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Random Thoughts on Irregular Warfare and Security Assistance

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As we continue the debate on how we are going to organize our forces for operations in the Irregular Warfare and we think about enabling other forces would like to think a couple of things before we chase new "shiny things" as in new "designer organizations."

First we need to look at ourselves critically and ask if we have been able to develop effective strategies and campaign plans and then support and execute them, respectively. I think that most all of our challenges can be attributed to our strategies and campaign plans (and I will caveat this and say we need to understand that in this world of irregular warfare, complex operations and hybrid warfare there is no cookie cutter strategy or campaign plan template that will work the first time, every time. We need to be agile and flexible and be able to adapt to constantly morphing conditions). But I would say that this is where we need to focus most of all because our forces at the tactical level from all Services have proven very adept and capable and have demonstrated that they are truly learning organizations.

The second point that no one talks about are authorities and processes. If we are going to truly be effective in the Security Force Assistance, Building Partner Capacity, Train, Advise and Assist, COIN, Foreign Internal Defense areas (or whatever we what to call these types of operations – what is the flavor of the month right now?? J But I digress with my sarcasm). Our security assistance processes are broken and not supportive of whatever strategies and campaign plans we may develop. We do not have agile processes that allow us to rapidly and effectively support our friends, partners, or allies. We have Congressional constraints and limitations placed on us for political reasons that are sometimes (and perhaps often) counter to objectives or end states we are trying to achieve from a security perspective.   But all the talk of an Advisory Corps whether in the military or a combined civilian-military one will be moot if we do not update, simplify, streamline, and make effective our security assistance processes and redesign them so they can support national and regional and Country Team strategies and campaign plans. Let me make a couple of points on this.

Some say that the training and advising mission should not be separate. I could not agree more. But often under our security assistance system they are separated. If we are conducting security assistance training under Title 22 authorities we cannot advise and assist forces on operations without shifting to Title 10 authorities. I do not know if this is why we are operating this way in Afghanistan but this construct and the mindset that goes with it might well be a contributing factor. We have to take a holistic approach to the entire process and not separate pieces and parts among different agencies, organizations and units.

I was at a conference at Leavenworth at the beginning of this year and an OSD Lawyer put up a slide that showed all the security assistance regulations and laws that a lawyer can use to get a mission approved. The slide was three columns and must have been at about 8 font size in letters because there were so many rules and regulations listed. His comment was that whatever it is we wanted to do he could find an authority either at DoD or DoS or he could invoke other executive authorities. My point is instead of continually adding to the security assistance laws we need to look at revamping the entire and making it simpler in order to be more effective (and though I mean no disrespect to Lawyers but we should not be dependent on them to explain the security assistance laws to us). I would ask the rhetorical question of why Congress passed the 1206 and 1207 funding processes? Most likely because the existing security assistance programs were not responsive to what we are trying to do in support of the War on Terrorism. I think that is in indictment of our security assistance system.

Lastly, as many of you can probably tell I have been an opponent of also chasing after new concepts (I am not fundamentally opposed to them, I just think we keep coming up with fancy new terms which makes things more confusing for our people). However, I have to accept the reality that Irregular Warfare and Security Force Assistance are here to stay at least for the foreseeable future (I just wish we could keep it with just those two new ones!!). After listening to the debate and thinking about it some of us came up with this description (and I say description because the doctrine experts advised me that this does not meet the criteria for a definition).

> SFA is a process that integrates the Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mission (which is inherently and by definition Joint and Whole of Government) with Security Assistance (SA) programs to be able to train, advise, assist, and equip the security forces (military, paramilitary, and police) a friend, partner and ally (e.g., build partner capacity) in order to defend itself against internal and external threats.

The bottom line is we have the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines who can execute all that we require of them. They are the ones who have the tactical agility and the ability to adapt to changing conditions. It is up to senior leaders to develop the proper strategies and campaign plans, and provide the resources that let them do their jobs effectively. Perfect is often the enemy of good enough. We are never going to have the luxury (or the funding) to develop organizations that are optimized for every mission across the spectrum of conflict, specifically we cannot develop single focused organizations as much as we would like to. If empowered and entrusted, I believe our Services will get it just about right (again perfect is the enemy of good enough). If we develop organizations that are good enough to operate across the spectrum and if given correct strategies and executable campaign plans, with the right authorities. combined with the great Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Other Government Professionals we have (I think I should not forget to emphasize all the great non-military people we have working out there contributing just as much as our military), we will be able to accomplish the missions our nation demands of us. Instead of trying to totally redesign Service organizations we need to ensure we can plan properly at all levels, develop the security assistance system with the right authorities, and then let our people get on with business.

One last point. Although I doubt we will ever see a 30,000 Soldier increase as some are advocating, I am heartened to hear leaders talk about it because in today's world it takes people to win (and I would borrow a SOF truth – "people are more important than hardware" and state categorically that this concept is by no means exclusive to SOF) I think that whether we are operating in an Irregular Warfare, Hybrid Warfare or Complex Operations environment or conducting Major Combat Operations it is time people remembered that technology is an enabler, an enhancer, but never a replacement for people.

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The opinions expressed here are my own and do not represent any DoD or USG positions.