

Considerations for Organizing and Preparing for Security Force Assistance Operations

Colonel David Maxwell

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework of the problem we face as a nation in terms of enabling friends, allies, and partners to defend against terrorism and insurgency and maintain internal stability, and to provide some recommendations for change.

We not only face a chaotic and complex environment in the post 9-11 world due to the nature of the threat and the interaction of religious and ideological conditions but we also face a complex and confusing national security environment. As we execute OIF and OEF and less visible WOT operations throughout the rest of the world under the rubric of OEF (e.g., OEF-TS, OEF-CCA, OEF-P, etc.) we find ourselves faced with questions of how to organize and train to be able to execute the full spectrum of operations required to be successful in the war on terror (WOT) and to conduct Stability Operations. Current Joint and Army doctrine (JP 3-0 and FM 3-0) recognize that Stability Operations are on par with Offense and Defense and there is general recognition that the emphasis on Offense, Defense, and Stability will shift over time and as conditions change.

There seems to be a major assumption among many planners that the level of effort in Iraq and Afghanistan will need to be sustained indefinitely in areas beyond those two countries and the focus is how to develop a force (some say an “Advisor Corps”) to be able to continue such large scale and continuous deployments. Before we develop such a force I think it is necessary to correctly frame the challenge we face, look at existing doctrine, training and organizations, and determine what is appropriate to sustain and what is appropriate for adaptation.

Since 9-11 some writers and military planners have called the WOT a counterinsurgency on a global scale. This is a useful planning construct and one with which I agree. Therefore I use it as the foundation for analyzing our situation and developing recommended improvements to our doctrine, training, organizations and execution of operations. We face many diverse threats but the bottom line is that there are individuals and organizations in the world using religion and ideology to mobilize people to fight against established governments and upend the status quo. In some ways this is similar to the Cold War and the use of the Communist ideology to attempt

to undermine the West. In both cases the religions and ideology are well suited for mobilizing the “have-nots” against the “haves”. However, as we know well from history while these can be successful in causing and even winning revolutions, they cannot be successfully sustained in the modern world and end up with despotic political systems enslaving their populations. This is the threat we face in a nutshell.

Framing the Problem

Most of the planning for Security Force Assistance (SFA) operations is focused on developing a force and capability to execute SFA missions. But what does SFA really entail? As we look at current terminology and doctrine we find we are using many words and concepts interchangeably and it seems to be causing confusion among interagency and joint military planners. A list of the current terms in vogue illustrates the confusion we face:

- Foreign Internal Defense (FID)
- Irregular Warfare (IW)
- Unconventional Warfare (UW)
- Counterinsurgency (COIN)
- Train, Advise, and Assist (TAA)
- Armed or Combat FID
- Stability, Security, Transition, Reconstruction Operations (SSTRO)
- Stability Operations (STABOPS)
- Phase 0 Operations
- Post Conflict Operations
- Phase 4 Operations
- Nation Building
- Capacity building
- Internal Defense and Development (IDAD)
- Humanitarian and Civic Action (HCA)
- Civil Affairs (CA)
- Civil Military Operations (CMO)
- Psychological Operations (PSYOP)
- Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)
- Transition Teams (TT)
- Human Terrain Teams
- Human Terrain System (HTS)
- Military Liaison Elements (MLE)
- Preparation of the Environment (PE)
- Operational Preparation of the Environment (OPE)
- Theater Military Assistance Advisory Groups – Future (TMAAG-F)
- Marine Special Operations Advisory Groups (MSOAG)
- Military Groups (MILGRP)
- Joint US Military Assistance Groups (JUSMAG)
- Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC)
- Office of the Defense Representative (ODR)

- Security Assistance Office (SAO)
- Foreign Military Sales (FMS)
- Individual Military Education and Training (IMET)
- Joint/Combined Exchange Training (JCET)
- Military Training Team (MTT)

All of these words and terms have baggage and many are tied to organizations and services trying to address current problems. Some are old and because of that there is a belief that they no longer have merit. What we really need to do is to simplify our understanding of the threat, the threat to nations *and their* people, and the methods for dealing with the threat *and* populations. We do have good doctrine to deal with the threat we face and we should examine it and ensure that it is commonly understood and implemented. If we accept that the WOT is COIN on a global scale then we also should accept that the correct way to contribute to the defeat and deterrence of terrorism is to enable friends, allies, and partners with sufficient capacity to defend their countries. This of course is the province of FID and should be accepted as the overarching unifying doctrinal concept for employment of US instruments of national power both civilian and military.

Furthermore, the assumption that current levels of employment of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan will be the norm around world needs to be challenged. While it has been stated that Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) have submitted requirements that are equal to or above the current force levels of employment for advisors this fact needs to be challenged. As all good planners are necessarily conservative and plan for the worst case it is logical to assume that GCC planners as well as service planners are pre-disposed to estimating requirements of sufficient size to ensure they have a large enough force structure to deal with emerging threats.

In today's situation the GCCs are competing with CENTCOM's insatiable appetite for forces, therefore it is in their best interests to estimate future requirements that will ensure that they get "their fair share" of forces. The services, in particular, the Army and the Marine Corps are supportive of these requirements as it helps to validate their force development plans for the future. When questioned, planners state that these requirements have been "validated" by country teams. However, when the onion gets peeled back I would submit that there has been no country-by country assessment of the needs of the security forces as well as a thorough analysis of which country will accept US aid and in particular in the amounts envisioned by the GCC and service planners. Assessment and estimates of access are key to developing future requirements.

The fundamental problem is: How to enable partner nations (allies, friends, and the governments of high priority and priority countries) to prevent terrorism and insurgency by conducting effective intelligence and tactical operations?

The problem is NOT how to build an advisor corps.

To solve the problem the entire security assistance system and framework needs to be reformed and transitioned to a system that allows the interagency and military to synchronize and apply their capabilities to support partner nations in their fight against terrorism and internal and external threats to stability.

Again, the real question is how do we conduct Security Force Assistance operations to be preventative in nature and to support the WOT?

Doctrine

Foreign Internal Defense is defined as “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” (*JP 1-02, JP 3-05, JP 3-07.1*) This definition clearly and succinctly outlines what must be done in terms of enabling friends, allies, and partners to be able to defend against terrorism and insurgency.

This doctrine is all encompassing and provides sufficient framework for the interagency community and all US military forces to conduct operations to assist another country (*or designated organization*). This doctrine is important because it recognizes that it **supports** “action programs taken by another government or designated organization” to defend itself from lawlessness and subversion (i.e., terrorism and insurgency). It is a key fundamental of COIN that the host nation has to be in charge and the US can only provide external support to that nation. This is because legitimacy is key and if the US does the fighting for another nation vice providing support it almost always undercuts the legitimacy of the host nation in the eyes of its people and provides a propaganda boon for the opposition. (See LTC John Mulbury in the December-January 2008 edition of *Special Warfare Magazine* for one of the best discussions of FID doctrine “ARSOF, General Purpose Forces, and FID: Who Does What, Where and When”?)

In addition, nothing in the definition limits it to a “peacetime” or “Phase 0” operation. It can and must be applied across the spectrum of conflict when conditions warrant. In that it can support other, larger military operations or civilian assistance efforts both internal to the host nation or as a supporting effort for other regional operations it again provides for support to full spectrum operations. Finally, it can use direct military force, but has to be the rare exception because of the legitimacy issue but it is currently required in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Most importantly, nearly every concept and organization currently under development falls under, is related to, or is supported by the doctrine of FID. Whether it is IW (and environment or condition), Stability operations, reconstruction (also known as Nation Building operations), PRTs or TTs (organizations), train, advise, and assist (a method), Phase 0 operations (a campaign plan construct) FID provides an overarching and unifying concept.

In an IW, COIN, or stability operations environment FID doctrine recognizes that legitimacy is key. There are three basic elements in such an environment:

- The threat (insurgents/terrorists)
- The population (the battlefield of human terrain and the center of gravity)
- The counterinsurgent/counterterrorist
 - The government: its agencies and security forces
 - External support to the Government

The US role is simply that of the external support. In any kind of advisory assistance role US forces and US government agencies can only be the external support to the host nation government and it must be understood by those US forces and agencies that the host nation has to be the main effort. Furthermore to be successful in such operations the host nation has to be able to perform four functions simultaneously and with discipline and precision:

- Deny sanctuary to insurgents/terrorists
- Deny insurgent/terrorist mobility
- Deny insurgent/terrorist access to resources (internal and external)
- Separate the population from insurgent/terrorist organizations

When we talk about advising and assisting host nation forces we talk about building their capacity from a military, governmental services, and good governance standpoint. The four tasks above are all encompassing and as we organize support to our friends, partners, and allies we generally employ our support along four lines of operation.

- Capacity building (train, advise, and assist security forces – military and police so that they can effectively deny sanctuary, mobility, and access to resources to insurgents/terrorists)
- Civil-Military Operations (to change conditions that give rise to insurgency/terrorism and demonstrate commitment of the government to its people; thus separating the population from the insurgents/terrorists and allowing the population to provide information that will aid the security forces in denying sanctuary, mobility, and access to resources)
- Intelligence Operations (the fusing of all source intelligence to aid the host nation in conducting precise operations against its threat)
- Information operations (or influence operations and more specifically Psychological Operations or PSYOP – focused on enhancing the legitimacy of the host nation government which aids in further separating the population from the insurgents/terrorists)

Finally, FID doctrine recognizes that the problems faced by host nations are political in nature and require a proportionate political response making security operations a complementary but often secondary effort. Ultimately the socio-economic conditions that give rise to insurgency/terrorism must be addressed in order for the host nation to achieve internal stability. Of course the socio-economic and political conditions cannot be effectively addressed without security and therein lies the complexity and challenge for military forces and government agencies.

Thus a thorough understanding FID doctrine provides the joint and interagency framework to assist our friends, allies, and partners. However, there exist many challenges to implementing such doctrine.

First and foremost our FID doctrine, although recognizing the pre-eminence of interagency cooperation and operations, remains rooted in military doctrine and is not widely accepted in the interagency community. Second, although USSOCOM has responsibility for writing FID doctrine, FID is not an exclusively Special Operations mission. True, by law FID is a core SOF

mission; however, the joint doctrine also clearly states that all services will provide forces trained and ready to conduct FID. This misunderstanding is likely one of the reasons for all the services and many units to want to create new doctrine, organizations, and concepts and overlook what already exists in doctrine. Because FID is associated with SOF most non-SOF personnel neglect reading or employing it and because it is a military concept it is also not read by the interagency community. SOF plays a key supporting role in FID but all services and the interagency are required to participate in operations in order for the US to execute successful FID. This is not a question of replacing SOF with general purpose, conventional (or full spectrum) forces. This is about organizing and applying all (military and civilian) resources and elements of national power. Our FID doctrine is sufficient for providing the foundation for how to organize and support Security Force Assistance operations. However, there are other areas where we still need to adapt.

Interagency (of “Whole of Government”) Requirements for Success

As stated above, correct application of FID doctrine requires an interagency approach vice a purely military one. One of the issues with Iraq and Afghanistan has been the perception that US civilian agencies were unprepared and incapable of providing the civilian component for post-conflict operations or National Building. Work is being done to improve this situation as evidenced by the National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD 44) which established the Department of State’s (DOS) Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. While this is a start it has not been fully resourced or empowered.

One of the critical problems in the interagency effort is the ability to plan and organize to conduct operations in the post 9-11 environment. The interagency community is complex and the nature of the bureaucracy is to protect resources and organizations. There is no disciplined planning mechanism in place to cause the interagency community to achieve unity of effort and to plan and synchronize operations. Although many might rightly say that the National Security Act of 1947 created the National Security Council as the organization best suited to synchronize interagency activities.

Ironically, the above lesson was learned in the 1990’s with operations in Northern Iraq in post Desert Storm, and then Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia.. In May the 1997 Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD 56), Management of Complex Contingency Operations, was signed in an attempt to codify an interagency planning process that would ensure unity of effort. PDD 56 provided a framework for all government agencies to conduct mission planning, to include conducting mission analyses and developing an estimate of the situation with courses of action for the agency as well as adopting an overall plan of action to support the US government’s synchronized execution of complex contingency operations. While this was good in theory it was never fully implemented and lost momentum when the administration was changed. However, this does provide a useful model for future interagency efforts and should be re-evaluated for future use perhaps as an addendum to NSDD 44.

I mention “Whole of Government” because an Ambassador recently mentioned to me that to those in the interagency community sometimes feel when members of DoD use interagency it is pejorative and implies it is DoD against the interagency when in fact DoD is an integral part of

the interagency community or “whole of government”. And of course as any student of FID knows to be successful in helping friends, partners, and allies it takes a “whole of government” effort.

Country Teams as the Center of Gravity for Security Force Assistance

At the tip of the interagency spear is the US Country Team. This seems to be an overlooked organization in all the current discussions. Many people misunderstand the Country Team and mistake it for a State Department organization. But it is in fact an interagency team that answers to the US Ambassador who in turn really answers to the President of the United States.

The Country Team is critical to the execution of FID and Security Force Assistance operations because we have to recognize and accept that we are dealing with sovereign nations that are our friends, allies, and partners. Sovereignty is a concept we often pay lip service to but we forget how important it is to the success of the mission especially as we concern ourselves with tactical and operational level activities and neglect the understanding that every tactical operation has strategic effects. The Country Team is the single point of entry to the sovereign host nation with whom we are charged with support.

The Ambassador exercises authority over *all* US government agencies in the host nation. This is not simply an administrative requirement, it is essential to ensuring synchronized USG operations in that host country which of course requires unity of command to ensure unity of effort.

It is the Country Team that will coordinate for access for US military forces and interagency players to support the host nation. Without access the GCC will be unable to provide military support. In all planning the Country Team must figure prominently and from a military terminology perspective it must be the “supported command.”

Most importantly, it is the Country Team, by virtue of its political contacts and through assessments by its organic military organization(s) that will identify requirements for support to the HN and determine if US military and other government agencies will have the access necessary to support a FID effort enabling friends, allies and partners to defend against terrorism and insurgency and maintain internal stability.

MAAG – The Tactical and Operational C2 HQ for SFA

Most Country Teams have a military element, some as few as a handful of military attaches, while others have large JUSMAGs, MILGRPs, ODCs, or ODRs. Military organizations at the country team level vary widely throughout the world and have varied in the same country team over time.

Today’s JUSMAGs, MILGRPs and ODCs for the most part are focused on the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Individual Military Education and Training (IMET) aspect of security assistance and rarely have an advisory role in the host nation.

However, given today's conditions it might be useful to revive the Military Assistance ***and Advisory*** Group (MAAG), properly resource it and provide it with the correct authorities to employ it as the focal point for Security Force Assistance operations and to accomplish the following tasks:

- Conduct assessments of HN military forces and recommend capacity building support
- Provide C2 of US Advisors and Military units supporting capacity building
- Coordinate for the deployment, redeployment, and logistical support of US forces
- Provide liaison at appropriate HN military organizations
- Provide the conduit for sharing intelligence with the HN security forces
- Establish and sustain the long term relationships with HN military personnel that are key to successful employment of US support

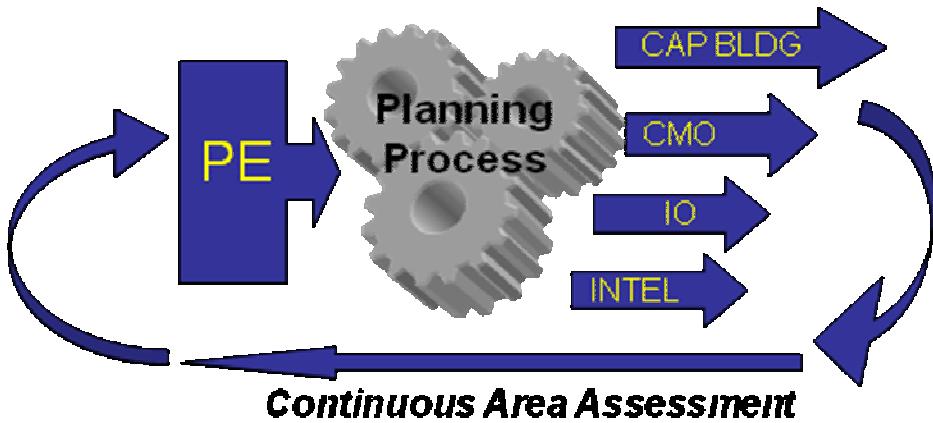
A revitalized MAAG structure will provide the US military with the capability to identify requirements and provide the right military support. Investment of personnel and resources in a MAAG-like organization is a necessary pre-condition to the conduct of successful long term security force assistance operations. For more on the MAAG concept please see the writings of COL (R) Robert Killebrew who has done the definitive work on developing this concept.

Assessments

As stated above effective security force assistance requires initial and continuous assessments of the HN security forces and conditions so that the right programs can be developed and implemented. The US military organization in country must be able to conduct these assessments or coordinate for a force that can. Fundamentally it is the assessment that provides the foundation for the Country Team's plan and the GCCs theater engagement and campaign plans.

GCC requirements for security force assistance must be validated by thorough assessments of HN forces. In addition, while operations are being conducted continuous area assessments are required so that forces and support can be adjusted to meet changing conditions.

Assessments fuel the planning that takes place to support the HN. Combined with effective preparation of the environment, they shape plans and operations and help US military and civilian agencies provide the right support at the right time.



Access to HN/Willingness of HN to Accept US Support

The critical requirement for US Security Force Assistance operations is access to the host nation and its willingness to accept the offer of US support. Again, the issue of sovereignty is the most important. Despite our best intentions US operations are often viewed or at least exploited by political opponents as an affront to a nation's sovereignty.

Again, it is the Country Team that is the essential organization to gain and maintain access and it is its military organization that must identify the requirements and help convince the HN military that the US can provide effective support.

As GCC requirements are identified for future advisor requirements they must be based on thorough assessments not only of the HN security forces but also an assessment by the Country Team of the likelihood that the HN will accept such support.

“Enterprise” Advisors

There has been much discussion of the types of advisors and skills required to support Security Force Assistance operations. One of the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan is that there is a need for advisors who can help to develop the “enterprise” functions of a nation. While this is important during reconstruction operations when institutions need to be rebuilt or even sometimes established for the first time this requirement may also exist in some cases with our assistance to our friends, allies, and partners.

The Country Team and the MAAG may identify requirements to assist in strategic level reforms within a host nation and may require advisors who are proficient in operating large organizations at the Ministry levels of a nation. The paradox is that these types of advisors are not available in tactical units nor would they be available in an “advisor corps”. The only “advisors” who are proficient in these types of skills are those who are serving or have served at the Pentagon/GCC level or in other civilian government agencies at the national level. The challenge is identifying and deploying such advisors. Advisors do not gain the requisite experience in a training course or in any Service School. Proficiency is gained by doing and if advisors with the necessary skills were relegated to an advisor corps they would be unable to maintain their proficiency. However, since the best qualified advisors are those serving at the national level, their deployment will

impact existing US government organizations and if the operations are of a long term nature there is insufficient depth to sustain the deployment of qualified personnel.

This is a very important aspect of the Security Force Assistance mission that needs to be addressed. While there is talk of identifying those with advisor experience the personnel system also has to be able to identify those with “enterprise” experience and then find a way for the personnel system to make them available to support missions. This will be an important step in our ability to conduct effective “enterprise advisor” operations.

Tactical Advisors

In many cases this is the main focus of Security Force Assistance operations. What needs to be understood is that there are various levels of advisor capabilities required. SF personnel are selected, trained, and provided with career long experience in advisor operations while training for Unconventional Warfare (requiring the highest level of experienced advisor but a mission that is rarely executed in its classic form). However, while they routinely conduct FID missions they cannot and should not conduct all FID missions. The development of advanced advisory skills in SOF is a long term process that starts with accessing the personnel with the right aptitude, providing them with training and education not only in tactical skills but also in cultural awareness and language, assigning them to experienced teams that provide mentorship, and then sustained deployments into operational environments where they use continue to employ and refine their advisory abilities.

While SOF and in particular SF are well suited for many advisory missions they cannot be the only force conducting FID as we should know from our doctrine. Current examples of ongoing and sustained SOF FID operations include OEF Trans Sahel (OEF-TS), OEF Philippines (OEF-P), OEF Caribbean and Central America (OEF-CCA) and operations in Colombia. However, in each of these cases SOF depends on support from other forces and from all services especially in terms of intelligence and logistic support but also in security operations as well. These are an example of what might be called Tier I operations in the parlance of 1981 doctrine for Low Intensity Conflict. This doctrine outlined three tiers for employment of US forces in FID. But what Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated is that all forces have to play a large role in FID but even in 1981 Army doctrine correctly recognized this requirement. The three tiers are:

- Tier I: *US Army Special Forces*—Security Assistance, FID, IDAD plus CA and PSYOP
- Tier II: *US Army Separate Brigades*- fight the heavy fight to allow host nation forces to develop.
- Tier III: *US Army General Purpose Forces* from CONUS become the main effort until the enemy is reduced in power and handover to the host nation is possible

Although this was Army doctrine in 1981 it provides a possible outline for employment of US military forces.

- Level I: USSOCOM forces and interagency elements conduct FID in support of the HN

- Level II: US Army and Marine Corps BCTs and RCTs conduct small unit exchanges and military to military engagement activities and exercises to improve HN capabilities. US interagency elements conduct parallel operations to advise and assist HN elements
- Level III: GCC provides theater and CONUS based forces to assist in full spectrum security operations to assist the HN government in stabilization operations until the HN security forces can conduct effective security.

What this model shows is that all elements of the military have a role in FID but full spectrum operations should be maintained in order to be able to operate at all levels. Rather than develop a separate advisor corps US forces must maintain the capability to fight and win when necessary as well as share experience and expertise with friends, allies, and partners. We need to provide the right training to our forces and educate our officer and NCO leadership with sufficient understanding of the FID mission and the requirements for successful FID operations. Before we invest significant resources and time in trying to develop a separate advisor corps we need to go back to the Country Team for detailed assessments and determine the real requirements for future Security Force Assistance operations.

Authorities and Funding

One of the most important initiatives that can be taken to enhance our ability to conduct Security Force Assistance operations is a transformation of authorities and a streamlining of funding. As currently exists there are a myriad of laws and regulations that govern all aspects of Security Forces Assistance. These have been developed over time and often legislated due to actual or perceived abuses and nearly almost always result from political considerations. The Leahy Amendment and the Denton Amendment are two such examples forcing unwieldy and inefficient processes for Human Rights vetting and the support to non-governmental humanitarian aid organizations. But it is not only legislation that hampers effective operations it is also DOD and Service regulations as well.

In addition to authorities the funding sources are extremely complex and confusing and cause a great deal of staff work by all agencies from the Country Team to the GCC to the Services and OSD. Although some lawyers will explain there are authorities for every conceivable event, planners and organizations should not have to “shop around” for the right authority. As our doctrine recognizes the importance of Stability Operations and FID, so too should our authorities and funding system.

For effective Security Force Assistance operations authorities and funding need to be straight forward, understandable, and streamlined. A thorough analysis of authorities and funding needs to be conducted and a new system that supports operations be emplaced. Programs such as 1206 and 1207 are a good start but even they are complex. There needs to be legislation that will supersede all the previous regulations and amendments and put into a single category perhaps under a new program called Capacity Building for Partner Nations (CBPN) that would provide a single authority for all FID operations and a single funding source for the full spectrum of Security Force Assistance.

Conclusion

Before we embark on widespread reorganization to meet future needs we should examine our existing doctrine. I would submit that our doctrine is sufficient to meet the current and future complex environments in which US military and interagency (or “whole of government”) organizations will find themselves. It is true that changes are needed but these should be focused on optimizing existing organizations e.g., the Country Team and its military component. Also the interagency process does need reform. Perhaps most important is the security assistance system and its processes have to be adapted to meet the current and future environment and this requires updating and streamlining authorities and funding mechanisms. Furthermore, prior to determining requirements we must ensure that the target countries for our assistance actually need and can benefit from our assistance and are willing to accept it. To do this we need to have the full support of the Country Team in order to facilitate the proper assessments and ensure the feasibility of access. Lastly, the challenges we face may seem new but in fact the US military has dealt with similar challenges throughout history and is fully capable of adapting to meet today’s and tomorrow’s challenges. Because we need to undertake such adaptation and “get on with business” also means we should focus less on radical reorganization and more on enhancing the effectiveness of our current organizations and most importantly read and heed our doctrine.

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