

# **Military Review**

THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF THE U.S. ARMY

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COMBINED ARMS CENTER, FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS



Sgt. Thomas Cook provides medical training 19 March 2011 to Iraqi soldiers of the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th Iraqi Army Division, at the Field Engineer Regiment compound. Cook is a combat medic with 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.

(Photo by Sgt. Coltin Heller, 109th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

# What Lessons Did We Learn (or Re-Learn) About Military Advising After 9/11?

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**A**s military operations in Afghanistan continue to wind down in 2014, the U.S. military and international partner armed forces need to codify lessons learned on military advising from 9/11 to the present, with special emphasis on capturing insights from the two major

counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. A compendium of lessons should include answers to certain essential questions. What major advising lessons did the U.S. military learn since 9/11? What current advising lessons parallel previously gleaned insights from historic advising missions? How should

armed forces treat the advising mission after the troops withdraw from Afghanistan?

The main purpose of this article is to provide a set of the most important military advising lessons learned from past and present. These lessons have been distilled from comparing historical and contemporary advisory experiences extracted from dozens of sources including military journal articles, doctrine, book chapters, and monographs. Although my tour as an advisor in Iraq from 2009-2010 proved informative, I tried to canvass and examine myriad advising sources with an open mind toward capturing the major patterns that emerged.

Recognizing that recording every germane advisory insight in a single short article would be an impossible task, I focus instead on presenting a discrete set of the most salient major contemporary military advising lessons learned in the post-9/11 era, with special focus on combat advising in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of these lessons learned apply directly to individual advisors, while other topics provide organizational-level insights and considerations for the U.S. military and its friends and allies.

## **History of the U.S. Military Advising Mission**

Military advisors are not a new phenomenon for the U.S. military. In fact, they played a key role in the founding of the United States itself. A small group of competent and dedicated Prussian, French, and other military advisors helped emerging Continental Army forces increase their warfighting capability and professionalism as they waged war against the British Crown for their freedom.

These included such notables as Prussian officer Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who produced early manuals of arms, drills, and other training products to instill discipline and order into the new Continental Army. The efforts of advisors such as von Steuben ultimately helped the fledgling American nation successfully fight for and win its independence.<sup>1</sup>

America's relatively short national history includes significant involvement in sponsoring numerous large- and small-scale advising missions for strategic reasons of its own. Some of the purposes to advise include, "modernization, nation building,

economic penetration or purposes, ideological reasons, and counterinsurgency."<sup>2</sup>

Among the more prominent examples, U.S. advisors were assigned to work with surviving national military leaders in Japan and Germany after World War II to stabilize the societies of their war-torn nations and then help rebuild military forces appropriate for each nation's post-war national defense. The nature of those advisory relationships reflected the idiosyncratic post-Hitler landscape in Germany as well as the post-atomic bomb setting in Japan. Each case required close association among U.S. advisors and military units with German and Japanese military forces for a prolonged period. Not coincidentally, the close working relationships that developed between U.S. advisors and their foreign counterparts, coupled with the subsequent establishment of military bases in Germany and Japan, provided the United States with vital regional and strategic advantages.

In another example, a contingent of U.S. advisors working with South Korean military forces during the Korean War era provided significant leverage against North Korea to halt its aggression.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the success of U.S. advisors led to the establishment of a permanent U.S. military presence in South Korea, which has facilitated the U.S. advising mission there from the Korean War to the present.

This particular advising mission has not only contributed to a dramatic improvement of South Korean security force capabilities over the long term, but also has enabled U.S. and South Korean military units to train and prepare together. Advisory support has thus undergirded America's longstanding pledge to stand by its South Korean ally in its still unsettled conflict with North Korea.

In another instance of U.S. advisory support to an ally, America's preliminary entrance into the Vietnam War began with the covert deployment of Special Forces advisors to work with the South Vietnamese military. As the United States officially entered the war with the deployment of a large conventional force to Vietnam, the advising mission eventually grew in size and scope beyond the capability of Special Forces. This led to significant use of conventional forces in an advisory role.<sup>4</sup> One consequence was that by the time the United States withdrew from Vietnam, the U.S. military had acquired broad institutional experience

with a wide array of pertinent advising lessons and skills. However, for a variety of reasons, including some misunderstandings of—and some outright resistance toward—the “softer” unconventional advising mission by the combat-focused mainstream U.S. military, the Army did not internalize and preserve its advising lessons from Vietnam. Consequently, as the Army distanced itself from the memory of the Vietnam experience and turned its attention to the threat of large-scale standing conventional communist forces in the context of the Cold War, it gradually forgot many of the hard-earned lessons about advising (despite some small-scale conventional advising missions that occurred after Vietnam).<sup>5</sup>

In any case, as the mainstream U.S. military gradually shelved the advising mission, U.S. Army Special Forces wholly adopted the unconventional advising mission as one of its core charters. Thus, after the Vietnam War, Special Forces honed their advising

capabilities and deployed military advisors to numerous regions around the globe—albeit typically in much smaller advisor teams—while the conventional Army generally lost its advising capability until the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts after 9/11.

### Relevant Lessons from the Korean and Vietnam Wars to the Present

A retrospective of the U.S. military’s historic advising experiences provides some vital insights and lessons learned that are consistent with the contemporary advising lessons offered in this article.<sup>6</sup> Despite some differences between the past and the present, many historic advising mission insights from the Korean and Vietnam Wars ring true with relevance for the present. These include the importance of building relationships with foreign counterparts; the need to draw on numerous pertinent skills, including combat proficiency; the requirement for substantial cross-cultural and



Capt. John Washburn, 2nd Battalion, 136th Combined Arms Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, listens as an Iraqi army officer briefs his soldiers before a convoy 20 November 2006 near Rawah, Iraq. Washburn is a member of the 1st BCT’s military transition team working with the Iraqi army near Rawah.

(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division)

diplomatic skills; the significance of relevant military expertise; the importance of role modeling (from appropriate moral boundaries to proper military procedures); and, the need for adaptability and flexibility (to adjust to unique, ambiguous, and shifting conditions).

Among the first obstacles U.S. advisors had to overcome during the Korean and Vietnam War eras was the low opinion conventional military units commonly held with regard to the advisory mission. Mainstream U.S. military organizations commonly misunderstood and tended to marginalize the unconventional advising mission due to the belief that the advisory mission was a soft activity of questionable utility as compared to traditional, conventional combat operations.

In addition to the challenge of overcoming skepticism and a lack of support from U.S. units, advisors also had to perform a highly stressful cross-cultural juggling act with their foreign counterparts. Advisors had to simultaneously understand counterpart military units' disparate cultures and objectives—and try to align their counterparts' objectives with those of the U.S. military.

Successful advisors effectively balanced these diverse interests by adopting a patient, tolerant, and diplomatic approach with their counterparts. In contrast, unsuccessful U.S. advisors included those who inadequately muzzled the commanding, take-charge styles they typically used with U.S. troop formations. Additionally, some advisors suffered from expecting their South Korean or South Vietnamese counterparts to mirror U.S. military procedures or meet U.S. performance standards, which proved to be an unreasonable and ineffectual advisory approach for the circumstances. And, at other times, advisors inappropriately tried to give orders to their counterparts, even though advisors did not possess the command authority to do so.

Some U.S. advisors' inability or unwillingness to change these approaches toward their South Korean or South Vietnamese counterparts reduced their effectiveness, or worse, aroused hostility. In some extreme cases, South Korean counterparts intentionally stranded their most-hated U.S. advisors on battlefields during the Korean War, which illustrated how some advisors' lack of cross-cultural skills reduced their chances of survival in combat situations.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, it is useful to compare the impact of new technologies in previous eras of advisors with

contemporary times. The introduction of new technologies appears to have had similar effects on the U.S. advising missions over time. For example, during the Vietnam War, for the first time in history, U.S. citizens watched reports (though sanitized) about the war on television, while an extremely small number of Vietnamese citizens shared the same technological window to view new developments in the war occurring across their own country. Though diffusion of information through technology was much slower in previous eras than today, the emergence of television with its global reach nevertheless dramatically changed the political environment in which the war was being waged, which complicated the advisor mission.

Similarly, but with a much more dramatic and quicker impact on a global scale than advisors in previous eras experienced, today's near real-time information diffusion from the battlefield has had far reaching effects on the advising mission, with life and death implications for U.S. advisors. For example, very shortly after the global circulation of reports of Korans getting burned along with common trash at an American military base in Afghanistan in 2012, thousands of Afghan people rioted and demonstrated across the country, resulting in damage, violence, and numerous deaths—including the deaths of some U.S. advisors who had no personal involvement in the Koran burning incident.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, historically, pockets of organizational resistance toward change within the mainstream U.S. military have often successfully marginalized and limited investment in unconventional capabilities—including advising—or anything that detracts from traditional combat capabilities. However, during periods of conflict, real-world demands often have overshadowed this sort of resistance over time. Those demands have caused the growth of unconventional capabilities, including an expanded need for advisors as well as non-combat capabilities needed to conduct stability operations and perform peace-building tasks.<sup>9</sup> The current world situation—with conflicts erupting throughout Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and elsewhere—should provide sufficient indication that the need for such unconventional capabilities (including advising) will not diminish any time soon. On the contrary, world events suggest the conventional military will need to cultivate a broad range of advisory skills.

## Major Advisory Lessons Learned or Re-Learned Since 9/11

Several major lessons learned (or re-learned) have emerged from our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan after the attacks on 9/11. These include the need for advisors to forge strong relationships with their counterparts and linguists, the need to learn about and adapt to the unconventional military advising mission, and other key lessons that follow in this section.

**Building strong relationships with counterparts is the most important aspect of the advising mission.** The attribute that appears most often in the historic and contemporary military advising documents I reviewed is the need for advisors to build solid working relationships with their counterparts.<sup>10</sup> To succeed in the mission, an advisor's ability to effectively influence, counsel, teach, mentor, coach, role model, and conduct other actions that support the advising mission hinges on the establishment of rapport, trust, and a positive advisor-counterpart working relationship.

The most important method to develop a productive advisor-counterpart relationship is to create a strong personal connection. Such a relationship results from advisors' concerted efforts to learn about their counterparts' personal characteristics and idiosyncrasies. A productive relationship also comes from gaining greater knowledge of the overall context in which the counterparts function and then applying a variety of relevant techniques to leverage this understanding to create mutual trust and a solid bond.

The following advisory approaches (including advising methods to avoid) support creating a beneficial advisor-counterpart relationship to advance the advising mission:

- ◆ Avoid the *ugly American* U.S. advisor style. This is a doomed approach for military advisors. It includes being impatient, threatening, commanding, condescending, and narrow-minded; exuding a *my way or the highway* style; and, exhibiting United States-centric chauvinism.<sup>11</sup> Such an advisory approach will fail.
- ◆ Attain cross-cultural competence to help build combat advisor-counterpart relationships and enhance advisory team survivability.<sup>12</sup>



Staff Sgt. Frederick Scott, an advisor with the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan Mobile Training Team, receives a token of appreciation from an Afghan National Army officer during a transition ceremony at Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan, 17 April 2013. The Afghan National Army general staff G-4 transitioned from International Security Assistance Force support to complete independence, marking a significant milestone.

(Photo by Canadian Cpl. Jean-Philippe Marquis)

- ◆ Acquire culture-specific competence about a counterpart and the cultural context in which that person thinks and acts. To succeed, advisors must learn relevant and detailed knowledge about the counterpart, the counterpart's organization, and, the host nation and region.<sup>13</sup>
  - ◆ Accept a counterpart's hospitality, and draw on the power of informal socializing to build relationships.
  - ◆ Use humor, including comical self-deprecation, to build rapport with counterparts.
  - ◆ Wisely navigate delicate, sensitive issues when interacting with counterparts. Despite warnings from advisor training and doctrine about avoiding taboo topics (politics, religion, etc.), sometimes candid, but private, conversations about these topics build advisor-counterpart bonds. However, appropriate timing and settings for such conversations is essential.<sup>14</sup>
    - ◆ Serve as a meaningful role model through persistent professional presence.<sup>15</sup>
    - ◆ Build relationships with counterparts, but avoid over-identification with counterparts or 'going native.'<sup>16</sup>
    - ◆ Practice *cultural stretching*: advisors must often enter discomfort zones and tolerate or participate in some unusual or culturally challenging events to bond

with counterparts (e.g., trying to eat distasteful foods, letting counterparts hold the advisor's hand, understanding that counterparts might apply harsh punishments to their own troops, and so on).

- Carefully navigate cases when cultural stretching goes too far. At times advisors need to politely refrain from events (e.g., that cross moral boundaries) and also may need to try to influence counterparts to stop certain actions—without disrespecting counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

- Remain firm while not being either commanding or too diplomatic; strong, respectful, and courteous military advisors gain their counterparts' respect.

- Perform cost-benefit analyses about taking mission-related physical and cultural risks to help build rapport with counterparts and advance the mission. For example, sometimes advisors must work hard to acquire permission to reside on their counterparts' bases, travel in their counterparts' vehicles (or at least to frequently travel in convoys with their counterparts), soften their conventional military appearance standards (e.g., U.S. Special Forces advisors sometimes grow beards or wear military patches given to them by their counterparts), and so on.<sup>18</sup>

**Linguists are vital intercultural intermediaries.** A second major post-9/11 advisory lesson learned is the need for advisors to work effectively with linguists (also known as translators or interpreters). During the Iraq and Afghan conflicts, only a very small handful of advisors spoke their counterpart's language at a working level, or worked with counterparts who spoke English at a high enough level of competence to preclude misunderstandings. Thus, the overwhelming majority of U.S. advisors had to use linguists, many of whom lacked the vocabulary and cultural understanding of both sides to provide translations beyond a basic level. This presented a special problem because without effective communications advisory missions are doomed to failure. Therefore, successful advisors developed special skills to effectively lead, build rapport with, and make full use of their linguists' talents.

Numerous conditions had an impact on the development of solid linguist-advisor relationships. These included understanding the diverse backgrounds of the actors involved in advising sessions (linguists, counterparts, and advisors), sensitivity to the cultural nuances within different regions and counterpart organizations, and familiarity with the specialized jargon and



vocabulary used in the relevant military subject matter in specific advising missions. In some cases, important technical terms and words used by the U.S. military do not exist in the counterparts' language; thus, linguists had to coin new terms with explanations for counterparts to understand.

Additionally, advisors need to know the occupational origins of their linguists. Is the linguist a school trained military specialist (09L), or a locally contracted civilian? Further, advisors need to learn the category of their linguist in terms of language proficiency as rated by military testing. These issues, in addition to a variety of other circumstances and factors, influence how advisors partner with linguists to advise successfully.<sup>19</sup>

Since linguists also fill the role of vital intercultural intermediaries between advisors and counterparts in the advising mission, advisors must effectively form bonds and relationships of trust with their linguists.<sup>20</sup> A productive advisor-linguist relationship is a



Army Sgt. David Floyd, Spartan 3 truck commander, discusses ways to position troops with an Afghan National Army officer 13 April 2010 to ensure proper traffic flow along a busy road. The Spartan 3 team served as combat advisers at more than 50 different checkpoints within five Kabul police districts throughout the densely populated city.

(U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chris Fahey)

prerequisite to successfully building relationships with counterparts. The following precepts support successful advisor-linguist relationships that advance the military advising mission:

- ◆ Advisors must carefully select and hire suitable linguists; linguists selected should either already possess, or show a willingness to learn, sufficient cross-cultural and language skills as well as demonstrate the ability to learn to operate in a military context.
- ◆ Advisors must build strong relationships with linguists through informal and on-the-job time spent together.

- ◆ Linguists must mentor their advisors about relevant cultural details and help advisors learn some of the language of polite protocol (e.g., important “meet and greet” phrases) to advance the advising mission.

- ◆ Advisors must ensure their linguists’ cultural backgrounds (including linguists’ open-mindedness towards counterparts) and language skills are well suited for the specific mission’s needs.

- ◆ Advisors must influence linguists to serve as full advisory team members, but not to assume a dominant or lead role. Advisors need to strike the right balance between not relegating linguists to the sidelines while preventing linguists with strong personalities from dominating.

- ◆ Advisors’ effective leadership of linguists must extend beyond the advising mission with counterparts and include ensuring healthy interactions among linguists and other members of their U.S. units.

- ◆ Advisors must diligently and consistently prepare in advance with linguists for advising sessions and meetings with counterparts.

- ◆ Advisors need to use sound techniques for working with linguists while talking with counterparts: advisors should avoid using acronyms, highly technical jargon, and lengthy speeches without taking breaks.<sup>21</sup>

**Conventional forces must adapt to the unconventional military advising mission.** The advisory role had been primarily handled by the Special Forces since Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> However, the post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted the substantial need for advisors in such conflicts, causing conventional U.S. military forces to undertake a larger role in the advising mission. One result was that many contemporary mainstream advisors felt caught in a dilemma as they conducted the unconventional advising mission while operating within the sometimes overly rigid or cumbersome conventional military.

Some telling differences exist between the approach of the smaller and more nimble U.S. Special Forces and that of the larger and more lumbering conventional military to the advising mission. Special Forces advisors tend to benefit from mission-essential flexibility, adaptability, and the knowledge and lessons of an organization accustomed to conducting the unconventional mission over several decades. In contrast, advisors from the conventional force often experience the growing pains of serving in an organization with



less advising experience and know-how. As a result, at times, conventional-force advisors suffer from an overly constraining conventional military modus operandi.<sup>23</sup>

There are several questions and issues that combat advisors who fall under conventional commands must be prepared to encounter. For example, will their leaders and policies enable them to unconventionally adapt to their circumstances to best accomplish the mission? Will conventional combat advisors be permitted to live on their counterparts' bases, travel in their counterparts' vehicles, and frequently visit their counterparts in combat zones? Or, will advisors be compelled to rigidly follow all convoy rule requirements even if doing so reduces time spent with counterparts? Will combat advisors be allowed to alter their military appearance standards while working with counterparts (e.g., to grow a beard for an advising tour in Afghanistan or to make minor uniform modifications such as wearing a badge awarded by a counterpart)?<sup>24</sup>

These are important questions because combat conditions require the Army to strike a delicate and vital balance. On one hand, the force must ensure security, safety, and important soldier standards. On the other hand, it must adequately empower combat advisors by allowing some beneficial unconventional actions so advisors can build camaraderie and trust with counterparts.

**Overcome the second-tier military advising mission syndrome.** Despite some high-ranking political-military leaders that espouse the tremendous importance of the advising mission, as did former Secretary of Defense Bill Gates, the organizational acceptance of the advising mission has been mixed and contradictory.<sup>25</sup> Some commanders genuinely value and support it, while other units and leaders marginalize and tacitly resist the unconventional advisory mission—showing a strong preference and favoritism for emphasizing conventional direct combat operations at the expense of unconventional activities.<sup>26</sup>



Sgt. 1st Class David Cox, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and Jesse Mill, a law enforcement advisor, talk with an Afghan Border Police student with the assistance of an interpreter at a checkpoint near Waza Khwa, Afghanistan, 14 December 2009. The student was participating in a 3-week leadership development course.

(U.S. Air Force Photo by Staff Sgt. Dallas Edwards)

One consequence is that there is great reluctance among many service members to serve as advisors. This stems from uncertainty about whether serving as an advisor hurts their careers. There is much concern that serving as a conventional U.S. advisor will reduce a soldier's chances for promotion, as compared to peers who serve in more traditional and bureaucratically well-rewarded roles—especially command positions.<sup>27</sup>

Such uncertainty is exacerbated by the Army's inconsistent advisor selection process that often appears to support the idea that the Army treats advising as a second-tier mission. Nevertheless, in some cases, the Army solicits and selects volunteers with strong and relevant performance records, particularly for senior officers assigned as advisors and advisor team leaders. The budding use of a centralized selection list to assign senior advisors is a step in the right direction for the Army, as long as the results of future promotion boards reveal that advisor selectees actually fare comparatively well.

In other cases, the Army haphazardly and involuntarily assigns soldiers as advisors and disregards their background, motivation toward the mission, disposition (personality), and potential to advise well. This seems to apply more commonly to the assignment of junior officers and noncommissioned officers as advisors. Further, at times it seems that the Army uses advisory units as a dumping ground for poor performers or problem soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

The Army's inconsistent approach to the assignment of advisors may stem from the problematic assumption that anyone can successfully advise. Most veteran advisors view this as a damaging fallacy that some senior military leaders still believe. Thus, the Army appears ambivalent toward the advising mission, with public pronouncements of support for the mission by strategic political-military leaders, but mixed and inconsistent levels of support for the mission on the ground.

Solving some of these problems to ameliorate the second tier military advising mission syndrome will take greater organizational commitment—reflected in focus, motivation, allocation of resources, concrete steps taken to cultivate and preserve advisory competence, and ultimately, the development of greater organizational acceptance of the mission.

## Other Impacts on the Contemporary Military Advising Mission

Numerous other conditions characterize the U.S. military advising mission that require advisors to employ additional applicable skills. Some of these additional important lessons learned are as follows:

**Subject matter expertise is vital in the advising mission.** Advisors who are sent to advise on a specific specialty or set of skills must possess those skills, or have the ability to obtain the services of experts who do. Common areas of required expertise include numerous military and police specialties, combat and noncombat organizational and technical skills, and expertise in leadership or organizational training for different positions and roles (e.g., how to serve as a noncommissioned officer).<sup>29</sup>

**Advisors need to draw on, work with, and navigate other influential agencies in the field.** These include U.S. and coalition partner units, the media, nongovernmental organizations, and a plethora of other organizations that operate in the advisors' working environments.<sup>30</sup>

**"Goodies" can benefit the advising mission.** Advisors provide information, intelligence, resources, money, and other desirable resources to advance the mission—as long as this support does not create excessive counterpart dependency, or stymie counterpart development.<sup>31</sup>

**Information age technology can benefit and degrade the advising mission.** Advisors should apply suitable new technologies to augment the mission, but they should not expect counterparts to use technology the way the U.S. Army and other U.S. services employ it (e.g., the U.S. military's sometimes obsessive application of PowerPoint).

**Special considerations are needed for deploying women advisors.** Women can serve as very effective advisors, but advisor units should first conduct a careful analysis of the situation (such as determining a counterpart's openness to engagement with females and understanding the country's culture and gender norms) before assigning a female advisor.<sup>32</sup> Some circumstances make the use of women advisors imprudent.<sup>33</sup>

## Defining Military Advisory Success

One conundrum of the mission is the difficulty advisors share in defining success. The unconventional mission's ambiguity and long-term nature, and some confusion about the overall nature of advising, contribute to

the challenges of formulating a metric for definitively determining advisory achievement.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, today's advisors use different methods to define advisory success. Some of the following methods consistently emerge that appear useful in gauging advisory success.

One informal test for defining advisory success is summarized as, "Does it meet the standard of Iraqi (or Afghan) good enough?"<sup>35</sup> This informal approach—though some may regard it as ethnocentrically patronizing or insensitive—actually reveals open-mindedness, tolerance, flexibility, perspective-taking skills, and overall situational awareness. It promotes understanding of performance standards appropriate for a given counterpart and foreign security force based on their own culturally nuanced conditions.

A second approach entails advisors who frame success as working themselves out of a job, meaning, "Have they helped counterparts achieve a level of professional competence and autonomy whereby counterparts no longer need advisors?" This second method for defining success often manifests when advisors work with counterparts against the deadline of the U.S. or coalition military's imminent withdrawal from a host nation, such as in the latter phases of Iraq and Afghanistan.

A third approach is defining success by gauging the strength of established relationships and friendships. This is obviously an intangible measure of accomplishment in a mission that often lacks conspicuous, tangible, and objective signs of progress. Nevertheless, in addition to trying to apply classic (and sometimes obsessive) objective, precise, and quantitative measures of success (e.g., numbers of trained foreign troops or pieces of equipment and weaponry issued), contemporary advisors often rely on subjective and qualitative estimates of advisory success—which sometimes better fit the nebulous and unconventional nature of the military advising mission.<sup>36</sup> Finally, advisory success is only validated with the test of time and the strength of continuing links between the advisor and the counterpart after a given advisory mission has ended. Signs of success may therefore take many years to become evident.

## Conclusion

We have learned that many of the historical advising insights from previous conflicts ring true today, although the information age and other contemporary developments create new complexities in the

performance of this essential mission. As shown in the historical and contemporary experiences discussed in this article, military advisors require a sophisticated array of skills; the pentathlete concept certainly applies to successful military advisors.<sup>37</sup> Advisors must cross myriad cultural bridges to build trust with diverse people (including counterparts and linguists) so they can succeed in their unconventional and complex mission. The critical advisory skills required include warfighting and combat competence, subject matter expertise, leadership (especially softer leader tools of influence and persuasion), cognitive flexibility, diplomacy, agility, an ability to rapidly learn and adapt on the job, and, especially, cross-cultural competence.<sup>38</sup>

**The future of military advising.** As U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan, the U.S. military is now faced with the question of what will happen to its advising mission, capabilities, and wealth of experience accumulated over more than a decade of conflict in which advisors played a vital role.

One forecast is that after the U.S. armed forces depart Afghanistan, the conventional military will gradually shelve the advising mission. History seems to indicate that this will be the more likely outcome. After the Vietnam War, the mainstream military forgot many of the advisory lessons and skills it acquired, shuffling responsibility for advising back to the U.S. Special Forces. Similarly, the conventional military's ambivalence toward advising, including some organizational resistance to conduct the mission, may contribute to a gradual dissolution of the advising mission within conventional forces as the demand for conventional advisors in the field diminishes. Finally, given the ongoing U.S. military drawdown, there will undoubtedly be a strong institutional impetus for the conventional forces to return to their longstanding focus on training for traditional combat roles. Thus, the mainstream military might progressively sweep the unconventional advising mission under the carpet.<sup>39</sup>

However, a second future path for advising could involve the continuation of focus and training on the mission in the conventional military long after the troops leave Afghanistan. In an ideal forecast for the future of advising, the Army might make a modest investment in preserving the advisor capability within the conventional force by developing an advisor training center hub. The advising training center envisioned

would remain fully intact and well-resourced long into the future, serving as a hub to preserve its advisory capabilities and perhaps expand its relevance by focusing on developing skills pertinent to more regions of the world, while also providing a robust general advising portion of the training program.<sup>40</sup> This center would serve the U.S. military by not only continuing the legacy of advisor training but could also augment Army efforts to resource and preserve new culture education and training initiatives. These could include support for already established and relevant culture centers across the military's branches. Such an initiative would expand cultural focus in professional military education, promote more realistic training with regard to negotiating foreign cultures during field exercises, and serve other useful related developments.<sup>41</sup> Due to the complex nature of the evolving global security environment, the Army should adopt this second alternative to create a robust long-term focus on the advising mission.

**Military advising and the next war.** Given that accurate predictions about future wars elude even the foremost experts, broad preparation provides an excellent strategy for U.S. forces to prepare for future conflicts. Numerous worldwide events could precipitate the next conflict, including civil wars and falling regimes in the Middle East (with major implications regarding oil reserves); expanding terrorist networks in Southwest or Southeast Asia; violence and instability connected to cataclysmic water and food scarcity in Africa; the destabilizing effects of the widespread drug industry in Mexico and Central and South America; or, even a catastrophic event in the United States requiring humanitarian relief comingled with security operations.

When America enters the next war, its military will require not only sophisticated and versatile service members, but also a robust team of effective military advisors. Cultivating the development of an



Sgt. Alton Farr, serving as a rule of law adviser with Imam Sahib District Advisory Team, 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 170th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, directs an Afghan policeman during a training session 18 December 2011.

(Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Christopher Klutts, 170th Infantry Brigade Combat Team PAO)

intricate and powerful multiple skill set—including combat skills, leadership, cross-cultural competence, diplomacy, flexibility, strong moral-ethical fiber, technical military knowledge, and numerous other talents—combined with advisory expertise will best prepare the U.S. armed forces for the next major conflict.

Institutionalizing a concentration on military advising, including an effectual advisor training center, while preserving relevant soft-skill programs (such as culture centers, culture education and training, and other helpful culture-based initiatives) will help the military to remain balanced and well prepared for multifaceted future contingencies. ■

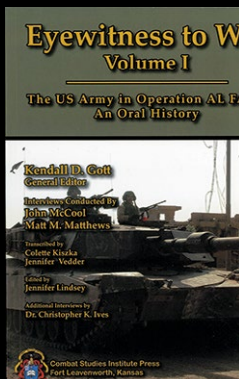
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**MR We Recommend**



# Eyewitness to War, Volume 1

Edited by Kendall D. Gott, Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2006, 327 pages

**T**he first Combat Studies Institute publication that makes exclusive use of oral history, *Eyewitness to War*, tells the story of the second battle for Fallujah as described by those who witnessed it firsthand. Interviews of 36 participants with a wide variety of ranks and occupational specialties—including two Marines, an airman, and a civilian journalist—provide a riveting account of this 2004 battle, a brutal and bloody fight over urban terrain. Gleaned from the Operational Leadership Experience Project, a program that collects and archives first-person experiences from the Global War on Terror, this work is history in raw form, recorded for future generations by key leaders on the ground and the men and women there to see and hear the events unfold.