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Institutionalizing Adaptation

It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps

By John A. Nagl



**Center for a
New American
Security**



COMBAT ADVISOR

Proposed Combat Advisor Tab

Cover Image

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Anthony Tata, left, deputy commanding general for Security, Combined Joint Task Force 76, 10th Mountain Division, meets with Afghan Gen. Mulwana, right, and village elders during a key leaders engagement in the village of Landikheyl, Afghanistan, Nov. 25, 2006.

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Dexter D. Clouden, Released

Foreword

I would like to thank Colonel (retired) Don Snider, Ph.D., whose seminal June 1998 “Army” article “Let the Debate Begin: It’s Time For An Army Constabulary Force” was the intellectual progenitor of this work; Don’s thoughtful mentorship of young Army officers at West Point is a lasting gift to the nation. Dr. Carter Malkasian at the Center for Naval Analysis sponsored the roundtable discussion that was the proximate cause of research leading to this report; thanks to all of those who drew me out at that session, especially those from the Program Analysis and Evaluation element of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The argument in this report was informed by the experience of hundreds of members of Transition Teams with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan and sharpened by dozens more officers and non-commissioned officers engaged in training their successors at Fort Riley, Kansas. Thanks to Major General Carter Ham for encouraging such debate and making the Big Red One a true learning organization. Finally, I would like to thank Vinca LaFleur and Christine Parthemore for their masterful editing and Billy Sountornsorn for his leadership and creativity in our production process. Any errors of omission or commission are my own. The views expressed in this report are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Army or the Department of Defense.

—*John A. Nagl*

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It’s Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps

About the Author

Lieutenant Colonel John A. Nagl commands the 1st Battalion, 34th Armor at Fort Riley, Kansas, which trains Transition Teams for Iraq and Afghanistan. Nagl led a tank platoon in Operation Desert Storm and served as the Operations Officer of Task Force 1-34 Armor in Khalidiyah, Iraq from September 2003 through September 2004. He was a member of the writing team that produced Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency.



"Helping others to help themselves is critical to winning the Long War."
—Quadrennial Defense Review 2006, cited in Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency

The most important military component of the Long War will not be the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our allies to fight with us. After describing the many complicated, interrelated, and simultaneous tasks that must be conducted to defeat an insurgency, the new Army/Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* notes “Key to all these tasks is developing an effective host-nation (HN) security force.”¹ Indeed, it has been argued that foreign forces cannot defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win for them.²

In his valedictory Senate Armed Services Committee Testimony, Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter Schoomaker warned that the Army’s counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan offer “a peek into the future.” In words informed by a lifetime of uniformed service, General Schoomaker stated, “These people that keep saying we’re never going to do this again—I don’t know where they’re coming from.”³

The counterinsurgency campaigns that are likely to continue to be the face of battle in the 21st century will require that we build a very different United States Army than the enormously capable but conventionally focused one we have today. The long-overdue increase in the size of the Army announced by President George W. Bush in December 2006 can play a pivotal role in helping build it. The best way to use the additional soldiers is not simply to create additional Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) as currently planned by the Army. Indeed, demand for such forces is likely to shrink as the American combat role in Iraq diminishes. Instead, the Army should create a permanent standing Advisor Corps of 20,000 Combat Advisors—men and women organized, equipped, educated, and trained to develop host nation security forces abroad.

The United States Army’s signature contribution to the development of host nation security forces is embedded advisor teams. These teams coach, teach, and mentor host nation security forces, training them before deployment and accompanying them into combat; the mission is called “Foreign Internal Defense”—commonly known by the acronym FID. Advisors bring important

¹Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, page 6-1. Now available with a new introduction by Sarah Sewall as *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

²John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiv.

³GEN Schoomaker is cited in David Wood, “Wars Deplete Training, Gear Of U.S. Troops, Officers Say,” *Baltimore Sun* (February 18, 2007), page 1.

combat multipliers to the fight: close air and artillery support, MEDEVAC, and, perhaps most important, the culture of leadership and training that is the U.S. Army's greatest strength. For their part, the host nation forces offer significant cultural awareness and linguistic advantages over U.S. forces, and also are likely to be far more acceptable to the local public whose support is essential to victory in any counterinsurgency campaign.

Recognizing the importance of the advisory mission, the new Army/Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency* Field Manual states clearly that FID is a "Big Army" responsibility: "The scope and scale of training programs today and the scale of programs likely to be required in the future has grown exponentially. While FID has been traditionally the primary responsibility of the special operating forces (SOF), *training foreign forces is now a core competency of regular and reserve units of all Services.*"⁴

Unfortunately, the Army and the nation have rarely given sufficient priority to the advisory teams they embed in host nation forces. The advisory effort in Vietnam has been widely criticized as "The Other War." Military analysts Peter Dawkins and Andrew Krepinevich have described the often poor quality of Army advisors in Vietnam and the rather slapdash nature of their pre-deployment training.⁵ In the words of an army officer serving in our last great counterinsurgency effort, "Our military institution seems to be prevented by its own doctrinal rigidity from understanding the nature of this war and from



U.S. Army Spc. Patrick Ward shows an Afghanistan National Police officer the finer points of how to hold a 9 mm pistol during weapons training in Sar Hawza, Afghanistan, on Aug. 30, 2006. Ward is attached to the Army's 2nd Platoon, 554th Military Police Company, Stuttgart, Germany. DoD photo by Cpl. Thomas Childs, U.S. Army. (Released)

making the necessary modifications to apply its power more intelligently, more economically, and above all, more relevantly."⁶

Some critics have argued that over the past five years, the Army and the Marine Corps have made many of the same mistakes while implementing combat advisory efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷ The so-called "Transition Teams" that have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have been selected from Guard, Reserve, and Active Duty Forces on an *ad hoc* basis; for the first several years of the Long War their training was conducted on several different Army posts and varied widely in quality. Doctrine for the advisor mission is lacking; indeed, even the

⁴ FM 3-24, p. 6-3. Emphasis added.

⁵ Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986); Peter Dawkins, *The U.S. Army and the "Other War" in Vietnam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Doctoral Dissertation, 1979). Dawkins served as an advisor in Vietnam during one of his two tours there.

⁶ Cited in Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 269.

⁷ Greg Jaffe, "Problems Afflict U.S. Army Program To Advise Iraqis," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 2006, and Scott Cuomo, "It's Time to Make ETIs our Main Effort in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2006, pp. 63-67.

teams' size and composition is inconsistent, with most Afghan teams consisting of sixteen soldiers with no medic while Iraq teams contain eleven soldiers including a medic. Internal and external studies have concluded that the teams are too small for the tasks that they have been assigned; many teams consequently have been augmented in theater by additional security forces, again on an *ad hoc* basis.

In 2006, the Army centralized training for transition teams at Fort Riley, Kansas—initially giving the training mission to two cadre heavy brigade combat teams, and later consolidating responsibility with the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division. This unit has created a 60 day training program that includes both advisory and combat survival skills.⁸ Unfortunately, few of the cadre members have been advisors themselves. One of the four battalions conducting the training has just three former advisors among its 96 soldiers, most of whom have served in Iraq, but in a conventional combat role. In addition, the training battalions' rank structure hinders optimal training, as junior sergeants are out of necessity often assigned to mentor teams composed of senior sergeants and officers.

The need for well-trained, professional combat advisors is unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future. To the contrary, the new *Counterinsurgency* Field Manual states that “Counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment.”⁹ In the 20th century, the average counterinsurgency campaign took nine years; the campaigns

in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to be longer than average. Numerous national-level leaders, from the President on down, have highlighted the importance of the advisor teams; General George Casey, the Army's Chief of Staff, stated on a recent visit to Fort Riley that “We will not succeed in our mission in Iraq and Afghanistan without the Iraqi and Afghan security forces being able to secure themselves. So these missions for the transition teams are absolutely essential for our long-term success.”¹⁰ Well after the vast majority of conventional U.S. BCTs have gone home, the predominant American commitment to these wars will likely be embedded advisory teams.¹¹

Given their extraordinary importance as the enabler of victory in current wars and the likelihood that their expertise will continue to be required to win other campaigns in the Long War, it is past time for the Army to institutionalize and professionalize the manning and training of combat advisors in permanent Army force structure. One solution would be to establish a permanent, 20,000-member Advisor Corps. This Corps would develop doctrine and oversee the training and deployment of 750 advisory teams of 25-soldiers each, organized into three 250-team divisions. Each division would be commanded by a Major General who would deploy with the teams on their yearlong advisory tours. This chain of command would simplify the command relationships with conventional forces in theater, which have limited the effectiveness of advisory teams now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹²

⁸ The Training Model can be downloaded at <http://www.riley.army.mil/view/article.asp?id=775-2006-04-10-35086-69>

⁹ Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, page 1-24.

¹⁰ Dustin Roberts, “Army Chief of Staff Visits Fort Riley,” *Fort Riley Post* 50, 20 (May 17, 2007), p.1.

¹¹ One of the primary recommendations of the Iraq Study Group Report. See James A. Baker III, Lee H. Hamilton, et al., *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), pp. 48-51. See also Andrew Krepinovich, “Send In The Advisers,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2006.

¹² See Greg Jaffe, “A Camp Divided,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2006, for a description of the chain of command problems that have limited the effectiveness of advisory teams forced to rely on neighboring U.S. units for their logistical support, quick reaction forces, and other essentials.

Advisor Corps Composition and Organization

Corps Commander and Corps Staff

- Lieutenant General Commander
- Has responsibility for Combat Advisor School and Doctrine Development
- Advises Host Nation Ministry of Defense

Division Commander and Division Staff (3 per Advisor Corps)

- Major General Commander
- Advises Host Nation Corps or Army Commander
- Commands all teams deployed in theatre
- Oversees logistical support for teams in theatre
- Oversees eight Division Advisor Teams

Division Advisor Team (8 per Advisor Division)

- Colonel Commander
- Advises Host Nation Division Commander
- Oversees five Brigade Advisor Teams

Brigade Advisor Team (5 per Division Advisor Team)

- Lieutenant Colonel Commander
- Advises Host Nation Brigade Commander
- Oversees five Battalion Advisor Teams

Battalion Advisor Team (5 per Brigade Advisor Team)

- Major Team Leader
- Advises Host Nation Battalion Commander

The Corps would be commanded by an active duty Lieutenant General with overall responsibility for all Combat Advisor doctrine, training, and employment in the United States Army—a Title 10 “Force Provider” role. The Commander of the Advisor Corps would also have an advisory role to Combatant Commanders employing his or her Combat Advisors, and could conceivably serve as the senior advisor to a foreign Ministry of Defense. Currently, this role is played in Iraq by Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq, another *ad hoc* organization.

The three Major Generals would command Divisions of Combat Advisors, preparing and deploying with them into combat. These general officers and their staffs would assume the vital role currently being filled by the Iraq Advisory Group—another *ad hoc* formation—overseeing the deployment and employment of Military Transition Teams.

A Combat Advisor Division would include eight Division Advisory Teams (DATs), each commanded by a full Colonel. Service as a DAT Commander would be the equivalent of Brigade Command for Colonels. These Colonels would be the senior advisors to Host Nation Division Commanders and would oversee the operations of five Brigade Advisor Teams.

Each DAT would consist of five Brigade Advisory Teams (BAT) commanded by centrally selected Lieutenant Colonels. Service as a DAT Commander would be the equivalent of Battalion Command for Lieutenant Colonels. These Lieutenant Colonels would be the senior advisors to Host Nation Brigade Commanders

Advisor Team Composition

- Team Leader
- Team NCOIC
- Team Adjutant
- S1 NCOIC
- Team Intelligence Officer
- Team Intel Sergeant
- Team Intel Specialist
- Team Ops Officer
- Team Ops Sergeant
- Team Logistics Officer
- Team Logistics Sergeant
- Team Medical Officer
- Team Medical Sergeant
- Team Light Wheel Mechanic
- Infantry Squad (Personal Security Detachment/Infantry Trainers)

Total Strength: 25

and would oversee the operations of five Battalion Advisor Teams.

In their turn, each BAT would consist of five Battalion Advisory Teams (BnAT), led by a Major who would earn Key Developmental credit for his or her service. In addition to a team leader and team sergeant, each team would include advisors focused on personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, medical support, and maintenance support for their team and for the unit they advise.

This proposed organization would solve the vast majority of the problems afflicting embedded combat advisors—providing them with doctrine, training, and a permanent home. Service members would be transferred to the Advisor Corps for a standard three-year Army tour of duty, during which they should expect to deploy for one year and then hand off the mission to the next advisory division, facilitating the consolidation of lessons learned. Upon the end of their combat tours, some advisors could remain at the Advisor Corps as trainers and doctrine writers, while others could return to the conventional Army sporting their new “Combat Advisor” tab—which should give them a competitive advantage for promotion as the advisory mission becomes the main effort in both Iraq and Afghanistan over the next few years.

An additional and valuable benefit of this plan is that the Combat Advisors’ families could create a family support group based in one geographic location, rather than scattered across the United States, as is currently the case. Alleviating deployed Transition Team members’ worries about their loved ones back home will enable them to better focus on their mission overseas.

Critics may object that creating this Advisor Corps would require the Army to build four fewer BCTs than currently planned—clearly a valid concern. However, while the United States urgently needs more advisors today for Iraq and Afghanistan, we are likely to need at least as many, if not more, to cope with challenges of the future security environment. In fact, by the time the Army stands up the extra units enabled by the recent force structure increase, it is likely to need additional advisor teams far more than it will need additional BCTs.

A more valid concern is that the proposed Advisor Corps (see proposed Combat Advisor tab on the inside cover) isn't big enough to meet the nation's needs. After all, this isn't just an Army challenge; none of the U.S. armed services is currently prepared to meet the ever-increasing demand for professional combat advisors. Ultimately, to win the Long War, the Army may need several Advisor Corps. Moreover, as the American combat role in Iraq and Afghanistan winds down over the next several years, the OPTEMPO of the Advisor Corps will increase, far exceeding the OPTEMPO of BCTs. Under the current plan, as time goes on, the Army will have to continue stripping soldiers from an even greater number of BCTs to create more ad hoc advisory teams—reducing the effectiveness of the BCTs and weakening the institutional Army, while still failing to provide the kind of trained advisors formed into capable, coherent teams that the counterinsurgency mission demands.

The alternative is to build the Army our country needs now, and will need far more urgently in years to come—an Army that includes a standing Advisor Corps organized, designed, trained, and equipped to develop professional host nation security forces that can build freedom abroad.

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