand that your success as an advisor is directly proportionate to the success of those around you, much like the success of the platoon leader is directly tied to the abilities of his or her platoon. Taking ownership, though not in a command role or relationship, vests interest into the well being and totality of the unit. Shortcomings, when taken personally, are apt to receive greater concentration so that they are not repeated. Additionally, success shared is sweeter than private satisfaction. When pointing out the successes of others, ensure that achievement is recognized. If one of your partner unit *jundis* (soldiers) does well, make sure that his leadership, peers, and subordinates know that he did well. Recognize him in public, making a point to reward his hard work and dedication. Conversely, correct in private, particularly those in leadership positions. Consider how you would want to be treated if you erred and knew it. Consider how you have felt in the past when corrected. Implement lessons learned from your own past into tangible and usable lessons in your advisory role.

RAPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

BUILD PROGRESS:

Your abilities to connect with your partner unit on a level transcending your professional military relationship will allow both of you to accomplish more together. We played soccer with our counterparts, watched television, drank chai, talked of our families (after a period of time), played ping pong, air hockey, and told old war stories. We connected in ways outside of our official capacities; in turn, these growing

personal relationships fostered significant progress over time. Think of your relationships, particularly those friendships bred from an initial working relationship. How did those friendships support better working relationships? How did you get to that point? How will you incorporate lessons learned in this arena throughout your life into your advisory role? You will be amazed at how much impact getting to know your advisory partner will have both personally and professionally.

MISTAKES ARE TRAINING TOOLS

“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.”¹⁰ Chances are that as a child or teenager, there was a time of your life where you were told that a particular action would cause some sort of negative reaction. If you were like me, and your parents told you this, chances are you did not listen. And like me, you probably found out the hard way that doing something incorrectly precipitated a reflex mechanism meant to teach you never to repeat said action again. Just as these formative experiences from our youth have conditioned us to, perhaps, the correct path, mistakes made by the partner unit may have significant consequences in determining how not to do things in the future. The responsibility of the advisor is to ensure that these mistakes do not become fatal in the long run.

¹⁰ T.E. Lawrence, *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917

YOU ARE NOT A COMMANDER

Unless you are working in the capacity as a multi-national force commander, you will not have any command authority over your partner unit. Regardless of your opinion of a specific course of action, it is up to the indigenous chain of command to make the ultimate decision. Additionally, granting your partner commander the same due respect he deserves is not only helpful, it's the right thing to do. Your status as an advisor to a commander of a brigade or battalion does not equate your status as a brigade or battalion commander. Too often have we seen young officer or non-commissioned officers who believe their nationality supersedes military customs and courtesies. The main job of an advisor is to provide assistance and advise to the partner unit. Explaining “another way” of conducting operations alternative to the chosen course of action may be prudent in some circumstances. The bottom line is to ensure that your status as an advisor does not diminish or subvert the command authority of the partner unit. Recall the section “Mistakes as training tools.”

CONCLUSION

Emphasis on the advisory aspect in the Long War has thrust to the forefront the importance of placing tactically proficient officers and non-commissioned officers with interpersonal and intercultural skills in advisory positions. The role of the advisor in FID and IDAD operations is the lynchpin of success in fostering viable security forces able to protect their respective countries from internal and external threats. Standardization of the training programs to prepare potential advisors at Fort Riley, Kansas is an appropriate step in increasing the quality of the end product. However, common sense

and dealing with others as they should be treated are perhaps the greatest tools the advisor can bring to the table. Place yourself in the position of the “advised” and ask yourself “how would I wish to be treated?” That answer will guide you correctly.

CPT Ryan T Kranc is a two tour OIF veteran, Reconnaissance Tactics Instructor, and member in particularly good standing at the Small Wars Council, where all welcome his insights but are a bit puzzled by South Park displacing his photo evidence of a glory day with Lord Stanley’s cup.

