



Iraqi Special Operations Forces advance on the opposing force during a field training exercise near Baghdad on 15 May 2017. U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY CHIEF MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST BRANDON RAILE

The SOF advisory role is a long-term commitment to help enable and aid other nations improve their military forces and security. SOF advisors have traditionally operated at the tactical level to increase partner capabilities 'by, with and through' to generate sufficient rule of law, address local needs, and advance rapport building. Mr. White advocates for a SOF role in advising foreign militaries at the high operational/strategic and ministerial levels. He provides real world examples through four vignettes of SOF advisors in Afghanistan, Iraq, Colombia, and the Philippines. This monograph is a handy resource for commanders and planners needing to establish a rapport with allies and friends at the highest operational/strategic and ministerial levels.

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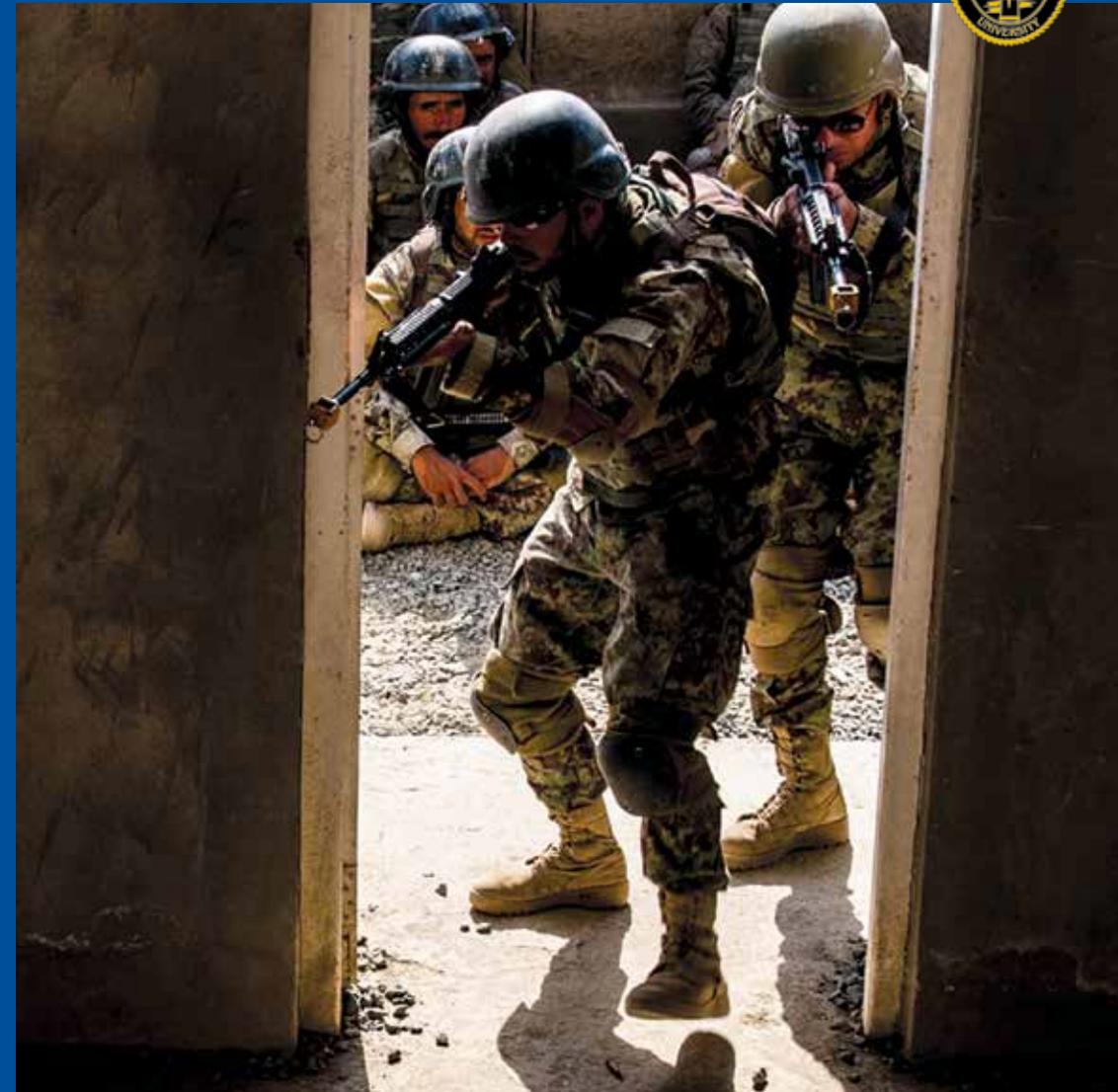
JSOU Report 18-1

Growing SOLO: Expanding the Spectrum of SOF Advisory Capabilities

White



JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY



Growing SOLO: Expanding the Spectrum of SOF Advisory Capabilities

Troy White

JSOU Report 18-1



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*Growing SOLO:
Expanding the Spectrum of
SOF Advisory Capabilities*

Troy White

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On the cover. Afghan Commandos tactically move into a room during a close quarters combat exercise at Camp Morehead, Kabul, Afghanistan on 4 October 2017. Their training consists of weapons familiarization, weapon drills and tactical movement as part of their 14-week course. U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY SENIOR AIRMAN XAVIER NAVARRO/RELEASED

Back cover. Iraqi Special Operations Forces advance on the opposing force during a field training exercise near Baghdad on 15 May 2017. This training-part of the overall Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR)-focuses on building partner capacity missions by training and improving the capability of partnered forces fighting ISIS. CJTF-OIR is the global coalition to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria. U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY CHIEF MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST BRANDON RAILE

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From the Director

While Troy White’s research and conclusions are focused on how to make special operators “better” when serving in an advisory capacity, there are clear implications and parallels that all Special Operations Forces (SOF) could reflect on in this monograph, regardless of their rank or assignment. Considerations on how to more effectively “maneuver” in the higher operational and strategic levels of national and international security—whether one is a special operator in a formal advisory role or not—is useful in many positions and circumstances. As an academic institution, it is always refreshing to see an author conclude that deeper education and training are part of the solution. Mr. White provides specific examples and opportunities instead of the general or sweeping conclusions seen in other works. As always, tell us what you think.

Boyd L. Ballard
Director, Center for Strategic Studies

Foreword

Mr. Troy White's *Growing SOLO: Expanding the Spectrum of SOF Advisory Capabilities* tackles a difficult and under-researched topic—one of extreme salience for SOF. The SOF advisory role is a long-term commitment to help enable and aid other nations improve their military forces and security. SOF advisors have traditionally operated at the tactical level to increase partner capabilities 'by, with and through' to generate sufficient rule of law, address local needs, and advance rapport building. Mr. White advocates for a SOF role in advising foreign militaries at the high operational/strategic and ministerial levels. He asserts the additional training and education requirements can be found in existing ministerial advisor training and education programs.

The monograph is well organized and begins by anchoring the advisory role in U.S. strategic documents and SOF doctrine. While providing advisory services at such a high level is not a specified SOF task, it is consistent with SOF core activities such as security force assistance and foreign internal defense. To answer the question whether SOF skills are capable enough to succeed at the higher level, Mr. White explores the skills and traits of effective military advisors, specifically, ones at the high operational/strategic and ministerial levels. He concludes that many of the skills identified for ministerial advisors (technical expertise, knowledge of local culture, customs, history and politics) are fully consistent with SOF.

To provide real world examples, this monograph explores four vignettes of SOF advisors in Afghanistan, Iraq, Colombia, and the Philippines. Through these vignettes, the author builds a case that SOF have previously performed these roles (in somewhat limited fashion) and have performed admirably. Expanding on the advisory role will require additional training and education. Mr. White proposes a few of these programs and how they might be adapted for SOF.

The strengths of this monograph include its comprehensive review of the SOF advisory role and its inclusion of various points of view and perspectives. As a result, this monograph will be a handy resource for

commanders and planners needing to establish a rapport with allies and friends at the highest operational/strategic and ministerial levels.

Peter M. McCabe, Ph.D.
Resident Senior Fellow, Center for Strategic Studies

About the Author

Troy White is a nonresident senior associate with the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), Americas Program. He joined CSIS after 15 years of service as a strategic analyst and interdiction analyst in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). While at ONDCP, he drafted core sections of the National Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime and the National Drug Control Strategy. He was also instrumental in the coordination of budget guidance for over \$4 billion in U.S. international drug control programs. He contributed to multiple other counter-narcotics and border security strategies, including the Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy, the Northern Border Strategy, and the National Synthetic Drug Control Strategy. In addition, he participated in the initial implementation of Plan Colombia and later developed lessons learned for application in other countries threatened by illicit drug trafficking. Prior to joining ONDCP, Mr. White was a U.S. Navy officer serving in the Pentagon on the Joint Staff after several years of duty with the Pacific Fleet. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, where he earned a bachelor's degree with a minor in Spanish and was selected for postgraduate Cox Fund studies in Spain. He holds a master's degree from Georgetown University, where he is also working toward completion of his Ph.D. studies.



Introduction

The United States is currently engaged in at least two major defense institution-building missions simultaneously in the Middle East, linked to U.S. involvement in major regional contingencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have been critical enablers in both the tactical- and operational-level advisory and combat missions associated with these events. While some researchers may argue that the lessons from these contingencies will limit U.S. commitments to similar operations and associated defense institution-building endeavors in the future, other experts assert that the demand for U.S. advisory support for the development of partner nation defense capabilities is likely to persist at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.¹ Given the evolving vision for the employment of SOF, the unique skillset of SOF, and the proven performance of SOF advisors in tactical, operational, theater/strategic, and interagency environments, the expansion of the spectrum of SOF advisory capabilities to include combatant commanders' counterparts at the high-operational/strategic level,² as well as the ministerial level of a partner nation's defense establishment, is a reasonable extension of existing SOF initiatives such as the Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO) and Special Operations Support Team (SOST) programs and a logical emerging requirement for future SOF plans. Leveraging the training requirements developed for Department of Defense (DOD) ministerial advisors during the contingencies in Afghanistan and Iraq provides a framework for updating training programs to add this strategically impactful capability more broadly across SOF at a relatively limited additional expense.

Although relatively early in the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, Secretary of Defense General James Mattis and National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster have already articulated expectations that the United States military will continue, and potentially strengthen, its partnerships with forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.³ Similarly, the 2015 National Security Strategy released by President Barack Obama's administration highlights U.S. and partner nation defense advisory activities in Afghanistan, stating "We are working with NATO and our other partners to train, advise, and assist the ANSF." It also notes ongoing U.S. efforts "leading an unprecedented international coalition to work with the

Iraqi government and strengthen its military to regain sovereignty.²⁴ In addition to these ongoing requirements for defense institution-building, the 2015 National Security Strategy and the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review describe two broad challenges that will continue to require the defense institution-building capabilities developed during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

First, there is the challenge posed by weak, fragile, and failing states. The 2015 National Security Strategy identifies the “significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states” as one of the “top strategic risks” to U.S. interests. These “fragile and conflict-affected states” are considered to be sources of “infectious disease, illicit weapons and drug smugglers, and destabilizing refugee flows.” Moreover, trends that are diffusing power “below and beyond the nation-state” also have the ability to “foster violent non-state actors and foment instability— especially in fragile states where governance is weak or has broken down.”²⁵

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review adds that “unrest and violence” provide “a fertile environment for violent extremism and sectarian conflict, especially in fragile states, stretching from the Sahel to South Asia, and threatening U.S. citizens abroad.” It describes particular concerns in Africa and the Middle East, where terrorist groups already “seek to exploit transitional governments and expand their influence.” In Africa, the Quadrennial Defense Review asserts that “terrorists, criminal organizations, militias, corrupt officials, and pirates continue to exploit ungoverned and undergoverned territory on the continent and its surrounding waters.” Moreover, “the potential for rapidly developing threats, particularly in fragile states, including violent public protests and terrorist attacks, could pose acute challenges to U.S. interests.” In the Middle East, the same source projects that “competition for resources, including energy and water, will worsen tensions in the coming years and could escalate regional confrontations into broader conflicts,” once again “particularly in fragile states.”²⁶

The second major challenge that will require a continuation of U.S. defense advisory efforts is the number of U.S. allies, partners, and friends that find themselves overmatched by the security threats they face. The 2015 National Security Strategy highlights efforts to “Build Capacity to Prevent Conflict” by “reaffirming our security commitments to allies and partners” and “investing in their capabilities to withstand coercion.”²⁷ This issue has particular resonance with countries in Eastern Europe, where “Russia’s

violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity—as well as its belligerent stance toward other neighboring countries”⁸ has caused the United States to reassure “our allies by backing our security commitments and increasing responsiveness through training and exercises, as well as a dynamic presence in Central and Eastern Europe to deter further Russian aggression.”⁹ The National Security Strategy provides a clear commitment to “support partners such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine so they can better work alongside the United States and NATO, as well as provide for their own defense.”¹⁰

The 2015 National Security Strategy and 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review propose partnering and BPC as the solution to these problems. In efforts to “build capacity to prevent conflict” the National Security Strategy indicates that the United States will “prefer to partner with those fragile states that have a genuine political commitment to establishing legitimate governance and providing for their people.”¹¹ The Quadrennial Defense Review asserts that “the Department of Defense will rebalance our counterterrorism efforts toward greater emphasis on building partnership capacity, especially in fragile states.” It also commits the DOD to placing “even more emphasis on building the capacity of our partners” in the Middle East “in order to complement our strong military presence in the region.” From this perspective, “building security globally not only assures allies and partners and builds their capacity, but also helps protect the homeland by deterring conflict and increasing stability in regions like the Middle East and North Africa.”¹²

Discussions regarding building partner capacity (BPC) often break down the supporting security cooperation programs and activities into the categories of security assistance, security force assistance (SFA), and foreign internal defense (FID). SFA and FID are SOF core activities,¹³ and these tasks are typically considered to take place substantially at the tactical and operational levels of interaction with partner nations involving smaller units and task forces. In some cases, however, SOF performance of these functions can have a significant impact on the more high-operational and strategic activities of defense institution building and security sector reform involving partner nation forces and organizations that interact with U.S. combatant commanders. SOF activities to BPC in some cases can impact all levels of partner nation defense establishments, raising the question of whether SOF

advisory efforts should routinely expand to include the tactical, operational, and high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels as well.

Given this background, this study seeks to answer two primary research questions. First, is advising foreign militaries at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels an appropriate task for U.S. SOF to perform on a regular basis? Second, what additional training would be required to accomplish this task?

This study concludes that based on the vision for the employment of SOF, unique skills of SOF, and proven performance of SOF in advisory roles worldwide, advising foreign militaries at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels is indeed an appropriate and necessary task for U.S. SOF. The primary U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) initiative that addresses this challenge—the SOLO program—however, may not be sufficient on its own to fill the demand for SOF advisors at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels to fully support the global SOF network envisioned in the United States Special Operations Command 2020 (SOCOM 2020).¹⁴ Adding training require-

Adding training requirements extrapolated from existing training programs for civilian ministerial advisors to select SOF advisor training plans can serve as a critical force multiplier, developing this increasingly important high-level advisory capability across a broader group of SOF personnel.

ments extrapolated from existing training programs for civilian ministerial advisors to select SOF advisor training plans can serve as a critical force multiplier, developing this increasingly important high-level advisory capability across a broader group of SOF personnel. This monograph develops this argument in greater detail through the exploration of existing research and applicable cases, and ends with a summary of conclusions, observations on a tentative lesson learned from the cases, and initial thoughts on potential implications for SOF under the

President Trump administration. To lay a foundation for the analysis to follow, the next section explores the application of the concepts of partnering and BPC by senior U.S. leaders and in key national security strategic documents.

Chapter 1. Partnering and Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) in U.S. Strategy

Partners, partnering, and BPC have been featured in the comments of several U.S. national security leaders across multiple presidential administrations. USSOCOM Commander General Raymond A. Thomas III highlighted the importance of BPC to counter and defeat violent extremist organizations in his May 2017 testimony before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee.¹⁵ National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster also indicated shortly after returning from Afghanistan in April 2017, that the Taliban has “redoubled their efforts, and it’s time for us, alongside our Afghan partners, to respond.”¹⁶

Previously, partnering and BPC also figured prominently in then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel’s congressional testimony in 2014, highlighting the need to continue to “help build partner capacity so that local forces can take the fight to ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and ultimately defeat it.” In his testimony, Secretary Hagel outlined the main components of the U.S. plan, “to help strengthen Iraqi Security Forces,” including “partnering coalition advisers with Iraqi forces at the headquarters level,” providing training to support “the regeneration of Iraqi forces,” and “broader security sector reform.”¹⁷ Furthermore, in a 2013 speech, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter summarized the DOD leadership’s conclusions about the importance of BPC, stating that “the United States cannot address the challenges of tomorrow alone. And this places a premium on building the capacity of others.”¹⁸

Secretary of Defense General Mattis, however, has been a particularly noteworthy advocate of partnering and BPC over both his military and civilian careers crossing multiple administrations. During his February 2017 trip to Iraq, Secretary of Defense General Mattis noted that “the Iraqi people, the Iraqi military and the Iraqi political leadership recognize what they’re up against and the value of the coalition and the partnership, in particular with the United States.”¹⁹ In response to advance policy questions during his January 2017 confirmation process, he responded that “the role of the Department of Defense in providing security assistance should be focused on ways to improve the military capacity of other states in order to help

them become more reliable and effective partners with the U.S. on security matters.”²⁰

Secretary of Defense General Mattis provided a broader rationale for these security assistance programs in a book chapter he co-authored in 2016, asserting that, “Those who oppose sustained international involvement because of its cost have the argument exactly wrong: only by coming together with allies and attending to the maintenance of the international order can we amass the resources necessary for the long-term management of our interests.”²¹ In this chapter he also noted that, “Civilian departments are too weak to keep pace with the military’s contribution in areas like capacity-building for friendly governments.”²² Several years earlier, while serving as the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, Secretary of Defense General Mattis emphasized that partnering with foreign security forces (FSF) would be the key to how the United States would fight and win irregular wars such as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.²³

While President Trump’s administration has not released a new National Security Strategy yet, U.S. partnering and BPC activities are discussed broadly in several leading national security documents from the prior administration. The 2015 National Security Strategy highlights that the U.S. military is postured to “build the capacity of our partners to join with us in meeting security challenges.” To confront the challenge of terrorism, the National Security Strategy highlights that the United States “will train and equip local partners and provide operational support to gain ground against terrorist groups.” The 2015 strategy also indicates a preference for the United States “to partner with those fragile states that have a genuine political commitment to establishing legitimate governance and providing for their people.” Furthermore, the focus of these partnership activities “will be on proven areas of need and impact, such as inclusive politics, enabling effective and equitable service delivery, reforming security and rule of law sectors, combating corruption and organized crime, and promoting economic opportunity.”²⁴

DOD strategic documents from the Obama administration also address partnering and BPC. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review discusses BPC, both in terms of rebalancing DOD “counterterrorism efforts toward greater emphasis on building partnership capacity, especially in fragile states,” and of “enhancing our partners’ capacity to address growing regional challenges in areas such as missile defense, cyber security, space resilience, maritime

security, and disaster relief.”²⁵ The 2012 DOD strategic guidance titled “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense” emphasizes the importance of leveraging exercises, advisory capabilities, and other partnering activities to attain U.S. security objectives.²⁶

The discussion, drawn from national security strategic documents and comments of U.S. leaders, firmly establishes the importance of partnering and BPC to U.S. national security plans. Partnering and BPC are considered crucial for the achievement of U.S. security interests, and are essential elements of U.S. plans to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and

Partnering and BPC are considered crucial for the achievement of U.S. security interests, and are essential elements of U.S. plans to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and counter other terrorist groups worldwide.

counter other terrorist groups worldwide. In weak and fragile states, BPC is critical to address several other regional security challenges as well. A closer review of the concepts of partnering and BPC in military doctrine and practice is necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these activities and their associated requirements.

Chapter 2. Clarifying the Concepts of Partnering and BPC

While the strategic documents and DOD leadership comments discussed above highlight the importance of partnering and BPC to U.S. security, the specific details of these activities merit further attention. Although partnering is not specifically defined in DOD doctrine, the U.S. Army Functional Concept for Engagement describes “partnership activities” as consisting of “civil military operations, Army support to security cooperation, security assistance, foreign internal defense, and security force assistance.” These activities serve projected future requirements for the U.S. military to “support, train, advise, and equip and learn from partner security forces to counter insurgencies, terrorism, proliferation, and other threats.”²⁷

The *U.S. Army Functional Concept for Engagement* also recognizes the need for cooperation with other governmental and non-governmental organizations operating in unified action scenarios to “build the capacity of partners to secure populations, protect infrastructure, and strengthen institutions as a means of protecting common security interests.” In support of these goals, the *U.S. Army Functional Concept for Engagement* envisions military forces “working with foreign counterparts from the individual to ministerial levels” to provide “support to governance and the rule of law.”²⁸ Another U.S. Army source—Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*—frames BPC as “the outcome of comprehensive interorganizational activities, programs, and military-to-military engagements that enhance the ability of partners to establish security, governance, economic development, essential services, rule of law, and other critical government functions.”²⁹

Upon surveying the application of both terms in DOD doctrine, one scholar offers more detailed definitions for partnering and BPC in a recent Joint Special Operations University monograph titled *Building Partner Capacity*. Partnering is described as a process “founded in shared interests and objectives” that “leads to and sustains strategic partnerships over time.” The partnering process is “implemented” through BPC activities, “which include mentoring, advice, support, and training.”³⁰ This leads to the following, broader definition for BPC:

BPC is a multifaceted concept involving the integrated application of tactical, operational, and strategic actions and resources from differing governmental and nongovernmental actors and agencies over time to enhance a sovereign partner state's institutional and environmental conditions for achieving and sustaining security and clear societal goals (ends), guided by local rights to self-determination and international norms. BPC is inherently complex and involves issues of sovereignty, legitimacy, and human security. BPC may include multiple, smaller-scale activities that occur simultaneously, sequentially, or singularly. These small-scale activities focus on building specific capacities and capabilities and creating intermediate conditions that contribute to the realization of long-term security and stability interests of the partner state and the United States.³¹

The DOD conducts these partnering and BPC efforts primarily through three categories of programs and activities: security cooperation, security assistance, and SFA. Security cooperation is the umbrella term for all DOD foreign assistance programs and activities. As discussed in Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, security cooperation “encompasses all Department of Defense interactions, programs, and activities with foreign security forces (FSF) and their institutions to build relationships that help promote U.S. interests; enable partner nations (PNs) to provide the U.S. access to territory, infrastructure, information, and resources; and/or to build and apply their capacity and capabilities consistent with U.S. defense objectives.”³² Security cooperation also includes a set of Title 10 programs such as personnel exchanges and traditional combatant commander activities.³³

Security assistance programs are a subset of DOD security cooperation efforts that are funded by the U.S. Department of State and administered by DOD. The *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines security assistance as “a group of programs ... by which the United States provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives.”³⁴ JP 3-22 adds that security assistance “is predominately aimed at enhancing regional stability of areas of the world facing external vice internal threats.”³⁵ Security assistance is also frequently used to support DOD SFA activities, through programs such as foreign military financing, foreign military sales, and excess defense articles.³⁶

SFA is comprised of the DOD's "activities that contribute to unified action by the U.S. Government"³⁷ to "support and augment the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces (FSF) and their supporting institutions."³⁸ A wide variety of units can constitute FSF, such as military, police, border control, paramilitary, and regional security forces. Consequently, SFA activities can involve a broad spectrum of "joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, nongovernmental, and private company cooperative efforts" to provide "training, equipment, advice, and assistance" to the designated FSF.³⁹

The underlying tasks of SFA are to "organize, train, equip, rebuild and build, and advise and assist" FSF and their supporting institutions in support of partner nation efforts to "plan and resource, generate, employ, transition, and sustain" these forces.⁴⁰ The resulting FSF "must possess the capability to accomplish the variety of required missions, with sufficient capacity to be successful and with the ability to sustain themselves as long as required." The corresponding development of the supporting institutional infrastructure is vital to the maintenance of these SFA gains.⁴¹

From a joint perspective, SFA is a SOF core activity that can also be performed by conventional forces (CF), but while both the Department of the Army and USSOCOM sponsor this operational concept, USSOCOM is the sole designated joint proponent.⁴² As alluded to above, SFA activities frequently rely upon support from security assistance programs, however SFA activities can draw support from other DOD security cooperation programs also. Similarly, security assistance programs are not restricted to funding only SFA programs; security assistance programs can support other DOD security cooperation activities as well.⁴³

While SFA is a subset of DOD security cooperation programs and activities, it also "spans the range of military operations" from military engagement and deterrence to "crisis response and contingency operations, and if necessary, major operations and campaigns." SFA "may be conducted in both permissive and uncertain security environments" and, while not involving "direct combat by U.S. forces," it also "can include combat advisory and support activities."⁴⁴ Although SFA may be used to help a partner nation "defend against external threats or help contribute to multinational operations," it is primarily provided to support partner nation efforts to defend against "internal and transnational threats to stability."⁴⁵ These internally focused security activities are collectively categorized as FID.

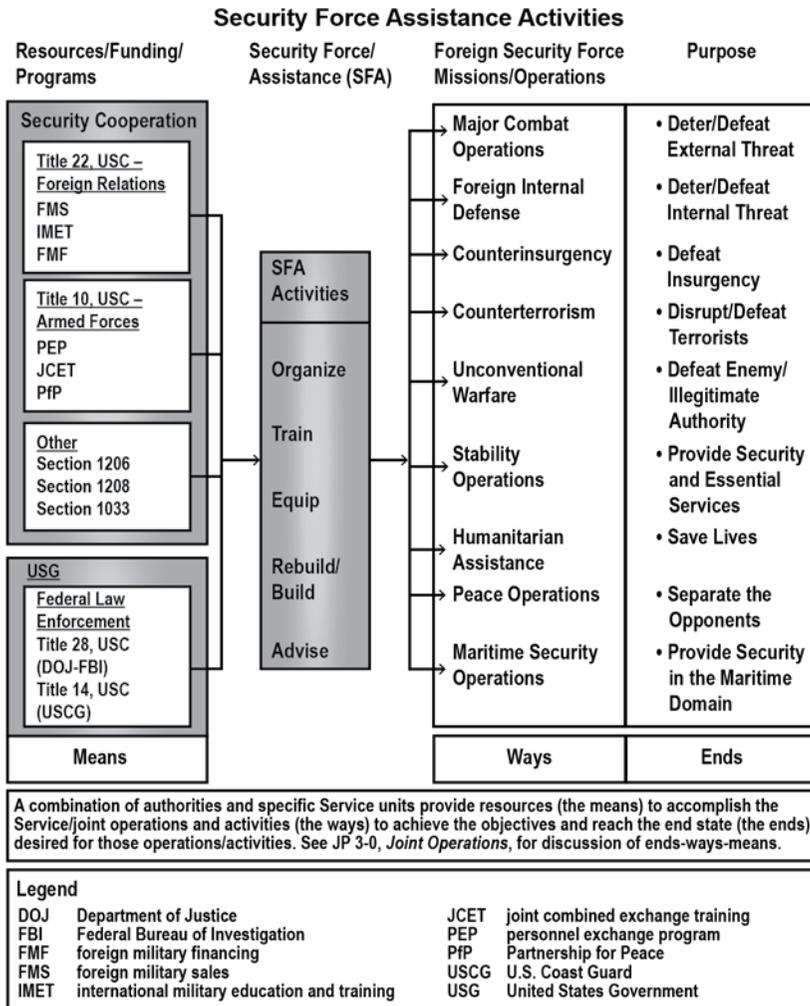


Figure 1. SFA Activities. Source: Yarger, Building Partner Capacity⁴⁶

Joint Publication 3-22 defines FID as “the 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, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their security.”⁴⁷ Similar to SFA, FID is a SOF core activity that can also be performed by CF, however, in contrast, it is designated as a USSOCOM core task as well.⁴⁸

FID activities are comprised of “indirect support, direct support (not involving combat operations), and combat operations.” Indirect support leverages security assistance programs as well as exchange programs and joint/multinational exercises to help build “strong national infrastructures through economic and military capabilities that contribute to self-sufficiency.” In cases where the partner nation faces “social, economic, or military threats beyond its capability to handle,” U.S. forces can provide direct, non-combat assistance through civil-military operations, military information support operations, communications and intelligence cooperation, and mobility and logistics support. U.S. combat operations supporting FID can only be authorized by the president as a temporary measure until the partner nation’s forces are “able to stabilize the situation and provide security for the populace.”⁴⁹

Although other security cooperation programs can contribute to FID through initiatives such as bilateral meetings or civil affairs events, SFA activities provide substantial support to FID.⁵⁰ When the United States provides direct or indirect “support to foreign internal defense, security force assistance is the means to bolster the host nation’s efforts to counter internal threats.”⁵¹ SFA can include some FID indirect support and direct support activities, but does not include FID combat operations.⁵²

SFA has much in common with FID at “the tactical level where advisory skills are applicable to both.” However, at the operational and strategic levels, where SFA and FID both share a focus on developing FSF to confront internal threats, SFA also prepares FSF “to defend against external threats and to perform as part of an international coalition as well.” While security assistance programs fund a substantial portion of FID indirect support operations, security assistance is significantly broader than FID.⁵³ SFA activities and security assistance programs can both provide personnel, material, and equipment to support the plans and objectives of FID programs. In this sense, both FID and BPC activities provide purposes to which security assistance and SFA can be applied.⁵⁴

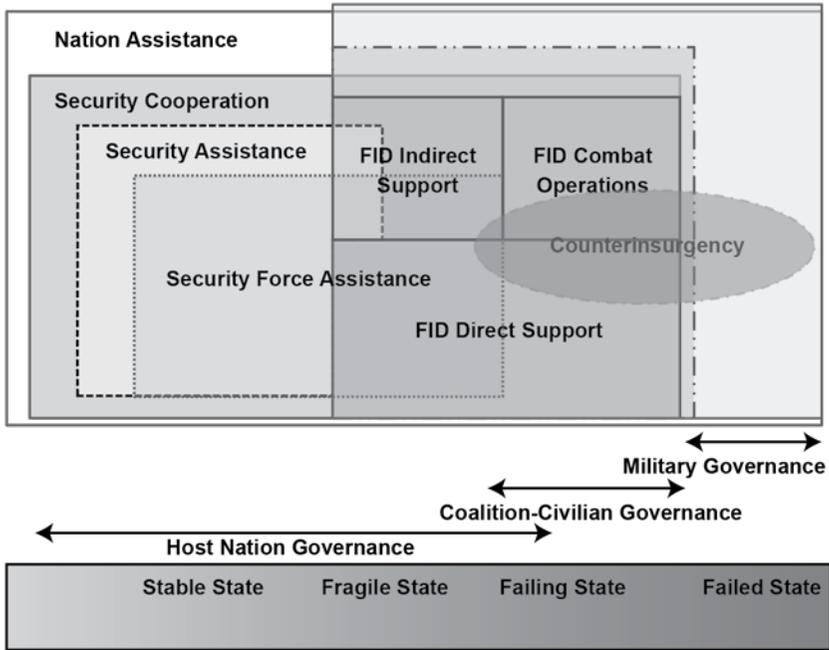


Figure 2. Security Cooperation, Security Assistance, Security Force Assistance, and FID. Source: Yarger, Building Partner Capacity⁵⁵

Chapter 3. Building Partners for the Long Run: Security Sector Reform

To build greater stability in the security circumstances of partner nations and enable effective partnering for an extended period of time, additional reforms to the partner nation's broader security sector may be required. Security sector reform is "the set of policies, plans, programs, and activities that a government undertakes to improve the way it provides safety, security, and justice."⁵⁶ The objective of security sector reform is to "transform the [security and justice] sector into an instrument of conflict prevention and management," that can contribute "to development and paving the way for development activities."⁵⁷ Security sector reform may include activities "in support of security force and intelligence reform; justice sector reform; civilian oversight and management of military support and intelligence services; community security; and DDR [disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration]." The DOD's "primary role in security sector reform is supporting the reform, restructuring, or reestablishment of the armed forces and the defense sector across the range of military operations." Yet security sector reform also "includes, but extends well beyond, the narrower focus of more traditional security assistance on defense, intelligence, and policing."⁵⁸

FSF enhanced through traditional security assistance comprised of equipment and training can better carry out their responsibilities if the institutional and governance frameworks necessary to sustain them are equally well developed."⁵⁹ SFA can support security sector reform through FID efforts, BPC efforts, and other security sector reform initiatives.⁶⁰ SFA activities "at the ministerial level and down to the tactical unit level" can provide the requisite support for a partner nation to achieve and sustain the "transformational objectives" of security sector reform.⁶¹

Thus, security sector reform requires attention to both operational capability and institutional support. As highlighted in JP 3-07, "in addition to the capability to conduct operations, military capacity building must include the administrative support and development of a functioning [partner nation] defense ministry and chain of command."⁶² A 2013 RAND study titled "What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?" reinforces this point, concluding that building the ministerial

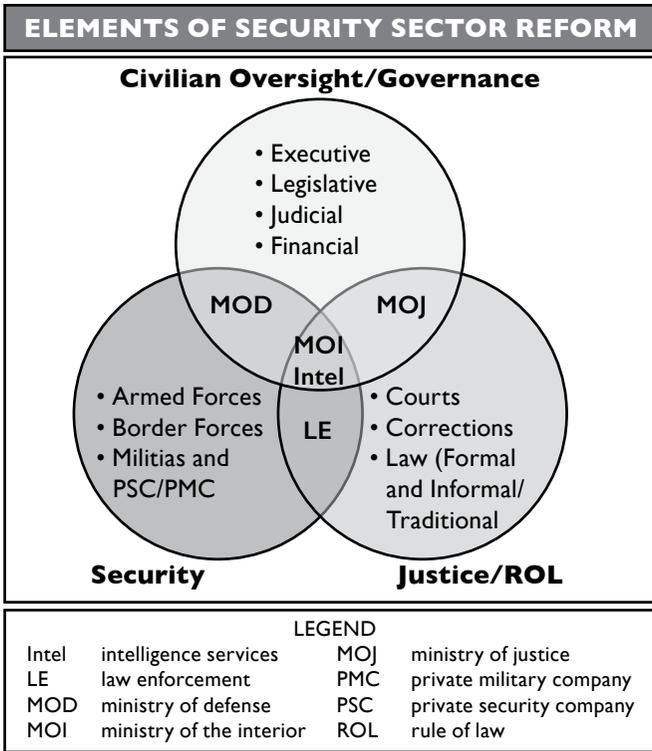


Figure 3. Elements of Security Sector Reform. Source: JP 3-07⁶³

capacity of partner nations is “foundational to other forms of capacity” due to its ability to “improve a partner’s absorptive capacity, thus enabling future capacity building in other areas.”⁶⁴ Similarly, JP 3-07 suggests that providing “advice on change and project management” to senior security sector officials may also strengthen partner nation “capacity to deliver reform.”⁶⁵

For these reasons, security sector reform efforts must achieve a balance between operationally focused activities and institutionally focused initiatives to be most effective. JP 3-07 asserts that security sector reform programs “should focus on the provision of training and advisor teams, simultaneous delivery of equipment and infrastructure, operational support through provision of fires [support] and logistic support and delivering financial and managerial support for the security forces.” This type of “high-level reform” can help partner nation security sector officials “link threats with capabilities, leading to affordable plans for developing the sector.” Overall, there needs to be a clear commitment to balancing operational support with

institutional reform activities, since “success and sustainability depend on developing the institutions and processes that support security forces as well as the human capacity to lead and manage them.”⁶⁶

This defense institution-building is therefore a key component of security sector reform. It can be defined as “programs, structures, and processes used to develop effective, efficient, and accountable partner defense establishments, including defense ministries, joint and general staffs and commands, and the supporting institutions of the armed forces.”⁶⁷ As described by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, defense institution-building programs “aim to establish responsible defense governance in order to help partner-nations build effective, transparent, and accountable defense institutions.” These efforts “advance American ideals of democracy and the rule of law, as well as key strategic interests and secure security cooperation investments.”⁶⁸

As noted by one security sector reform scholar, the promotion of “a civil-military relationship in which a civilian led defense institution exercises legitimate authority over the state’s military forces” is perhaps the most important military aspect of security sector reform. In many of the “newly independent nations, developing countries,” and “states in transition or emerging from conflict” that often require security sector reform, “civilian-managed defense ministries are underdeveloped or nonexistent.” Furthermore, in cases where civilian-led defense ministries exist, “the interaction between the military and its civilian counterparts tends to be dominated by those in uniform.” To perform this most important security sector reform task, this same scholar asserts that the DOD requires “a cadre of civilian advisors who specialize in the key functional tasks of a defense ministry.”⁶⁹

In 2013, in testimony before the U.S. Congress, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict ASD(SO/LIC) highlighted two DOD activities designed to address these defense institution building challenges, noting that the Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI) and Ministry of Defense Advisors (MODA) program “are important capacity building tools that will sustain other security assistance efforts over time by building the core competencies needed in effective and accountable defense ministries.”⁷⁰ DIRI focuses on ministry-to-ministry engagement, and develops “effective, accountable, professional and transparent partner defense establishments in partner countries that can manage, sustain and employ national forces” by providing “subject matter experts to work with

partner nations to assess organizational weaknesses and establish a roadmap for addressing the shortfalls.”⁷¹ In contrast, the MODA program “partners DOD civilian experts with foreign counterparts to build ministerial core competencies such as personnel and readiness, logistics, strategy and policy, and financial management.”⁷² While DIRI provides essential ministerial assessment and planning capabilities, the MODA program reflects the closer ministerial advisory interaction that may ultimately be required to build effective defense institutions in developing and transitioning states.

The DOD established the MODA program in Afghanistan in July 2010 as a result of increased “U.S. government emphasis on civilian-led capacity building at the ministerial level.” In particular, the program addresses concerns that the existing advisory services to Afghan ministries were “often carried out on an ad hoc basis, utilizing uniformed or contract personnel whose functional expertise and advisory skills were not always well-matched to the sociocultural working environment.” Subsequently, the MODA program was expanded to support the provision of advisory services to the defense ministries of additional countries following the program’s inclusion in the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The FY2014 NDAA extended this authority to include the assignment of advisors to “regional organizations with security missions” as well.⁷³

As framed in the FY2012 NDAA, the MODA program is designed to “enhance the capabilities and capacity of the partner nation’s defense ministry” by leveraging the DOD’s civilian workforce to “provide institutional, ministerial-level advice, and other training ... in support of stabilization or post-conflict activities,” and to “assist the ministry in building core institutional capacity, competencies, and capabilities to manage defense-related processes.” The DOD also intends for this program to aid the development of “long-term relationships that strengthen a partner nation’s defense ministry” and “support broader U.S. policy goals” such as “promoting positive civil-military relations” and the professionalization of partner military forces.⁷⁴

While the ASD(SO/LIC) asserted in his 2013 congressional testimony that the MODA Afghanistan program “has demonstrated the positive impact that DOD civilian personnel can have in the field by helping to build capable defense institutions and providing professional advice and assistance at the ministerial level,”⁷⁵ there have been challenges scaling the program to support other partner nations. Despite deploying over 200 civilian advisors to Afghan ministries during FY2010–FY2014, the DOD was only able to deploy

a total of five civilian advisors to ministries in other countries by the end of FY2014 through the MODA program. Although difficulties obtaining partner nation approval for MODA advisors has been part of the problem with the program's expansion outside Afghanistan, the recruitment of qualified advisors also has been an issue.⁷⁶

Even in Afghanistan, there are questions about the continued success of recruiting for these positions, as the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan continues to decline. In addition, gaps in the deployments of MODA advisors may occur as a result of training and administrative challenges, regardless of the effectiveness of recruiting efforts. Given the projected positive impact of the MODA program on security sector reform and BPC, would it be feasible for SOF to help mitigate shortfalls in civilian ministerial advisors while the MODA program scales to achieve a new advisory footprint worldwide?

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Chapter 4. SOF Doctrine and Perspectives

In its planning and execution of the SOF core activities of SFA and FID, USSOCOM has primarily focused on providing military advisors at the tactical and operational levels of FSF. However, there are elements of associated joint doctrine and SOF strategic documents that appear to reinforce the possibility of these activities extending to impact the ministerial level as well. In fact, the first end state identified for SFA in JP 3-07, is “Competent from the ministerial level to the individual soldier and police officer, across all related fields of interest and functional specialties.” JP 3-07 also indicates that “the level and intensity of advice and assistance is based on local operational conditions and should continue until the security forces establish the required systems to provide for themselves.”⁷⁷

Similarly JP 3-22, states that SFA consists of “activities from the ministry level to the tactical units, and the national security sector,” including “organizing institutions and units, which can range from standing up a ministry to improving the organization of the smallest maneuver unit.” Furthermore, JP 3-22 specifically endorses BPC at the strategic level, highlighting that developing “tactical capabilities alone is inadequate; strategic and operational capabilities must be developed as well.” It also clarifies that “building capability and capacity” includes “personnel, logistics, and intelligence, and their support infrastructure,” much of which can typically be found within a ministerial apparatus.⁷⁸

Although USSOCOM has not specifically designated the high-operational/strategic and ministerial level activities as the domain of SOF, it has developed a vision for SOF SFA and BPC efforts that could require high-operational/strategic and ministerial level interactions to deliver optimal impact. SOCOM 2020 describes SOF missions as actively “building enduring relationships through training with partner forces and assisting like-minded nations as they address the underlying causes of extremism.” In the case of Afghanistan this involves leveraging “SOF’s expertise as advisors and trainers” to develop “the capability and capacity of the Afghanistan National Security Force to provide sustainable security, transparency, justice, and opportunity for the Afghan people.”⁷⁹ Assisting countries by addressing “the underlying causes of extremism” and the development of security forces

that can provide “transparency, justice, and opportunity” are both tasks that would be consistent with the more high-operational/strategic and ministerial level initiatives typically associated with security sector reform.

To accomplish these tasks, the broader SOCOM 2020 vision for SOF activities describes a “globally networked force” that includes “interagency, allies and partners” with the collective ability to “rapidly and persistently address regional contingencies and threats to stability.”⁸⁰ USSOCOM’s Special Operations Forces Operating Concept expands the list of SOF “strategic partners” to include “interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, non-governmental, commercial, and academic” partners in this “Global SOF Network.”⁸¹ Many of these strategic partners primarily operate at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial level of a government, which suggests that the additional SOLOs that the concept calls for stationing in U.S. embassies could reasonably end up providing advice to high-operational/strategic and ministerial representatives in a partner nation, as well as partner nation SOF.⁸²

USSOCOM established the SOLO program in 2006 to provide SOF representatives who could “coordinate United States SOF (USSOF) development efforts at foreign national level SOF command headquarters” and “facilitate establishment and nurturing of institutional relationships to the partner nation’s (PN) Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior, and civilian leadership.” SOLOs also serve as “the SOF advisor to the U.S. Chief of Mission, the country team, and the PN SOF commander,” and are responsible for assisting the applicable Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) operating under USSOCOM in “the development of PN special operations capabilities and capacities from the strategic through the tactical level.”⁸³ Although focused largely on the high-operational/strategic advisory mission, the program has been challenged with developing the supporting accessions, training, assignment, and professional development processes necessary to generate highly skilled, senior (O5/O6) SOF officers to support the identified partner nation demand for SOLOs. As of June 2014, 40 countries had been approved to receive SOLO billets by 2019, but as of May 2016 only 17 countries have had SOLOs assigned.⁸⁴

The above excerpts from joint doctrine and USSOCOM strategic documents, plus overviews of applicable USSOCOM initiatives, indicate that providing advisory services at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial level of a government, while not a specified task for SOF, is at a minimum,

fully consistent with the objectives of the SOF core activities of SFA and FID, as well as the vision for creating a global SOF network. As indicated in Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter's 2013 speech mentioned above, SOF are clearly "central" to BPC.⁸⁵ One scholar asserts that SOF BPC efforts already "run the gamut of security cooperation from training individuals and units to institutional security sector reform."⁸⁶ SOF ministerial advisory activities appear to be well underway through initiatives such as USSOCOM's SOLO program, but the program may continue to be challenged with delivering a sufficient number of SOLOs to support the broadest vision of the global SOF network described in SOCOM 2020.

With engagements in "approximately eighty countries around the world" on any given day,⁸⁷ and "nearly 8,000 SOF" deployed continuously in "over 90 countries around the globe" as of December 2016,⁸⁸ even SOF personnel who are not in the SOLO program are well-positioned to provide advisory services to partner nation defense ministry officials in cases where SOLO and MODA program advisors are not available. Are SOF' skills, as primarily tactical and operational level advisors, a match for the skills required to succeed as advisors at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial level of a partner nation's security forces?

Chapter 5. Skills and Traits of Effective Military Advisors

When BPC requires the deployment of U.S. military advisors, the DOD typically turns to SOF to perform this mission given their experience and expertise with working by, with, and through partner nation security forces.⁸⁹ Joint and service doctrine for SFA and FID identify several of the key skills and traits that have enabled SOF advisors to be successful in the performance of these SOF core activities. Adding insights from analyses of advisory missions yields a better understanding of which skills and traits have proven to be most beneficial in U.S. SFA and FID activities over time.

JP 3-07 highlights the importance of language skills to advisors' ability to communicate and establish a rapport with their partner nation counterparts. It also recommends the personal traits of maturity, experience, and patience as helpful for dealing with the challenges and frustrations frequently associated with the task of advising FSF.⁹⁰ In addition to noting the importance of advisors having language skills, JP 3-22, asserts that knowledge of the partner nation's history, culture, and customs is also essential.⁹¹ Joint Doctrine Note 1-13 adds that leadership skills are required for advisors at all levels as well, from noncommissioned officers to general and flag officers, since SFA spans interactions from the tactical level through the strategic level.⁹²

U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-07.1 notes three types of skills that are particularly important for effective advising. The first skill set is combat skills, which are the foundation for any military advisor, but particularly for advisors to partner nation security forces that are operating in a combat environment. Second, competence or expertise in a particular subject matter related to security forces, such as intelligence, communications, operations, and logistics is necessary. The third set of essential skills consists of techniques for advising, teaching, and coaching—the core methods that advisors use to assist their assigned partner nation counterparts.⁹³

FM 3-07.1 identifies a number of additional personal traits that are helpful for advisors. Advisors should be open-minded, perceptive, intellectually curious, and flexible in their approach to challenges. They should be non-judgmental, tolerant of differences with others, and capable of empathy. It is also helpful for advisors to be highly communicative individuals, with

an ability to motivate themselves and others, as well as a general warmth in their relations with others. They should be self-reliant, with a “strong

It is also helpful for advisors to be highly communicative individuals, with an ability to motivate themselves and others, as well as a general warmth in their relations with others.

sense of self” and a healthy sense of humor to help make it through the more difficult times. From a broader perspective, advisors must be able to deal well with uncertainty, maintain a realistic outlook, and accept and learn from failure.⁹⁴

A review of articles and research primarily from the U.S. Army’s Combat Studies Institute on advisory missions in Afghanistan and Iraq reinforces the value of many of the skills mentioned above, including basic language skills (for rapport building), leadership, combat skills, subject matter expertise, and cultural competence including local history, customs, institutions, and religions. Diplomatic, management, and influence and negotiation skills are also considered to be helpful.⁹⁵ Additional personal traits recommended for advisors include self-discipline, self-confidence, humility, mental agility, and the ability to learn quickly.⁹⁶ For combat advisors, physical toughness in terms of stamina and energy was also cited as an important trait.⁹⁷

Surveying the body of research from the U.S. Army’s Combat Studies Institute, RAND, and other academic sources on tactical and operational advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador yields several of the same skills and competencies highlighted above. Language skills, advisory techniques and cultural competence are recommended most frequently. However, partner nation politics and military institutions plus counterinsurgency (COIN) and civic action techniques are also suggested competencies.⁹⁸ Familiarity with the fields of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and economics are also recommended for advisors, as well as an independent outlook and a contemplative nature.⁹⁹

Based on the insights above from both doctrine and research, a composite picture of the most valuable skills and traits for military advisors can be constructed. The skills and competencies recommended most frequently for advisors include language skills, advisory techniques, combat skills, subject matter competence, and country-specific knowledge of culture, customs, history, and political and military institutions. The personal traits identified most often as being preferable for effective advisors include patience,

empathy, maturity, humility, open-mindedness, flexibility, and tolerance of uncertainty.

Table 1. Most Valuable Skills and Traits for Tactical and Operational Military Advisors

Skills and Competencies	Personal Traits
Advisory Techniques	Empathy
Combat Skills	Flexibility
Country-Specific Knowledge of Culture, Customs, History, and Political/Military Institutions	Humility
Language	Maturity
Subject Matter Competence	Open-Mindedness
	Patience
	Tolerance of Uncertainty

SOF training and qualifications focus substantially on the development of the language, culture, combat skills, and instructional technique competencies discussed prior.¹⁰⁰ SOF selection processes are designed to screen for many of the highlighted traits as well,¹⁰¹ and the “Quiet Professionals” ethic and culture of SOF encourages their adoption.¹⁰² These skills and traits have enabled SOF to become the DOD’s first choice as military advisors for BPC activities—the bulk of which takes place at the tactical and operational levels of partner nation security forces. Surveying the skills and traits associated with effective advisors operating at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of partner nations will allow an assessment of whether this existing SOF skill set offers a sufficient foundation for BPC at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels as well.

Chapter 6. Skills and Traits of High-Operational/Strategic and Ministerial-Level Advisors

While the DOD has not developed any joint or service doctrine specifically focused on military advisors operating at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of a FSF, the essential traits and skills required for advisors to be effective at these levels can be developed from articles and research documents published by various DOD and U.S. government sources. In the year before the establishment of the MODA program, the U.S. Army's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) and Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) published a guide titled "The American Military Advisor: Dealing with Senior Foreign Officials in the Islamic World" that identifies negotiation skills, knowledge of U.S. policy and politics, and knowledge of partner nation culture, customs, history, and politics as essential competencies of U.S. ministerial advisors. The document also provides a broad overview of the personal traits that would be most beneficial for advisors, including: patience, savvy, adaptability, and flexibility; the ability to work independently, learn quickly, deal with ambiguous circumstances, and take action based solely on higher intent; and sufficient experience to establish credibility with the assigned ministerial counterpart.¹⁰³

The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) has also engaged heavily on this topic, through both its participation in the development and delivery of the DOD MODA program curriculum and its own initiatives. In 2009, USIP released a briefing paper titled "The Role of the Ministerial Advisor in Security Sector Reform: Navigating Institutional Terrains" summarizing the findings of one such initiative that assembled a panel of experts to discuss the challenges facing ministerial advisory efforts. The paper notes the importance of language and technical competency for advisors, plus the personal traits of patience and humility. By emphasizing that advisors are "not merely experts, but are negotiators, teachers and partners," one can infer that the expert panel would support the utility of negotiation and instruction skills as well.¹⁰⁴

USIP experts offered additional insights in an article focused on identifying "Lessons from MODA" three years after the program's inception.

The article, published in the National Defense University's Center for Complex Operations journal *PRISM*, reiterates the significance of advisors being technically competent in their designated advisory field, and the need for patience, adaptability, and flexibility to be traits of the individuals selected for advisory missions. However, the article recommends several more skills for advisors, such as problem solving skills, personal communication and interaction skills, and the ability to work with "many local actors at multiple levels." The article also emphasizes the utility of instructions skills, persuasion skills, and motivation skills. The additional personal traits that the article suggests for advisors include: maturity, cultural curiosity, and resourcefulness; compassion, empathy, and comfort engaging a wide array of people and personalities; plus integrity and a team player mentality.¹⁰⁵

Two other articles published by DOD organizations help clarify the desired areas of technical competence for ministerial advisors. In a 2011 *PRISM* article titled "Ministerial Advisors: Developing Capacity for an Enduring Security Force," three senior DOD officials associated with the MODA program identify a requirement for ministerial advisors with technical expertise in the fields of logistics, financial administration, human resources. The article also stresses the need for advisors to have mentoring and advising skills.¹⁰⁶ Finally, a 2013 Joint Special Operations University monograph titled *Security Force Assistance and Security Sector Reform* suggests that the fields of technical expertise for ministerial advisors should extend to include policy and strategy; force development; and planning, budgeting, and management.¹⁰⁷

Overall, many of the skills identified above for ministerial advisors—such as advisory techniques, language skills, technical expertise, and knowledge of local culture, customs, history, and politics—are fully consistent with the skills recommendations for tactical and operational advisors. Certainly the highlighted personal traits of patience, empathy, adaptability, and flexibility, among others, are familiar as well. Furthermore, Army Doctrine Publication 3-05 emphasizes that SOF are deployed in tailored packages that are "Language trained; Regionally aligned; Culturally astute; Politically nuanced; Trained in mediation and negotiation; Expected to operate autonomously; and Proficient at interorganizational coordination."¹⁰⁸ The primary differences between the proposed traits for advisors at the tactical and operational levels, and advisors at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels are the combat expertise focus of the former and the

Table 2. Summary of Most Valuable Skills and Traits for Ministerial-Level Military Advisors

Skills and Competencies	Personal Traits
Advising Skills	Ability to Deal with Ambiguity
Country-Specific Knowledge of Culture, Customs, History, and Politics	Ability to Take Action Solely Based on Higher Intent
Financial Administration Expertise	Ability to Work Independently
Force Development Expertise	Ability to Work with Many Actors at Many Levels
Human Resources Expertise	Adaptability
Instruction Skills	Compassion
Knowledge of U.S. Policy and Politics	Cultural Curiosity
Language Skills	Empathy
Logistics Expertise	Flexibility
Mentoring Skills	Humility
Motivation Skills	Integrity
Negotiation Skills	Maturity
Personal Communication and Interaction Skills	Patience
Persuasion Skills	Quick Learner
Policy and Strategy Expertise	Resourcefulness
Planning, Budgeting, and Management Expertise	Savvy
Problem Solving Skills	Sufficient Experience to Gain Credibility
Technical Competency	Team Player Mentality

organization, administration, and logistics concentration of the latter. Based on this comparison, it appears that if technical expertise concerns can be addressed, existing SOF advisor skills, competencies, and personal traits would provide a sufficient foundation for routinely extending SOF advisory activities to include partner nation government ministries. Technical expertise, however, is not the only concern that has been raised regarding the possibility of SOF personnel performing ministerial advisor roles on a more routine basis.

Consistent with the above analysis, the PKSOI/SSI guide for military advisors cited earlier contends that “the core skills necessary for a successful advisory role are the same from the tactical to the strategic level,” with the principal factors of “personality, credibility, and perception of value” applying to “junior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and junior company grade officers assigned to provide training to the lowest level of foreign army recruits, as well as to the general who is sitting in a meeting with a foreign head of state.”¹⁰⁹ Most of the SOF advisory skillset that has been so effective at the tactical and operational levels of FSF should also be effective at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels. Indeed one of SOF’ principal competencies directly addresses one of the challenges that the 2011 *PRISM* article lists as a catalyst for the development of the MODA program—contractor and military advisors’ frequent lack of “sufficient working knowledge of the sociocultural context into which they were being deployed.”¹¹⁰

The other challenge that the 2011 “Ministerial Advisors” article in *PRISM* highlights as a rationale for starting the MODA program is that given the wide range of specialties in defense and interior ministries, it was often difficult to identify military and contract advisors with the experience or expertise in the particular fields where Afghan ministries desired support. In this regard, the USIP authors of “Lessons from MODA” note that “successful institution-building requires advanced bureaucratic skills—for example, developing policy, logistics, and transport,” which they view as distinctly different skills from the combat skills that are the primary domain of military personnel.¹¹¹ Two COIN researchers with U.S. Army experience offer a similar view in a 2008 *Armed Forces Journal* article titled “New Answers to Hard Questions.” The authors asserts that SOF advisors “were not intended to develop security forces at the institutional level and cannot provide the division- and corps-level planners, personnel and finance specialists, and expert logisticians needed to develop security institutions.”¹¹² All of these observations support the conclusions of the previous section, which identifies technical expertise in typical ministerial activities as the primary differentiation between the skills of effective advisors operating at the tactical and operational levels and the skills of effective advisors working at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels.

The “Lessons from MODA,” however, extend beyond the challenge of addressing the technical, bureaucratic skills gap. The authors identify two additional hurdles for military personnel serving as ministerial advisors.

First is the paucity of military personnel “with extensive experience in civilian-led institutions” and not just in military units.¹¹³ Similarly, the COIN experts’ quote above regarding the inability of SOF advisors to provide “division- and corps-level planners” alludes to the lack of SOF personnel with strategic or ministerial level experience. Second is the USIP experts’ observation that “most U.S. military personnel are significantly younger than defense civilian personnel,” an issue that they assert “has been known to cause resentment and slow progress.”¹¹⁴ With personality and credibility being two of the principal factors for successful advisory missions, this age gap issue can clearly have a more substantial impact than may generally be expected.

In addition to these issues, there are concerns regarding the capacity and availability of SOF to perform security sector advisory roles. In his 2013 congressional testimony, Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael A. Sheehan noted that the “large demand for building partner nation capability over the past decade coupled with the limited availability of SOF for this mission has required the GPF [general purpose forces] to adapt and develop their skills in conducting an increasingly larger portion of security force assistance activities.”¹¹⁵ This trend has resulted in the U.S. Army’s recent establishment of Security Force Assistance Brigades to collaborate with, but not replace, SOF in building partner nation “institutional defense capability.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, the primary cause of the limited availability of SOF for SFA efforts—increased SOF counterterrorism activities—is not likely to diminish in the near future.¹¹⁷

Overall, it appears that the core skills required for successful advisors at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels are similar to the skills required for successful advisors at the tactical/operational levels, while the identified challenges are not insurmountable. The requisite technical and bureaucratic skills expertise is increasing in SOF as a result of increased assignments to strategy, policy, and logistics roles at SOCOM and other combatant command (CCMD) organizations. In particular, the assignment of SOF personnel to Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and interagency organizations through the

The requisite technical and bureaucratic skills expertise is increasing in SOF as a result of increased assignments to strategy, policy, and logistics roles at SOCOM and other combatant command (CCMD) organizations.

SOST program is helping address a paucity of military personnel with experience in civilian-led organizations. USSOCOM SOST teams are embedded “at critical nodes of the interagency process,” facilitating “the exchange of information, the development of courses of action, the preparation of recommendations, and the efficient execution of executive orders”¹¹⁸—activities that any civilian advisor to a partner nation ministry might expect to perform.

In addition, there are senior SOF advisors with the age and experience to establish close relations with partner nation ministry personnel, and in cases where age is not similar, the level of operational experience of SOF representatives should be sufficient to command respect. While only civilian personnel like the MODA advisors can “help demonstrate appropriate civil-military interaction” to the civilians leading ministries in partner nations, SOF advisors can help demonstrate proper military support to civilian leaders to the former military personnel who often assume roles in the defense and interior ministries.¹¹⁹ Perhaps more importantly, although SOF’ capacity and availability for the ministerial advisor mission may indeed be a significant issue based on the measured progress of the SOLO program, there are far more SOF advisors deployed worldwide who may be able to perform this mission than SOLO and MODA program advisors combined. Moreover, there are several cases where SOF personnel operating outside the SOLO construct have effectively served as advisors at the high operational/strategic level suggesting the potential for broader SOF advisory success at the ministerial level as well.

Chapter 7. SOF History Advising Foreign Security Forces (FSF) at the High-Operational/Strategic Level

While SOF are frequently called upon to conduct training at the tactical level with partner nations, mission requirements and their unique skills often lead to them providing advice and assistance at the high-operational and strategic/ministerial levels of partner nation governments also. In 2013 testimony before the U.S. Congress, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Sheehan highlighted that SOF regular engagement in key countries provides them with deep understanding of “local culture, society, language, economy, history and politics.” This rare appreciation of both “the physical and human terrain of their areas” enables SOF to be “more precise and therefore successful” in BPC.¹²⁰

One researcher adds SOF’ “high level of cross cultural competency,” and ability to be employed in sensitive, covert, or clandestine matters to the list of attributes that make SOF particularly well suited for BPC at all levels.¹²¹ Furthermore, this expert asserts that “SOF’s unique culture, global perspective, roles in the U.S. Military, and relationships across the spectrum of domestic and international actors also qualify SOF to offer perceptive insights on where to pursue strategic true partnerships and how to apply BPC methods and assets.”¹²² Staff at the U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center have even worked from a list of existing SOF imperatives to provide units assigned SFA missions at any level a list of SFA imperatives that can serve as a foundation while starting to build a campaign plan. A former U.S. military advisor to the commanding general of an Iraqi Army division has endorsed these lightly altered SOF imperatives as a useful baseline for advisors providing SFA at his high operational level.¹²³

Indeed, since 9/11 SOF have provided advice and assistance from the tactical level through the high-operational/strategic level to improve partner nation security forces and supporting institutions worldwide. These engagements have ranged from large-scale and long-term advisor deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan to smaller-team and shorter-term advisor engagements in Colombia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, and the Philippines.¹²⁴

Taking a closer look at four of these engagements—in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, and Colombia—will shed more light on how SOF have performed at the high-operational/strategic level in particular.

SOF Advisors in Afghanistan: Developing Village Stability Operations, Afghan Local Police, and Afghan Special Operations Capabilities

While SOF direct action (DA) at the tactical level against al-Qaeda and Taliban targets in Afghanistan frequently gained more acclaim, SOF programs such as Village Stability Operations (VSO) to build Afghan local police (ALP) and efforts to train and equip Afghanistan's SOF have also achieved significant impact—at both the tactical and high-operational/strategic levels.¹²⁵ SOF and Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) leaders started initiatives as early as 2005 in Uruzgan province to combine local resistance to the Taliban with governance and economic development programs.¹²⁶ Similarly, CJSOTF-A established an Afghan auxiliary police program in 2006–2007 working with local elders, and then coordinated with the governor to build ministerial capacities with the U.S. Agency for International Development and the state to improve economic development and local government appointments. These early initiatives demonstrated SOF's capabilities to operate effectively at the high-operational level with interagency support, however these efforts ultimately were not sustainable without a broader strategy; provincial support alone was not enough.¹²⁷

That broader vision for VSO/ALP was provided by Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A), which was established to serve as a strategic headquarters for all SOF in Afghanistan, but was also designated the lead for VSO/ALP programs.¹²⁸ From its base in Kabul, CFSOCC-A was able to coordinate VSO/ALP initiatives more effectively with International Security Assistance Force headquarters, Afghan ministries, and the U.S. embassy.¹²⁹ In addition, CFSOCC-A populated the regional infrastructure to support the VSO/ALP program by assigning SOF personnel from the CFSOCC-A and CJSOTF-A staffs to Village Stability Coordination Centers to help coordinate activities from the local tactical level through the national/strategic level. SOF teams assigned to VSO/ALP initiatives at the local level were also directed to integrate governance and

development activities from the start with security operations.¹³⁰ CFSOCC-A was subsumed by Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) in 2012, and SOJTF-A SOF staff members “provided more intensive mentoring of the ALP leadership at the national level starting in 2013.”¹³¹ To increase program capacity at multiple levels, SOJTF-A grew the number of SOF mentors at the national level, while also expanding provincial and regional level training activities.¹³²

VSO and ALP were the primary SOF contribution to population-centric, indirect approaches to COIN efforts in Afghanistan,¹³³ and can be considered effective given indications from enemy sources that “insurgent leaders generally viewed the ALP as the foremost obstacle to the success of the insurgency.”¹³⁴ Logistical bottlenecks existed at higher levels of the Ministry of the Interior where NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) advisors were assigned the lead.¹³⁵ Logistics is an area that SOF might benefit from expanding its capabilities in given how vital it is to transitioning programs to partner nation control. The strategically significant impact achieved by VSO/ALP, however, is a positive indication of the effectiveness of SOF advisors working at both the tactical and high-operational/strategic levels.

In addition to the VSO/ALP program, SOF advisors were engaged in developing Afghanistan’s own SOF capabilities at the operational and high-operational/strategic levels, as well as facilitating the interaction between Afghan ministries and SOF. Special Operations Advisory Groups (SOAGs) were established in 2013 as small teams of SOF advisors operating under NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A)/SOJTF-A to assist headquarters elements of the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF). SOAGs focused on building both the operational and institutional capacities of ASSF headquarters groups including the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command, the General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU), the Special Mission Wing, the Ktah Khas Strike Force, and the ALP Headquarters.¹³⁶

One SOAG, the Ministry Advisory Group Special Operations Forces Liaison Element (MAG SOFLE), was specifically assigned to support Afghanistan’s Ministry of Defense and Ministry of the Interior. MAG SOFLE advisors worked with these two ministries to help resolve issues impacting operational-level activities for U.S., Afghan, and coalition forces, while also facilitating the ministries’ understanding of NSOCC-A priorities and missions. In turn, MAG SOFLE advisors enabled NSOCC-A and other U.S.

and coalition commands gain a better understanding of the priorities and missions of the Afghan Ministry of Defense and Ministry of the Interior as well. SOF advisors operating in this ministerial environment helped facilitate understandings of expectations and interests across senior U.S., coalition, and Afghan leaders, and increase the likelihood of effective collaboration.¹³⁷

SOF Advisors in Iraq: Building Iraq's SOF and Counterterrorism Capabilities

In Iraq, SOF were again assigned a DA mission against terrorists and other extremists, plus an advisory mission to help Iraq develop its own special operations and counterterrorism capabilities as part of its security forces.¹³⁸ The mission to train the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) was executed by Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command-Iraq (JFSOCC-I),¹³⁹ and extended beyond tactical-level training of Iraqi troops to the development of a national counterterrorism capability and command structure that reached the level of government ministries responsible for policy and resources of national assets.¹⁴⁰

ISOF are organized into three brigades subordinate to the Counterterrorism Command (CTC) which falls under the Counterterrorism Service (CTS), and their primary mission is conducting operations against terrorists, insurgents, and extremists¹⁴¹ CTC was designed to provide operational control of ISOF, with the same rank and organizational level as Iraq's air, ground, and naval forces. It became a three-star general level organization.¹⁴² CTS was initially conceived as a civilian ministry separate from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior that would advise the prime minister on counterterrorism policy while also ensuring that ISOF were resourced properly and given appropriate civilian oversight. However, it ended up being a four-star general level organization commanded by military personnel.¹⁴³

SOF advisors focused initially on training tactical ISOF and started providing training on command and staff processes such as planning, logistics, personnel, and intelligence much later.¹⁴⁴ The familiarity and continuity created by multiple deployments of SOF trainers, plus the high-quality foundation provided by the use of U.S. Army special forces training doctrine, contributed significantly to the successful development of ISOF's tactical capabilities.¹⁴⁵ However, this concentration on advising at the tactical level reduced SOF availability to advise senior ISOF commanders, staff, and

combat service support units.¹⁴⁶ Eventually it became apparent that even strong Iraqi senior military leaders were often unfamiliar with the senior management skills required for optimum ISOF performance.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, ISOF lacked a combat service support organization to enable it to operate at peak efficiency.¹⁴⁸ While ISOF soldiers received basic training on how to identify and plan for requirements for parts, ammunition, and other supplies, CTC and CTS personnel did not receive this training, leading SOF advisors to be concerned about the ability of CTC, CTS and Iraqi ministries' ability to sustain ISOF properly.¹⁴⁹

Based on these initial observations, SOF advisors expanded their engagements to include the development and training of the ISOF brigades at the tactical level, the national command and control headquarters, and the attending combat service support structure.¹⁵⁰ SOF advisors and other subject matter experts were assigned to the CTS headquarters and CTC staff was to provide advice and training in not only operations and strategy, but also the supporting intelligence, logistics, administration, communications, and legal processes that facilitate operational effectiveness.¹⁵¹ This expanded focus on developing a sustainable ISOF capability and supporting structure led to impressive results. The United States' Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) highlighted "ISOF's demonstrated ability to independently conduct operations and missions and to sustain its equipment and facilities" as "indicators of the program's success" in 2010.¹⁵² In its final report in 2013, SIGIR judged the program to develop a counterterrorism capability in Iraq to have succeeded, yielding "a force of more than 4,100 expertly capable soldiers deployed throughout Iraq."¹⁵³

This expanded focus on developing a sustainable ISOF capability and supporting structure led to impressive results.

These findings matched the assessments of the JFSOCC-I commander as SOF prepared to depart Iraq in 2012. In an interview with *Special Warfare* magazine, Brigadier General Darsie Rogers commented that the SOF mission in Iraq had been a success, building within the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) a "reliable, professional counterterrorism capability that has allowed them to plan their own successful operations against Iraq's enemies—be they extremists, criminals or terrorists." Brigadier General Rogers also pointed to the ISOF ability to "conduct counterterrorism operations independently—without U.S. adviser support" as an indicator of their effectiveness.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps equally

important from a capability and organizational culture perspective, SOF advisors had been able to convince the brigades, CTC, and CTS headquarters “that capability does not equate to numbers. What matters is how good you are today and what you do to be better tomorrow.”¹⁵⁵ Notably, a SOF advisor who served four tours in Iraq mentioned that although “ISOF will likely be the most enduring foreign internal defense success story” for U.S. special forces, SOF advisors were already concerned that sustainment would prove to be “the unit’s most likely failure point.”¹⁵⁶

By 2014, with ISIS on the march in Iraq, these earlier assessments of CTS and ISOF capabilities were proven correct. According to a 2015 Brookings Institution analysis, “CTS was assessed as the one bright spot of ISF. It was the best military organization, and was able to maintain its cohesion and effectiveness.”¹⁵⁷ The same Brookings Institution report commented that CTS “performed better than other ISF units” and “is the most competent military partner the U.S. has” within the government of Iraq.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, a 2016 article in *The Washington Post* remarked that the CTS force of roughly 10,000 personnel “is a small bright spot in an otherwise lackluster legacy of American efforts to rebuild Iraq’s military.”¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Lieutenant General Mick Bednarek, who led all U.S. training activities in Iraq between 2013 and 2015, stated that ISOF are the “most professional, technically capable force” that the Iraqi government has.¹⁶⁰ The CTS response to ISIS, years after the departure for U.S. military forces from Iraq, offers perhaps the clearest evidence of SOF’s considerable skill of advising from the tactical level to the strategic level of a host nation to develop a truly strategic capability.”

SOF Advisors in the Philippines: Advising and Assisting in a Counterterrorist Conflict

SOF engagement in the Philippines was focused on advising and assisting host nation forces in their efforts to counter a terrorist organization that shared ISIS’ vision of establishing its own Islamic state. In response to the government of the Philippines’ request for assistance with addressing the threat posed by the Abu Syyaf Group (ASG), advisors from the U.S. Army’s 1st Special Forces Group began training elements of the Philippine Army in March 2001 to serve as a counterterrorism force.¹⁶¹ This initial effort expanded to include the provision of intelligence assistance following an ASG attack on a resort in the Philippines in May 2001 where tourists were also kidnapped

for ransom. After 9/11, U.S. military assistance increased again to advance counterterrorism efforts in the Philippines, leading to the establishment of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P) in 2002.¹⁶²

Under OEF-P, SOF engagement with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) strengthened substantially as SOF advisors deployed in larger numbers to advise and assist the AFP in their operations against ASG in the southern islands of the Philippines.¹⁶³ U.S. Pacific Command's Joint Task Force 510 (JTF 510) led by Special Operations Command Pacific led SOF advisor efforts against ASG on the island of Basilan. In July 2002, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) was stood up as a tailored force to replace JTF 510 and perform the FID mission with the AFP to defeat the ASG.¹⁶⁴ Based on the outreach of earlier SOF teams with local residents, these later SOF advisor units were able to work with the AFP to respond to the issues, grievances, and needs of the local community to undermine any ties they may have had to terrorist groups.¹⁶⁵ In addition to training and advising the AFP, SOF advisors "helped coordinate security efforts and interagency, sometimes international, programs to address key issues such as water, medical care, transportation, and education" that often left local residents open to the presence and influence of ASG and other terrorist organizations.¹⁶⁶

JSOTF-P employed the Liaison Coordination Element (LCE) construct "as the core unit to embed with selected host-nation partner forces in strategic locations and key junctures of host nation military command structure"¹⁶⁷ LCEs are "flexible, adaptive and scalable" units that can interface from the tactical level through the strategic level.¹⁶⁸ For nearly a decade, LCEs were primarily focused on advise and assist activities with AFP companies operating at the tactical level. However, following the Philippine government's release of a new Internal Peace and Security Plan in 2010, and the publishing of Philippine police and army plans soon thereafter, JSOTF-P shifted its advisory focus from the tactical level to higher-level operational and institutional development.¹⁶⁹

By 2012, SOF advisory efforts at the tactical level had been so successful that LCEs started to shift their advise and assist efforts to the operational level battalion and Joint Task Force headquarters staffs to address challenges in planning, coordination, and synchronization.¹⁷⁰ Philippine Army battalion, brigade, and division staffs, plus elements of superior commands including the Philippine General Headquarters, received training from SOF on planning and operations.¹⁷¹ ¹⁷² JSOTF-P advisors were also able to provide

training to higher Philippine military headquarters on program management and other staff functions.¹⁷³ Working at the operational level of brigades and JTFs enabled SOF advisors to build relationships with a greater opportunity to yield change while also allowing engaging with subordinate tactical units as required.¹⁷⁴

In 2013, JSOTF-P leaders started collaborating with the Philippine Army Special Operations Command through an assigned LCE to help identify institutional-level options to improve counterterrorism and FID efforts.¹⁷⁵ LCEs for operational activities and functional coordination elements for institutional activities concentrated on improving capabilities at the Philippine SOF headquarters and overall joint command.¹⁷⁶ SOF advisory cells were also established at every Philippine SOF command headquarters to improve command and control and other staff functions.¹⁷⁷ JSOTF-P personnel worked with the Philippine Army Special Operations Command to standardize and institutionalize the training of SOF skills and capabilities in the existing training pipeline.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, JSOTF-P and Philippine Army Special Operations Command leaders hosted a series of conferences to develop a strategic roadmap for Philippine SOF.¹⁷⁹

In addition, between 2012 and its deactivation in early 2015, JSOTF-P increasingly engaged at the operational and strategic levels to support national-level planning, coordination, and institutional development.¹⁸⁰ JSOTF-P shifted focus to advising and assisting at the institutional level to help resolve operational and tactical level operational capability gaps, to improve operational capacity and reduce the need for repetitive Subject Matter Expert Exchanges.¹⁸¹ High-level planning, intelligence fusion, and institutional development were viewed as critical to the development of a sustainable Philippine capability. AFP schools, courses, doctrine, and other institutions were strengthened.¹⁸²

The JSOTF-P commander and his deputy made particular efforts to cultivate strong relationships with U.S. embassy and national-level Philippine military and civilian personnel. As early as 2010, the JSOTF-P commander started allocating two days per week for meetings in Manila until 2013 when it shifted to five days per week.¹⁸³ JSOTF-P worked to establish structures to improve higher-level operational coordination between the Philippine police and military, and increased its efforts to achieve a whole-of-society approach to security in the Philippines.¹⁸⁴ JSOTF-P's success was facilitated

significantly by this high level of interagency coordination through increasingly close coordination with the U.S. embassy country team over time.¹⁸⁵

SOF advice and assistance efforts in the Philippines have resulted in a substantially more capable partner nation security force and a significant reduction in the threat posed by ASG and other terrorist organizations.¹⁸⁶ The OEF-P experience also demonstrates that SOF advisors are sufficiently adaptable and flexible to provide high-impact advice and assistance at the tactical level, operational level, and strategic level of interaction.¹⁸⁷

SOF Advisors in Colombia: Building a Sustainable Capability and Regional Partner

In Colombia, SOF advisors contributed to a sustained U.S. interagency effort to enhance the government of Colombia's ability to push back against drug traffickers and other associated security challenges within its borders. Starting in early 2003, the United States provided Planning Assistance Training Teams (PATT) to division and brigade-level Colombian forces.

The initial PATT was constructed to assist with operational planning, leveraging the expertise of SOF operations, intelligence, logistics, and civil affairs personnel.¹⁸⁸ However, the SOF advisory mission in Colombia reached its broadest impact—including training operational-level Colombian SOF, conventional, and police forces—in 2004. SFA activities included support to aviation operations, riverine operations, operational planning, intelligence fusion, command and control, logistics, security, and medical training.¹⁸⁹

The PATT program continued to grow along with the SOF advisory mission, and in early 2005 was comprised of 40 SOF and other U.S. military personnel, with a planned increase to 59 military personnel to extend their support to Colombian regional joint commands as well. By 2006, the PATTs were also working with the Colombian Army operations staff in Bogota, and the regional TSOC—Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH)—established a forward command element at the U.S. embassy also located in Bogota. Adding this senior SOF representative to the U.S. embassy gave the growing number of typically junior, rotational, SOF personnel in Colombia a stronger voice within the embassy to advocate on their behalf with the other senior Defense Attaché Office and Security Cooperation Office leaders onsite. It also helped build trust, transparency, and understanding among SOF personnel, the U.S. country team, and the Colombians far more

effectively than what SOCSOUTH could achieve from its headquarters in the United States.¹⁹⁰

SOF advisors also facilitated the development of multiple Colombian SOF operational centers and commands. SOF personnel provided training to elements of a Colombian Army Special Operations Command and a Colombian Joint Special Operations Command that included Colombian SOF, air force special operations units, and naval special operations units. In 2008, Colombia's Defense Ministry requested U.S. assistance with the design and implementation of a new service-level SOF command, and SOCSOUTH representatives led working groups with Colombian General Staff personnel to help establish this new joint special operations headquarters as well.¹⁹¹

Throughout this period, SOF advisors continued to train, mentor, and develop relationships with partner forces to substantially increase Colombian security forces' abilities to confront internal threats to Colombia's

Moreover, SOF' persistent and broad engagement in Colombia enabled the U.S. to impact Colombia's military training and education institutions significantly.

security.¹⁹² The long-term engagement of U.S. SOF advisors helped to develop a self-sufficient Colombian SOF that ultimately achieved strategic impact beyond its national borders in Latin and Central America through its training of units from other countries.¹⁹³ Moreover, SOF' persistent and broad engagement in Colombia enabled the U.S. to impact Colombia's military training and education institutions significantly.¹⁹⁴ Perhaps the biggest impact that SOF advisors had on Colombia was what one Colombian general termed a "transfer of culture."

A vice-minister in the government of Colombia described this culture more specifically as "a rigor of training, focus, organization" that also brought a "decisiveness," that helped Colombians "make decisions" and "speeded up what may have been a much slower process."¹⁹⁵

Chapter 8. Critiques of SOF Advisors Working at the High-Operational and Strategic/Ministerial Levels

Based on the historical examples above, SOF have demonstrated the ability to work at the high- operational and strategic levels to attain long-term partnering and security successes with FSF and supporting government ministries. There are, however, several critiques to expanding SOF interaction at the high-operational and strategic/ministerial levels. First, SOF often lack substantial expertise in the finance, logistics, and personnel fields that are critical to the development of government ministries and institutions, and are traditionally the strong suit of MODA program advisors. One example of this concern can be found in assessments of SOF advisory operations in Afghanistan.

In May 2002, U.S. Army special forces arrived in Afghanistan for the task of training the Afghan National Army (ANA). However, by October 2002, it was clear to Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry—who at the time was a Major General serving as the Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan and charged with building the ANA—that the development of a full national army was going to “exceed what U.S. Special Forces were able to do.” One of the main challenges that he was concerned about SOF being able to adequately address involved “the complexities of sustaining institutions” and “function systems” that “link that operational unit to their higher headquarters or the functional command.” In his analysis, these included a wide array of requirements such as “requirements for developing Afghan resupply” and “requirements that Afghan soldiers get paid on a regular basis” plus a requirements for a promotion system that would “communicate to the General Staff when we have an ace Afghan National Army battalion commander.” Ultimately, Lieutenant General Eikenberry decided that although SOF advisors could possibly fill these tasks, they still were at the limits of SOF advisors’ core capabilities. Lieutenant General Eikenberry instead chose to employ separate, non-SOF, Embedded Training Teams to help the ANA get their “administration and logistics” and other “non-combat systems up and running.”¹⁹⁶

Although Lieutenant General Eikenberry's observation that the functional skills of supply, financial, and personnel management are outside the core capabilities of SOF advisors is largely accurate, the accomplishments of the initial special forces teams in these non-core competencies are illuminating. According to Colonel Mark Milley, commander of the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division brigade that took over the broader ANA training mission from U.S. Army special forces in May 2003, the SOF advisors "got an army off the ground, so to speak, in everything from ranks and photographs and registration and identification cards to some basic training level stuff in individual skills and some collective skills at the squad and platoon levels and some basic command and control. They did a lot of good."¹⁹⁷ Clearly, the initial SOF advisors in Afghanistan were able to stretch to perform several non-core, functional skills that were required for a task as broad as the development of the ANA.

Moreover, the opportunities for SOF personnel to develop these skills are increasing as a result of USSOCOM requirements for staff with logistical, financial, and personnel expertise. The TSOCs have similar, if somewhat slimmer, requirements for these skills as well. Plus an advisor's strength in a particular field does not mean that they will automatically be called upon to leverage that specific area of expertise in their assigned duties.

Even MODA program advisors have been tasked to fill unexpected roles and responsibilities based on emergent needs once they arrived in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁸ Ultimately, DOD civilians comprise roughly 70 percent of the MODA advisors and another 20 percent come from outside the government, typically in cases where expertise traditionally does not reside within DOD (but even these outside advisors often have prior military or government experience).¹⁹⁹ Regardless, SOF advisors excel at the soft skills and personality traits that are so critical to the successful match of advisor and counterpart, and those skills have enabled them to be effective even without substantial prior experience with the functions of the assigned government ministry.²⁰⁰

A second critique is that SOF lack experience in the division-, corps-, and ministry-level activities that are essential to engagement at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels.

Returning to the Afghanistan example, Lieutenant General Eikenberry also thought of this challenge, where he considered SOF to be "extraordinary" at the performance of the FID mission and training FSF by "partnering with indigenous forces and working with them in very small numbers and

providing advice.” At the same time, he was somewhat less certain of SOF advisors’ skills developing “brigade echelons within the Afghan National Army and starting the corps echelon” and a “functioning General Staff.”²⁰¹ Similarly, Colonel Milley remarked that SOF advisors “have limited capability to train beyond small unit tactics,” but “when it comes to things like larger scale command and control, battalion operations and brigade operations” as well as “the tactics of combined arms operations at battalion and above” it takes “conventional guys that have that kind of experience” to conduct training effectively.²⁰²

The achievements of SOF advisors in Iraq offer a ready counterpoint to this critique. As described earlier, the Iraqi security force that performed the best when confronted by ISIS starting in 2014 was the CTS composed of three ISOF brigades trained by SOF advisors. While they may not have spent much time training in larger scale command and control and combined arms operations, the ISOF brigades have demonstrated the ability to learn those skills quickly while spearheading the government of Iraq’s advances to reclaim territory lost to ISIS. SOF are also gaining additional opportunities for high-operational/low-strategic experience through staff tours at TSOs, SOCOM, and other CCMDs. There are also more opportunities for SOF to gain experience in ministerial-level activities through an increasing number of SOST billets in DOD and other interagency organizations in Washington, D.C. Thus, although SOF may not have a robust amount of personnel with experience working with larger military formations and ministries, their capabilities to develop larger units effectively are proven and the depth of SOF’ experience in these organizations is increasing quickly.

A third critique of assigning SOF advisors to the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels is the limited availability of SOF for these requirements relative to other higher priority tasking and the sheer size of the FSF and supporting ministries to be engaged. In Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Eikenberry questioned whether “there were enough Special Forces available” to train a force the size of the ANA. However, he also wondered if it was wise to shift the tasking of “a highly professional well trained operative that is out there, that should be out there fighting with the Afghan National Army” given that “the Afghans along with our Special Forces have always been the deadliest combination from a Taliban perspective.”²⁰³ Counterterrorism activities and other DA tasking are additional requirements that

may also draw away from the pool of SOF available for advising at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels.

The SOCOM vision for an expansion of SOLO and TSOC billets, however, suggests that there will be a number of SOF personnel set aside to focus specifically on building relationships with partner nation forces worldwide. Concentrating on increasing the capabilities of the SOF personnel assigned to these billets to address high-operational/strategic and ministerial-level concerns before any broader expansion of applicable training throughout SOF would limit any potential impact on SOF units assigned to other higher-priority missions. Occasionally, high-operational/strategic and ministerial level requirements may even converge with typically higher priority activities, such as in the case of Iraq where SOF advisors were tasked with developing Iraqi forces that could fight counterterrorism with, and ultimately without, U.S. SOF. If, under the prevailing circumstances, the availability of SOF advisors would not match the size of the partner nation security force or supporting ministry to be engaged, then a model similar to the one applied in Afghanistan can be followed, where CF were assigned to augment and extend the capacity of the core SOF advisors assigned the FID mission. Consistent with the SOF vision, however, there should be far more BPC require-

While having military personnel clearly operating at the ministerial level may potentially reduce the clarity of U.S. messaging regarding the need for civilian control of the military, having military advisors work side-by-side with civilians in teams operating at the ministerial level can also be one of the most effective demonstrations of civilian control of the military.

ments that resemble recent engagements in the Philippines and Colombia than the larger-scale engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A final main critique to the expansion of SOF advisory activities to include the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels is that the use of military advisors at the ministerial level in particular, can undermine the United States' long-term advocacy for civilian control of the military. While having military personnel clearly operating at the ministerial level may potentially reduce the clarity of U.S. messaging regarding the need for civilian

control of the military, having military advisors work side-by-side with civilians in teams operating at the ministerial level can also be one of the most effective demonstrations of civilian control of the military. As asserted

by two scholars who have researched the impact of the MODA program in Afghanistan:

Despite the potential for problems and misunderstandings, it is worthwhile for military personnel and civilians to work together on advisory teams. Military personnel provide instant credibility to the host nation's military and police forces, and civilians are visible reminders of the importance of civilian control over the armed forces. American civilians must remember that this may be a challenging concept and perhaps even a paradigm shift for the host nation.²⁰⁴

The addition of military advisors at the ministerial level can also yield other benefits. Military advisors can often facilitate civilian advisor interaction with defense ministries. In Afghanistan, having military advisors in multiple ministries “facilitated access to the Afghan Ministry of Defense” since civilian advisors needed to be introduced by U.S. military personnel “in order to be taken seriously by MoD officials.”²⁰⁵ In some cases, the security situation may also demand that military advisors take the lead at all levels. Once again in Afghanistan, the initial security challenges led to the need for advising efforts to focus on military assistance at all levels—a role closer to SOF core competencies.²⁰⁶ In addition, sometimes only SOF can provide U.S. ambassadors with the options they need to be optimally effective. As Brigadier General Rogers of JFSOCC-Iraq remarked in 2012, as SOF units largely withdrew from Iraq, the key enabler would become the remaining SOF staff officers who “can help shape the diplomatic environment” and “provide the ambassador with options that empower diplomacy and are not restricted to a small glass case with instructions ‘break in case of emergency.’”²⁰⁷

With the effectiveness of SOF advisors operating at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels established, and the primary critiques addressed, the next question to address is what the additional training requirements for SOF advisors would be in this novel field. U.S. efforts to develop capacities at these levels in Afghanistan and Iraq has resulted in several approaches and proposals to this challenge that will be considered in the next section.

Chapter 9. Training SOF for High-Operational/Strategic and Ministerial Level Advisory Tasks

Before venturing into what the requirements would be to train SOF advisors to operate effectively at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels, it may be worthwhile to consider current SOF, and other military training specifically designed for assignments in locations such as Afghanistan. SOJTF-Bragg (SOJTF-B), based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, provides one- to two-week training options for officers who will be assigned to SOAGs. The training includes “leader professional development discussions,” rehearsal of concept drills, and language classes.²⁰⁸ SOJTF-B also hosts a monthly five-day orientation on the NATO/SOJTF-A mission and force structure including one day of training on local culture, history, customs, and religion. This course is also available in a one- to two-day training event.²⁰⁹

The U.S. Army recently established a six-week Military Advisor Training Academy course at Fort Benning, Georgia, that the new Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs) will attend starting in October 2017. The course curriculum is currently under development, but overall SFAB advisor training will include culture training, embassy training, foreign weapons training, and up to sixteen weeks of language training. Advanced medical training, advanced driver training, and survival, evasion, resistance and escape training are also anticipated to be part of an extensive SFAB training pipeline.²¹⁰

The U.S. Air Force offers training for personnel who will be assigned as advisors to FSF as well. The Advanced Level of Air Advising Education and Training includes “additional air advisor skills, language, regional expertise, culture, planning, assessment, and force protection/fieldcraft skills.” This training is designed to prepare U.S. Air Force advisors to “develop a partner nation’s aviation enterprise and conduct more complex tasks, with a larger scope, on a more frequent basis, or for long duration.”²¹¹ Requirements for SOF-related air advisor roles are a step above the Advanced Level of Air Advising Education and Training in most topics, adding additional competencies in the areas of cross-cultural communications, advisor-specific

skills, negotiations/mediation, conflict resolution, Key Leader Engagement, and communicating with FSF in their native language and with interpreters.²¹²

The U.S. Marine Corps has developed and maintained substantial training opportunities for its personnel engaging in advisory and other security cooperation duties in Afghanistan and other locations worldwide. When advisory requirements in Afghanistan were rising, the Marine Corps established an Advisor Training Group (ATG) in 2007 at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center in Twenty-nine Palms, California, to provide a 25-day training course to Marines en route to billets with Security Force Assistance Advisor Teams in Afghanistan.²¹³ The training provided included “billet-specific skills, mitigating insider threat training, rehearsal of common advisor situations, and additional language and culture training.”²¹⁴ The capstone of the ATG training program was a “mission rehearsal exercise” that was conducted on “a training facility constructed to resemble Afghan districts,” with “more than 250 Afghan-American role players, fluent in Afghan languages and culture” and subject matter experts observing the participants’ performance and providing feedback.”²¹⁵ The Marine Corps eventually disestablished this capability in June 2014,²¹⁶ and centralized all of its advisory training efforts under the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) at Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Virginia.²¹⁷

MCSCG was established in 2011 from the consolidation of Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group and the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Education Training Center.²¹⁸ Originally founded to cover the wide range of Marine Corps advisor assignments beyond Afghanistan, MCSCG offers courses spanning from the three-day Basic Engagement Skills Course to the four-week Marine Corps Advisor Course.²¹⁹

The Basic Engagement Skills Course is designed to provide participants with the basic knowledge and fundamental engagement skills required to perform security cooperation activities effectively with FSF. Participants learn how to build relationships and rapport with counterparts, read nonverbal communication, identify and reduce cultural stress, and work with interpreters. Specific topics covered during instruction include: an introduction to security cooperation, recognizing culture shock, non-verbal communication, establishing cross-culture relationships; employing interpreters, and foreign disclosure.²²⁰

Similar to the Basic Engagement Skills Course, the ten-day Security Cooperation Trainer Course covers fundamental advisor skills, training management, and foreign weapons training. However, the focus of the training shifts from merely engaging effectively with FSF while performing a security cooperation

activity, to providing participants with the essential skills to instruct and mentor a FSF to achieve higher levels of organizational capability and capacity. Participants learn “to analyze and apply operational culture to their mission, build and maintain relationships and rapport with FSF counterparts, recognize and mitigate cultural stress, develop and implement training plans.”²²¹

The Marine Corps Advisor Course covers advisor skills, security cooperation planning and execution, training management, force protection, and weapons skills. Key topics covered during advisor skills instruction include: “recognizing culture shock; non-verbal communication; establishing cross-culture relationships; employing interpreters; and negotiating differences.” The security cooperation planning segment of the course covers, foreign disclosure, security cooperation planning, functional-based advising, and designing a training plan.²²² Additional topics that have also been covered in recent course offerings include: language training, operational culture, building relationships and rapport, cross-cultural communication, social perspectives, instructional methods, developing a security cooperation letter of instruction, legal considerations in security cooperation, and interacting with media.²²³ Consistent with the lessons learned at ATG, each class involves practical application exercises, and advisor training activities end with both a written examination and a live performance examination with role players.²²⁴

Overall, existing training focused on preparing military personnel to serve as advisors with FSF share a consistent focus on providing participants with regional security and cultural expertise. In preparations for the FID mission discussed earlier, SOF personnel receive language, weapons, and advisor skills instruction. However, one scholar who has reviewed best practices for SOF advisors based on the Afghanistan experience suggests there are useful insights to be gleaned from the MODA program training for civilian ministerial advisors, regardless of the proposed level of SOF advisory engagement, such as a focus on the latest “coaching, mentoring, and influence techniques” and leveraging reach-back video-teleconference capabilities to foster advisor networks and continuous training with subject matter experts worldwide, while in-theater.²²⁵ A closer look at the MODA training program may yield additional topics and activities that can help enable SOF advisors to perform most effectively at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of a host nation.

Chapter 10. The Ministry of Defense Advisors (MODA) Training Program

In a 2015 report titled “Advising the Command: Best Practices from the Special Operations Advisory Experience in Afghanistan,” RAND researcher Todd Helmus describes the MODA training program and highlights differences between its offerings and the training covered by SOJTF-B for SOF advisors headed to Afghanistan to serve in SOAGs. MODA provides 7 weeks of training to its civilian ministerial advisors, with 5 weeks dedicated to advisor training, and 2 weeks of security training plus training on battlefield medicine and program administration. The advisor training includes language, culture, and country familiarization, with a concentration on advising and mentoring skills, plus a simulation of ministerial advisor activities in Afghanistan. Helmus offers that in addition to providing more “specific training for the advisor mission,” discussed earlier, SOJTF-B training for SOF advisors “should also make ample use of role-playing exercises for both cultural competency and advising to help ingrain classroom lessons learned.” Finally, he proposes that training on host nation governing institutions, command and control, and logistics are also important for SOF advisor success.²²⁶

The advisor training includes language, culture, and country familiarization, with a concentration on advising and mentoring skills, plus a simulation of ministerial advisor activities in Afghanistan.

MODA introductory slides from 2010 summarize the training topics covered as including “Culture; Country Familiarization; Language; History; counterinsurgency; Nation Building Concepts; Personal Security; Capstone Exercise; Weapons; First Aid; Admin and physical aspects.”²²⁷ However, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James Schear, the commander of the NTM-A (Lieutenant General William Caldwell IV), and the DOD’s Acting Director of Readiness and Training Policy and Programs for Personnel and Readiness Frank DiGiovanni offered additional insights into the MODA program in a 2011 article in the journal *PRISM*. They described the seven weeks of MODA training as “extensive, experiential training in culture, language, and advisory skills, as well as adaptability, resiliency, and personal

safety training.” This training also included assessments of participants’ “innovation and crucial thinking skills” plus training on “complex decision-making” and “risk communication.” The five weeks of advisor skills training were conducted in a classroom environment with the assistance of U.S. and Afghan officials, regional experts, and instructors from the USIP. This training was followed by a ten-day field exercise with Afghan role players and interpreters, including personal security and situational awareness courses at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center at Camp Atterbury in Indiana.²²⁸

In a 2012 evaluation of the MODA program by USIP, Victoria Stattel and Robert Perito offer additional details of the MODA training program. Course topics included not only advisor training, cultural awareness, country familiarization, and language instruction, but also how to conduct effective executive consultations and briefings. In addition to USIP instructors, National Defense University experts also provided instruction on culture, capacity building, mediation, negotiation, and gender roles. Another significant detail noted in this evaluation is that the Afghan role-players at Muscatatuck Urban Center also simulated the operations of an Afghan ministry.²²⁹

USIP scholars published two additional documents in 2012 that discussed the MODA training program. The first release was an article in *PRISM* titled “Lessons from MODA: Continuing the Conversation on How to Advise Institution-Building” in which USIP expert Nadia Gerspacher and research assistant Adrian Shtuni describe the training topics covered as including “traditions, history, and political dynamics of the country.” More specifically, Gerspacher and Shtuni outline the MODA training program as involving “professional advisor training; cultural awareness instruction, country familiarization, language instruction, senior-level consultations and briefings, and an evaluated Capstone Exercise.” They also note that learning “how to work effectively with interpreters” is an essential skill covered in training. However, they highlight that MODA advisors are provided “in-depth instruction on both the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior,” and the knowledge and skills “to be adaptable, responsible, and informed decision makers.”²³⁰

In a special report released later that same year, “Preparing Advisers for Capacity-Building Missions,” Gerspacher furnishes a helpful synopsis of the principles and tools that the MODA training program attempts to convey to its participants through the many classes and interactions described above. The four principles for ministerial advisors, which align with USIP

recommendations in this field include: “supporting local ownership; designing for sustainability; doing no harm; and demonstrating respect, humility, and empathy.” MODA training seeks to provide its civilian advisors with: coping mechanisms for working in “fragile, uncertain and highly stressful environments;” skills to “work with local counterparts to build enhanced systems;” and vital country-specific background information including “culture and norms, demographics, legal framework, governance structure, and history.”²³¹

Chapter 11. Subject Matter Expert Observations on Ministerial Training Requirements Beyond MODA

In Gerspacher's two publications for USIP discussed above, the MODA training program is central to the ministerial training discussion, but the recommendations that she offers on this topic are not bound to the MODA curriculum exclusively. In "Lessons from MODA," Gerspacher expounds on how language training for ministerial advisors should be conducted, noting that mastering "commonly used key phrases and administrative terms" is important, but driving toward fluency in pre-deployment training is "an unattainable goal in most instances." Instead, she suggests that "the focus should be on teaching language and cultural norms together" in pre-deployment training, with language being viewed as a "rapport-building tool." She recommends that language training continue "during deployment as a way to increase effectiveness."²³² Gerspacher also observes that ministerial advisors "find themselves interacting and coordinating with many international actors and agencies every day" and suggests that "advisors learn more about the resources that each component of the coalition brings to the table" as part of their pre-deployment training in order to improve "unity of effort" and "coordination" once deployed.²³³ In addition, Gerspacher proposes that training for ministerial advisors should concentrate more on "how to interact with skeptical ministry officials" than the "local mullahs and village elders" who are the focus of more widespread foreign advisor training.²³⁴

Gerspacher also provides a useful framework for the instruction of ministerial advisors in "Preparing Advisers for Capacity-Building Missions." First, she notes several skills required to be an effective advisor, including relationship-building techniques, cross-cultural communication, and cultural awareness and adaptability. Gerspacher then lists additional knowledge requirements in more specific detail. These topics include the foreign policy-making process in "both the donor country and the host country;" dealing with multiple bosses and objectives; working with interpreters; providing expertise to people from other countries/cultures; recognizing corruption; mediation and negotiation; and assessing and building capacity.²³⁵ Next,

Gerspacher outlines several topics to be covered regarding the country-specific situation, including history, culture, politics, and economics; organizational structure and key personnel in the advisor's assigned ministry; ability of the ministry to deliver services to the public; existing plans to develop the ministry; structure of the multinational command and any other engaged parties; and locals' perceptions of international personnel.²³⁶ The third category that she highlights in her ministerial training framework is substantive knowledge of the sector that the advisor will be assigned to, such as an understanding of the applicable host nation "processes and desired end states." Finally, Gerspacher details the key elements to be practiced during supporting role-playing exercises, including building relationships with international actors, local counterparts, and stakeholders; adapting to the local cultural environment; active listening and other cross-cultural communication skills; meetings; and identifying, presenting, and providing support to the implementation of solutions.²³⁷

International non-governmental organizations have provided recommendations for ministerial advisors as well. In the security sector field, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces has published an "operational guidance note" that includes an overview of the characteristics of a successful advisor. Several of these characteristics are skills that can be learned or enhanced through training, such as: "ambassadorial/diplomatic skills;" "vision and strategic planning skills;" "inter-personal and communications skills;" "linguistic skills;" and "technical knowledge." In addition, the operational guidance note highlights that successful advisors must be "an able negotiator and teacher/mentor," and have an "extensive knowledge and experience across the fields of politics, diplomacy, development, and security."²³⁸

Several perspectives on improving military advisor training have been added by organizations connected to the U.S. military. The U.S. Army's SSI and PKSOI published the first PKSOI paper in 2008 titled "The American Military Advisor: Dealing with Senior Foreign Officials in the Islamic World." In this paper, a retired U.S. State Department foreign service officer proposes several topics to prepare advisors for their assignments overseas, including history and circumstances of the country; local governing structures; fundamental documents of the host nation covering government, constitution, and treaties; language basics; local culture and etiquette; applicable U.S. command structure; and U.S. and international policy in the region.²³⁹

More recently, one analyst with the Center for Naval Analyses highlighted the types of skills advisors require to be effective in a 2014 article in the *Marine*

Corps Gazette, titled “Military Advising After Afghanistan.” Describing hard skills requirements as the military proficiencies and substantive expertise that advisors will need in their assignment, and soft skills requirements as the understanding of “language and the cultural, social, and historical environment in which advisors work,” Melissa McAdam asserts that a separate category of “interpersonal skills” that “enable effective communication” and “facilitate confidence-building” have received far less attention from military trainers.²⁴⁰ She contends that advisors need to practice not just everyday conversation but also complex communication through interpreters. In addition, McAdam proposes that military advisors need to learn how to adjust teaching methods to match how local populaces learn, and suggests that training packages from the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences can be particularly helpful in preparing advisors to “communicate and teach” effectively in the cultural setting of their assigned host country.²⁴¹

A 2010 report from the U.S. Army Research Institute highlighted by McAdam furnishes greater detail on the competencies and themes required to train personnel to be effective teachers in a cross-cultural environment. The report’s authors state that personnel who will train in these circumstances must gain proficiency in both “intercultural competencies related to teaching and learning” and “effective cross-cultural teaching strategies.”²⁴² Unsurprisingly, these scholars also note that necessary basic cross-cultural competencies include language skills, and a fundamental understanding of host nation culture. However, they also extend this set of requisite understandings to include cultural differences, including frequent issues such as “relationship to time, relationship versus task orientation, relationship to authority, face saving behavior, and cultural differences in communication patterns.”²⁴³ In addition, the authors provide five key themes for training effective teachers and trainers in a cross-cultural environment: “1) understanding the influence of culture on teaching and learning, 2) development of the teaching/advising relationship, 3) motivating learners in a cross-cultural environment, 4) effective cross-cultural communication skills, and 5) methods for cross-cultural teaching and training.”²⁴⁴

Unsurprisingly, these scholars also note that necessary basic cross-cultural competencies include language skills, and a fundamental understanding of host nation culture.

Chapter 12. Synthesizing Potential Solutions for the Training of SOF Advisors

The SOF, Service, MODA, and expert perspectives offered above on training advisors to FSF and associated ministries span a wide spectrum of training options that would be challenging to pursue collectively. A 2015 publication written by a security sector reform professor at the U.S. Army organization that provided one of the first publications on this topic since the end of the Cold War—PKSOI—offers a program of instruction that would be closest to the MODA training model. In his paper titled, “Professionalizing Ministerial Advising,” Raymond Millen recommends “a basic advisory course, advanced degree completion, and a pre-deployment training course” for ministerial advisors, which at initial glance might appear to be a challenge for most SOF advisors to fit into their training plans.²⁴⁵ However, the details of the training that he proposes offer a serviceable framework for the construction of a program of instruction for SOF advisors operating at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels. For example, Millen suggests that a basic advisory course for ministerial advisors could be completed in roughly six weeks and cover “structure and missions” of engaged U.S. agencies; applicable CCMDs; U.S. politics, culture, and history; corruption versus patronage and nepotism; the Law of War; ethical dilemma scenarios; assessment and measurement processes; strategic thinking and systems approaches; and deliberate decision making processes.²⁴⁶

In addition, Millen recommends that ministerial advisors receive a reference “Advisor’s Toolkit” consisting of “practical suggestions and information for study” covering matters of personal security and advisor skills. Personal security topics include “Stress Resilience, Predictive Threat Profiling, and Personal Security and Observation Skills.”²⁴⁷ Advisor skills topics involve “The Role of the Advisor, The Art of Asking Questions, Metacognition and the Reflective Practitioner, Institution Building Tools, Cross-Cultural Adaptability, Working with Interpreters, Mediation and Negotiation, Principles of Good Governance and Comparative Government, Risk Communication, Engaging Your Counterpart, and Measuring Progress.”²⁴⁸

Millen also describes the essential components of a pre-deployment training course that would be based on the MODA training program as well. First,

there would be classes on host nation language, culture, history, political structures, military and police structures, national security council, and rule of law. Similar to the MODA training program, regional experts and guest lecturers from the host nation would be invited to present these classes, including topics such as “history and geopolitics, recent regimes, religion, politics and governance, business etiquette, security forces, and governing institutions.” Second, there would be a broad review of U.S. and host nation “missions, policies, and programs,” potentially led by U.S. State Department or Afghan officials, former U.S. ambassadors, retired military officers, and prominent academics. Specific topics in this segment of the course would include: “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program, Rule of Law, Police Reform, Defense Reform, Challenges of Transition (if applicable), Insurgency and Counterinsurgency (if applicable), Engaging Women in Reform, country team (or combatant command) assessments and plans.” Finally, there would be an immersive advisory exercise, and potentially a video-teleconference for participants with the applicable U.S. embassy country teams.²⁴⁹ Collectively, the topics and interactions outlined by Millen for a basic advisory course, a pre-deployment course, and an advisor’s toolkit provide a robust initial framework for the core training element for SOF advisors designated to operate at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of FSF and their associated government ministries.

With an initial advisory curriculum identified, the next challenge is identifying the best method to deliver that training program to SOF advisors. A 2012 Joint Staff J7 study by the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis Division, titled “Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations,” recommends that the United States “re-establish a Military Assistance and Training Advisory (MATA) course to promote effective partnering and advising.” This proposal would restart the MATA course that was initially developed in response to Vietnam-era advisory requirements, but would “capitalize on recent lessons and Special Forces expertise with regard to FID and SFA operations.”²⁵⁰

Based at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg during the Vietnam War, the MATA course started in February 1962 as a four-week course featuring 136 hours of classes on “area studies, counterinsurgency, weapons, communications, and demolitions.” By April 1962, the course expanded to six weeks consisting of 217 hours of classes including “25 hours of area study, 46 hours Vietnamese language, 57 hours counterinsurgency operations, 8

Table 3. Initial Ministerial Advisor Curriculum (Based on Millen, “Professionalizing Military Advising”)²⁵¹

Basic Advisory Course	Advisors Toolkit	Pre-Deployment Course
Structure and Missions of Engaged U.S. Agencies	Stress Resilience	Host Nation language, culture, history, political structures, military and police structures, national security council, and rule of law
Applicable Combatant Commands	Predictable Threat Profiling	Recent regimes, politics and governance, security forces, and governing institutions
U.S. Politics, Culture, and History	Personal Security and Observation Skills	Host Nation Geopolitics
Corruption vs. Patronage and Nepotism		Host Nation Religion
The Law of War	The Role of the Advisor	Business Etiquette
Ethical Dilemma Scenarios	The Art of Asking Questions	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program
Assessment and Measurement Processes	Metacognition and the Reflective Practitioner	Rule of Law
Strategic Thinking and Systems Approaches	Institution Building Tools	Police Reform
Deliberate Decision Making Processes	Cross-Cultural Adaptability	Defense Reform
	Working with Interpreters	Challenges of Transition (if applicable)
	Mediation and Negotiation	Insurgency and Counterinsurgency (if applicable)
	Principles of Good Governance and Comparative Government	Engaging Women in Reform
	Risk Communication	Country Team (or Combatant Command) Assessments and Plans
	Engaging Your Counterpart	Immersive Advisory Exercise
	Measuring Progress	Video-Teleconference with Applicable U.S. Embassy Country Teams

hours communications, 12 hours weapons, 8 hours demolitions, 22 hours physical conditioning, and 39 hours general subjects such as land navigation, first aid, and night operations.” The MATA course for Vietnam continued to evolve and language training eventually occupied half of the hours allotted for the course, with the overall focus of the course shifting to familiarizing participants with language and culture and providing a more general

overview of “advisor duties, responsibilities, and techniques.” A twelve-week military assistance security advisor course highlighted by 8 weeks of language training was also added for military intelligence officer advisors.²⁵²

Although a six-week, largely classroom-based course at Fort Bragg would be similar to the format for MODA training, there may be more efficient and more flexible methods to deliver the training curriculum to SOF advisors. Leveraging existing online training for the MODA program may offer an opportunity to shorten the requirement for classroom training at a location such as Fort Bragg. Furthermore, since SOJTF-B training infrastructure has already been established at Fort Bragg, it may be possible to modify the existing training offerings there for military advisors instead of standing up a stand-alone course for advisors along the lines of the MATA course.

USIP’s Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacekeeping has worked with DOD experts to develop an online certificate course for MODA participants. The course is constructed around five main learning objectives. The first objective is understanding “the role of the advisor and how to engage” counterparts. Second, is appreciating “how advising is interrelated with cultural awareness, ongoing reform efforts, and long-term stabilization strategies.” Next comes learning “how to apply good conflict analysis and coordination strategies to ministerial advising work.” This is followed by analyzing the “personal conflict style” of both the advisor and the people the advisor works with. The final learning objective is “gaining familiarity with a diverse set of negotiation, mediation, and anti-corruption tools.”²⁵³ The course is divided into ten sessions that provide training podcasts, written transcripts, and other resources that participants can access covering the following topics: “Role of the Advisor; Negotiation and Mediation: Tools and Approaches; Cultural Adaptability in Complex Environments; Coordination Strategies; Personal Skills in Resolving Conflict; Working with Interpreters; The Process of Conflict Analysis; Perspectives on Reform; Reconstruction and Stabilization Strategies; Corruption and Anti-Corruption Strategies.” This USIP online training covers many of the same topics that Millen suggests above for advisor training.

Country-specific pre-deployment training, however, would most likely need to be addressed primarily onsite in a classroom plus a simulation space if available. Many of the existing SOJTF-B training offerings could be built upon to address the identified advisor training requirements. Once the SOF advisor’s destination is known, additional information on the advisor’s

counterpart and the counterpart's organization can be briefed. The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences can provide insights regarding the cultural landscape and various items that could impact the effectiveness of SOF advisor engagement and instruction activities. Subject matter experts from the U.S. State Department, DOD, and academia can be invited to provide insights on the applicable country and its culture. Language skills can be sharpened both onsite at Fort Bragg and online.

Perhaps the greatest value addition to the SOJTF-B course offerings would come from expanding their capacity for practical exercises that provide SOF advisors with the opportunity to practice their skills working with interpreters and interacting with mock FSF leaders at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels.²⁵⁴ Some SOF units have prepared for mentoring FSF previously by training CF personnel serving as a mock partner force. Finding suitable mock personnel to fill high-operational/strategic and ministerial roles effectively would most likely require bringing subject matter experts or other credible actors to Fort Bragg to augment SOJTF-B or having SOF advisors run through an immersive advisory exercise at MCSCG at Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Virginia, or preferably the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center at Camp Atterbury that the MODA program uses.

Chapter 13. Conclusions, Observations, and Implications

This study sought to answer two primary research questions. First, is advising foreign militaries at the strategic and ministerial levels an appropriate task for U.S. SOF to perform on a regular basis? Broadening the baseline scope of SOF advisors to include both the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of a partner nation's defense establishment appears to be an appropriate evolutionary step in SOF tasking. This conclusion is based on DOD and SOCOM strategies, statements, and speeches; the substantial fit between existing SOF advisory skills and the skills required of effective advisors at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels; and the demonstrated aptitude of SOF advisors at the tactical, operational, and high-operational/strategic levels.

National security strategic documents and DOD leadership speeches have established the significance of partnering and BPC for U.S. national security plans. SFA activities including BPA, FID, and other related initiatives from the tactical level through the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels can enable partner nations to attain and maintain substantial transformations of their security sectors, including their security forces. The equipment and training that the United States often provides to FSF through security assistance frequently yield more lasting improvements in capability when the institutional and governance frameworks necessary to sustain them are augmented as well.

The expansion of the MODA program to address ministerial challenges in Afghanistan and several other countries and regions worldwide has been a challenge given its reliance on identifying civilian U.S. government—and sometimes private sector—personnel to advise partner nation counterparts. USSOCOM's SOLO program has also encountered challenges in providing SOF representatives who can advise at the

The equipment and training that the United States often provides to FSF through security assistance frequently yield more lasting improvements in capability when the institutional and governance frameworks necessary to sustain them are augmented as well.

high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of partner nation security sectors. Adding more routine training for SOF advisors to operate effectively at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels may help address this shortfall in a field that is critical to the sustainment of U.S., and primarily SOF, efforts to BPC.

SOF selection processes already screen for many of the skills and personal traits highlighted as favorable for effective ministerial advisors. The essential difference is the area of expertise—a combat proficiency focus at the tactical and operational levels in contrast to a focus on organization, administration, and logistics at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels. If SOF advisors can bridge that technical expertise gap, then this analysis suggests that they can be effective advisors in the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of FSF, as demonstrated in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, and Colombia.

Despite these successes there are several arguments against this proposed expansion of SOF advisor duties, but many of these critiques can be readily addressed. For example, bureaucratic and technical expertise in fields such as supply, financial, and personnel management that are particularly applicable for high-operational/strategic and ministerial advisors may indeed lie outside the core competencies of SOF, but these skills are spreading in the SOF community as a result of increased assignments to strategy, policy, and logistics roles at USSOCOM and other CCMD organizations.

A second critique is that SOF generally lack the experience in the division, corps, and ministry-level activities that is often required to be a successful advisor at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels. More SOF personnel are becoming familiar with these activities, however, through staff tours at USSOCOM and TSOCs, SOLO billets at other CCMDs, SOF liaison billets in DOD and SOST billets in other ministerial-level U.S. organizations. Another criticism of expanding the scope of SOF advisors is that there are not sufficient SOF personnel to cover this additional role given other higher priority tasking and the sheer size of the FSF and supporting ministries that SOF advisors will be called upon to engage at these levels. USSOCOM's vision for an expansion of SOLO and TSOC billets engaging partner nations worldwide, however, suggests that there will be a number of SOF personnel set aside to build relationships with partner nation security forces worldwide.

Finally, some experts argue that the use of military advisors at the ministerial level may undermine the United States' long-term advocacy for civilian

control of the military. Yet having military advisors work side-by-side with civilians in teams operating at the ministerial level can also be one of the most effective demonstrations of civilian control of the military, and SOF personnel are increasingly gaining this experience through assignments to the OSD and interagency organizations that are directly led by and composed of civilians on a day-to-day basis.

The second research question for this study was what additional training would be required for SOF to advise foreign militaries at the strategic and ministerial levels? A review of existing training for military advisors and MODA advisors yields several options for upgrading SOF advisor training to add the capabilities required to operate most effectively at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels. In particular, Raymond Millen of PKSOI distills several of the relevant topics into a framework that can be applied relatively readily to the training of SOF advisors in his recent paper titled “Professionalizing Ministerial Advising.”

General topics such as “The Role of the Advisor, The Art of Asking Questions,” and “Institution Building Tools,” could be covered in a classroom setting or provided in a reference volume.²⁵⁵ Several of the more country-specific recommendations that are focused on host nation language, culture, history, geopolitics, political structures, security structures, and rule of law are essential elements of existing SOJTF-B training in classrooms and other SOF distance learning options. Leveraging regional experts, guest lecturers from the host nation, and U.S. State Department officials and former ambassadors to present this content in a classroom setting could be particularly beneficial for more focused pre-deployment training. Furthermore, increasing the opportunities for prospective SOF advisors to practice their skills working with interpreters and interacting with FSF leaders at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels in an immersive, simulated, host nation environment would be particularly helpful.²⁵⁶

Through the course of the analysis previously discussed on the appropriateness of SOF advisors expanding their role to include the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of a partner nation’s security sector on a more routine basis, another supporting rationale emerged. Time and time again, traditional SOF advisory efforts at the tactical and operational level have atrophied significantly upon the departure of SOF advisors. Often the most lasting success stories for SOF initiatives with partner nation security forces appear to have coincided with either the existence of a functioning

defense ministry or the development of greater ministerial capacity in the host country. SOF advisors' success with the CTS in Iraq was substantially linked with the development of quasi-ministerial level capacity to support the high-end capabilities that were being developed. In the Philippines, SOF advisors gradually shifted from tactical training to a focus on planning, logistics, and other high-operational/strategic skills and ministerial capacities. SOF advisors also sought to build capacity at the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels of the Colombian security forces as well, after years of recurrent tactical-level training did not yield the desired results.

Experts have identified similar outcomes in broader studies. In a 2015 RAND study, Christopher Paul highlights that "When capacity built through U.S. BPC efforts has endured rather than atrophied rapidly, an effective partner nation ministry has played a role in that outcome." Paul notes that often U.S. efforts to BPC "have focused on the operational and tactical levels first, only to determine later that the PN lacked the funding, manpower, and other resources needed to sustain the capacity built in the long term." Furthermore, while a lack of ministerial capacity could slow or derail initial U.S. efforts to BPC, "effective ministerial oversight" is particularly important in the post-engagement phase to "lay the foundation for avoiding attrition of capabilities."²⁵⁷ These considerations have often led SOF to choose not to build certain capabilities in partner nation forces to avoid sustainment issues due to a lack of ministerial capacity. However, in some cases, certain niche capabilities may be required to address a threat effectively, making building ministerial capacity a more urgent requirement. Overall, building ministerial capacity emerges as a critical skill to ensure SOF efforts at

Overall, building ministerial capacity emerges as a critical skill to ensure SOF efforts at the tactical and operational levels are able to deliver partner nation capabilities that last beyond SOF advisors' departure.

the tactical and operational levels are able to deliver partner nation capabilities that last beyond SOF advisors' departure. Otherwise, SOF advisors will likely be called upon to retrace their training steps in a most inefficient application of a relatively scarce U.S. capability.

In a February 2017 trip to USSOCOM, President Trump highlighted the DA counterterrorism role for SOF. He has not,

however, made any explicit policy proposals regarding the development and deployment of SOF advisors for partner nation capacity-building purposes.

Yet, as noted earlier, his national security team appears to support existing initiatives to train, equip, and enable partner nation security forces to fight and win local battles instead of deploying large numbers of U.S. forces to fight and win ensuing conflicts and wars.²⁵⁸

For example, Secretary of Defense General Mattis highlighted in a 2015 *Hoover Digest* article that “Friends matter in today’s globalized world—just as they have always mattered. Alliances and coalitions are high priorities when we confront today’s challenge: we need to embrace those who reject terrorism, working with allies even when they are not perfect.”²⁵⁹ More specifically, he proposed that “If a brigade of our paratroopers or a battalion landing team of our Marines could strengthen our allies at a key juncture and create havoc or humiliation for our adversaries, then we should do what is necessary with forces that exist for that very purpose.”²⁶⁰ While serving as the Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command several years earlier, Secretary of Defense General Mattis asserted that the development of more small advisory teams for irregular warfare was a “national priority,” calling advisory efforts “a growth industry” and noting that “where we need people to build relationships, that’s going to be a Special Forces kind of job.”²⁶¹

Based on these statements, one can anticipate that Secretary of Defense General Mattis will pursue this vision of an internationally engaged military that actively builds the capacity of partner nations, while continuing to rely on the unique skills of SOF advisors. It remains to be seen at what level of partner nation security forces he will ask SOF to focus their capacity-building efforts. With the training enhancements proposed in this study, however, even more SOF advisors can be prepared to build relationships and sustainable capabilities from the tactical level through the high-operational/strategic and ministerial levels when called upon to help make the global SOF network goals of SOCOM 2020 an enduring operational and strategic reality.↑

Acronym List

ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ALP	Afghan local police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
ASSF	Afghan Special Security Forces
ATG	Advisor Training Group
BPC	building partnership capacity
CCMD	combatant command
CFSOCC-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan
COIN	counterinsurgency
CTC	Counterterrorism Command
CTS	Counterterrorism Service
DA	direct action
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DIRI	Defense Institution Reform Initiative
DOD	Department of Defense
FID	foreign internal defense
FM	Field Manual
FSF	foreign security forces
GPF	general purpose forces
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces

ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISOF	Iraqi Special Operations Forces
JFSOCC-I	Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command-Iraq
JP	joint publication
JTF	joint task force
LCE	Liaison Coordination Element
MATA	Military Assistance and Training Advisory
MODA	Ministry of Defense Advisors
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan
OEF-P	Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines
PATT	Planning Assistance Training Teams
PKSOI	Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute
PN	partner nations
SFA	security force assistance
SFAB	Security Force Assistance Brigades
SIGIR	Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction
SOAG	Special Operations Advisory Group
SOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
SOCSOUTH	Special Operations Command, South
SOF	Special Operations Forces

SOLO	Special Operations Liaison Officer
SOST	Special Operations Support Team
SSI	Strategic Studies Institute
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
USIP	U.S. Institute of Peace
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
VSO	Village Stability Operations

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