

Alone and Unafraid: Advisors and Risk Across the Spectrum of Conflict

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The current structure and employment of the United States Army professional advisory formations is hindered by the confluence of risk aversion in their use and lacking necessary organic organizational structure. The result negatively affects the readiness of brigade combat teams, affecting their training and use while failing to maximise their full contributions to defense strategies. Security Forces Assistance Brigades (SFAB) were intended to formalise and focus institutionally the Army's advisory efforts and relieve the pressure of breaking up traditional combat units for advisory missions which reduced combat forces' training and readiness needed for peer competition focus. Even with the implementation of the SFAB, there remains a negative readiness impact on the Army during competition, and most notably with use in non-permissive, combat theatres. However, even in semi-permissive theatres after the creation and implementation of the SFAB construct, there remain impacts on other traditional combat units' readiness. The analysis comes from an examination of the SFAB current design structure and use, with insights from historical employment of ad hoc type advisory formations, and current reports from SFAB deployments.¹

Framing the problem is an analysis of risk. Assessing risk to mission, consuming combat brigades building readiness for great power competition for advisory missions

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and security, and the risk to force, the protection of the advisors, guides the discussion on possible solutions. Three options present themselves to improve the implementation of the SFAB concept and reduce readiness impacts on the traditional combat forces, including a reassessment of risk mitigation and employment of the advisors without embedded security teams, balancing risk to force and risk to mission; creation of a new type of combat arms security brigade-type formation comprised of combat arms security battalions aligned to each SFAB for habitual training relations and familiarization; or adding of a security battalion directly into each SFAB's organic structure providing the advisors their own security structure. In a flat, even possibly declining budgetary environment without expectation of force structure growth balanced with risk to mission and risk to force, the acceptance of more risk to advisory formations presents the most beneficial solution available within the limitations faced.² This approach maximises the current force structure in line with its primary purpose through focused readiness building and training that fully supports service strategy across the spectrum of conflict. Additionally, it multiplies the effectiveness of the advisors through building stronger rapport through more shared risks and reliance, narrowing the contrasts between advisor and partner.

This study focuses on the Army's SFABs within the Security Forces Assistance Command (SFAC) currently headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for large-scale, conventional advisory efforts.³ While the Navy and the Air Force have conducted advisory missions over the years, they are normally, as an institution, focused more on technical advice and assistance to other nations, being more equipment and technology-based, whereas the land components fill the spectrum from direct combat advise and assist, through basic staff training, to ministerial-level advisors. As such, this study focuses on the operational and relationships-focused advisory roles which most directly affect strengthening alliances and building partner relationships.

Security Force Assistance (SFA) is a "key strategic activity" as identified by a National Defense University 2015 study.⁴ This study also noted, "U.S. advisors can only train what they know," and determined that "the ad hoc approach to preparing

² Theresa Hitchens, "DoD Budget Cut Likely As \$4 Trillion Deficit Looms," *Breaking Defense*, 27 April 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2020/04/dod-budget-cuts-likely-as-4-trillion-deficit-looms/>, accessed 6 March 2021.

³ Due to the similarities between the land component advisory efforts the United States Marine Corps experience does not differ greatly from the Army, as the Corps faces similar issues, though on a relative smaller scale commiserate to the different sizes and operational tempo of the branches.

⁴ Richard D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, ed., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), p. 15.

advisory and assistance forces should not be our primary methodology.”⁵ SFABs are designed to fill this SFA mission that historically had been an ad hoc requirement placed on the Army to create advisory formations *out of hide*, impacting the readiness and training of the combat formations as they had to shift training focus and expend readiness in advisory deployments or support to such advisory efforts. Either by breaking up units, draining them of critical, skilled senior experienced leadership to form advisory teams or by reorienting the focus and training and deploying an entire modified unit for filling an SFA requirement, the decisive action, core competency readiness of these combat formations is impacted. Additionally, other combat units have seen their readiness affected by taking them from their traditional missions and breaking them up into smaller security elements to protect the advisory teams, thereby consuming their readiness built for peer competition. SFABs, by filling the enduring SFA needs, are meant to alleviate that demand, allowing those combat units to maintain focus and readiness for their core tasks without being diverted or expended on advisory missions.⁶

Although the emphasis remains on ongoing advisory efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, across the African continent, Europe, Latin America, and throughout the Pacific advisory efforts play a critical part in great power competition wherever American interests exist. Both SFAB deployments and ongoing out-of-design advisory missions for conventional combat brigades continue to impact the conventional combat forces in more active combat theatres. In the Afghan theatre, SFAB advisors have deployed to bolster Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) but require conventional combat arms units to provide additional security for the advisory teams. In Iraq, there are advise and assist efforts where Army combat brigades modified themselves into Advise and Assist Brigades (AABs), forming the nucleus of train-advise-assist teams. The AAB concept is still ongoing in Iraq, consuming the readiness of a combat brigade in a non-traditional, out-of-design advisory mission even though there now exist formal, professional advisory brigades with the implementation of the SFAB. In Europe, the Joint Multinational Training Group–Ukraine (JMTG-U) mission is currently filled by a combat brigade headquarters required to reorganise itself into an advisory and training formation.

⁵ Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, p. 16.

⁶ Colonel Curt Taylor, commander 5th Security Forces Assistance Brigade, “Security Force Assistance in an Era of Great-Power Competition”, Modern Warfare Institute, podcast audio, 7 July 2020, and “Security Forces Assistance Brigade Force Design Update Brief: Includes MOS and Grade Plate Bill Payer Strategy,” ACM-SFAB, slide deck, dated 14 May 2020, author’s files.

Based on this study's focus and scope special operation forces (SOF) traditionally involved in advisory roles, specifically the Army's Special Forces are not covered for two reasons. First, SOF units whose advisory mission is but one of many missions that do not meet the parameters of this study focused specifically on large-scale, conventional security force assistance efforts. For example, the Army's Special Forces also have core mission sets including Direct Action and Special Reconnaissance which do not involve advising or training partners or local forces. Even Army Special Forces are not solely an advisory force. Secondly, as the US military advisory efforts emerged since 11 September 2001 within the advisory mission SOF forces have largely transitioned to supporting local forces and allies' own versions of special operations forces or irregular forces, shifting the mantle of building enduring and institutional partner conventional forces advisory to American conventional forces, which are the focus of this study.⁷

The Role of Advisory Efforts across the Spectrum of Conflict

The range of military operations spanning the conflict continuum can be divided into three groups. The spectrum of operations ranges from peace to war: the low end includes military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence as part of the shaping and into competition; the middle of the continuum during competition includes security cooperation and deterrence below the threshold of armed conflict; and the high end of the spectrum being conflict in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) with direct, high-intensity military engagements. The mid-range of the continuum is where crisis response and limited contingency operations fall. While in some cases this includes small-scale combat, these operations are largely still in the shaping and competition environment. The emphasis of this level is on mitigation of the possibility of escalation to open, large-scale conflict. The upper range of military operations is where LSCO is found, traditionally the Western nation's understanding of what constitutes "war."⁸

Advisory missions run the full gamut of this spectrum; however, they do so in differing roles and ways. While they serve across the full spectrum of conflict, advisory missions maximise their use in the competition phase, below the threshold of conflict with military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence. This is where

⁷ Joshua J. Potter, *American Advisors: Security Force Assistance Model in the Long War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011), p. 38; and Taylor, "Security Force Assistance in an Era."

⁸ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 *Joint Operations*, 17 January 2017, Incorporating Change 1, 22 October 2018, V-4.

developing and strengthening allies and partners plays to advisory formations' strength and directly to deterrence.

While advisors have limited applicability to crisis response, they play a large role in certain contingency operations, mostly in their combat advisory role to local forces, notably in counter-insurgency.⁹ Moving along the continuum towards war, in the shape and deter phase the involvement grows from episodic to persistent, and then as it shifts into the conflict phase the entire SFAB could be fully employed to deter and influence the security environment.¹⁰

The advisory formations have two possible roles in LSCO and full-scale war. In LSCO, SFABs could be employed in their entirety in their core advise-and-assist role to allies and partners, with one SFAB capable of providing support to an ally or partner division, providing US combat multiplier capabilities to the partner, increasing its capacity to fight.¹¹ During LSCO, when traditional combat formations and their training and readiness are at a premium, the advisory mission still negatively impacts the rest of the force with the current employment methodology of advisory teams' receiving additional security. In most contingency operations during shaping and competition phases, the impacted readiness of traditional combat brigades can be absorbed without substantial risk due to relatively low demand to availability of forces. However, the acceptable cost associated with consuming combat brigade readiness to support or fulfill advisory roles in shaping and competition provides a false sense of security to the service as it becomes less acceptable when contingencies become enduring and in non-permissive, LSCO environments that under the current employment model consume traditional combat arms forces for SFAB security. This becomes an unacceptable drain on traditional combat brigades in high-intensity conflict when as many brigades as available will be needed for their core combat missions.

Global War on Terrorism Advisory Experiences

By 2015, the coalition forces, led by American forces, trained over 350,000 Afghan National Security Forces and built over 625,000 Iraqi security apparatus.¹² While a significant accomplishment, the methods by which they achieved this were inconsistent

⁹ Taylor, "Security Force Assistance in an Era."

¹⁰ "TCM SFAB Operational Concept", and JP 3-0 *Joint Operations*, V-5.

¹¹ Taylor, "Security Force Assistance in an Era."

¹² T.X. Hammes, "Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq," in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, eds., Richard D. Hooker, Jr. and Joseph J. Collins (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), p. 277.

and at times ad hoc. The process undertaken to support security force assistance was unsustainable for the long-term with the return of great power competition and conflict, leading to the creation of the SFABs as a permanent advisory formation.

Prior to the implementation of the SFAB, the Army applied two broad approaches to providing advisory forces to Afghanistan and Iraq.¹³ The methods included the formation of individuals into ad hoc teams built to support one deployment, or the conversion and temporary redesign of a standing unit, typically a combat brigade, into an advisory formation for a specific deployment. While they operated under various terms throughout the war and in the different theatres, the training or transition teams started within the Army as a collection of individuals.¹⁴ A combination of volunteers and assigned individuals formed these teams in the early years of the war, from across the active and reserve components of the Army and often with sister-service personnel and even allies.¹⁵ Units internally sourcing teams, an “advisor tax” so to speak, as well as the externally sourced individual ad hoc teams, were gathered and sent overseas.¹⁶

As the Army identified inconsistencies in advisor performance, a distinct shift came to provide more specific advisory preparation and training to these composite teams of individuals. This training, first instituted in Fort Riley, Kansas, created a formal, pre-deployment advisor course.¹⁷ Through this effort, the Army presented a standard, centralised pre-deployment advisor-training curriculum over a sixty-day

¹³ The USMC followed a near identical process for creating their advisory formations in almost a near flip of approaches. They started earlier in the war with converting standing units into advisory formations for a deployment, and later in the war shifted to building advisory teams from individuals pulled from across the fleet. Their lessons learned mirrored the Army’s, resulting in the USMC creating a standing advisory formation similar but not identical to the Army’s SFABs in the Marine Corps Advisor Companies (MCAC). For USMC advisory historical assessment, see William Rosenau, Melissa McAdam, Megan Katt, Gary Lee, Jerry Meyerle, Jonathan Schroden, Annemarie Randazzo-Matsel with Cathy Hiatt and Margaux Hoar’s *United States Marine Corps Advisors Past, Present, and Future* (Alexandria, Virginia: CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2013).

¹⁴ The most common names of these formations included the Afghanistan theatre’s Embedded Training Teams (ETT), and the Iraq theatre’s Military Transition Teams (MiTTs), and later the more universally applied Security Force Advise and Assist Teams (SFAATs) within Advise and Assist Brigades (AABs) prior to the codification of the SFABs. See, Hammes, “Raising and Mentoring Security Forces.”

¹⁵ Hammes, “Raising and Mentoring Security Forces,” pp. 279-282, and see *Eyewitness to War – Oral History Series*. Vol. III, *US Army Advisors in Afghanistan*, edited by Michael G. Brooks (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Potter, *American Advisors*, p. 38.

¹⁷ Steven E. Clay, *Iroquois Warriors in Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007), p. 204.

course on small unit tactics and advisor techniques. During this period, 8,000-12,000 US military personnel passed through the training annually. In September 2009, the training mission passed from Fort Riley to Fort Polk, Louisiana. At Fort Riley the training was conducted under the auspices of First Brigade, First Infantry Division. When the course moved to Fort Polk it transitioned to the 162nd Infantry Brigade.¹⁸ In October 2014, the 162nd Brigade was deactivated, with the training devolving to a battalion at Fort Polk's Joint Readiness Training Center. Later training for advisors diverged between the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) at the Army's War College training joint and interagency individuals for peacekeeping operations and the SFAC overseeing the training management for the combat advisors of the SFABs.¹⁹

The other method included the process of temporarily converting a conventional unit into an advisory mission-based structure for a single deployment. As an early example of a unit-based conversion to an advisory formation for a deployment was the United States Army Reserve (USAR) 98th Division (Institutional Training), serving as one of the first units rebuilding the Iraq army. This division deployed elements as part of the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, setting a pattern for future similar rotations.²⁰ As the advisory efforts intensified in the waning years of Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn in conjunction with the withdrawal, this method of taking one unit and transforming it from its typical role to that of an advisory formation for a deployment became the primary method. This technique, applied in Iraq during the later years, was a similar solution to that employed earlier in Afghanistan for TF Phoenix. For TF Phoenix, the Army took an Army National Guard combat brigade and restructured it to serve as a training headquarters and security force with additional individual advisors attached to fulfill the ANSF advisory requirements for fulfilling the advisory mission.²¹

¹⁸ Potter, *American Advisors*, pp. 38-40.

¹⁹ Richard W. Duncan, "3rd Battalion, 353rd Armor Regiment Assists Units with Security Cooperation and Security-Force Assistance Training," *Armor Magazine*, January-March 2016, p. 64; for PKSOI see "Background and History," PKSOI, <https://pksoi.armywarcollege.edu/background-history/>, accessed 6 March 2021; for SFAC see "TCM SFAB Operational Concept Brief," TCM-SFAB, slide deck, dated October 2018, author's files.

²⁰ Clay, *Iroquois Warriors*, pp. 3, 37, 203, and 208-209. Structured to provide individual and staff training to Army reserve component units, this division formed ad hoc teams from across the division and sister USAR units to form advisory teams for its mission to Iraq, while still having to meet the annual training requirements in the United States for its institutional training support to the rest of the Army.

²¹ Hammes, "Raising and Mentoring Security Forces," pp. 279-282, and 321-323

In particular, this method focused on the temporary remodeling of singular combat brigades into advise-and-assist brigades (AABs). While these AABs were built around advise and assist teams, composed of senior field grade officers paired with an Iraqi senior officer or ministerial-level official, like the SFABs, these formations also had the additional “advisor tax” of security forces attached to them for their protection, which came from the restructured combat brigade team’s infantry battalions.²² This AAB structure is most recently employed during the counter-Islamic State Operation Inherent Resolve mission in Iraq and Syria and still brings with it the addition of individuals to fill the field grade advisor positions and additional security and support structure even with the current use of SFABs.²³

All of these methods taxed the service, impacting unit readiness, complicating personnel management, and producing inconsistent advisory effort results from each method and deployment to another. To remediate this impact, the Army instituted the SFAB concept. It codified and structured a permanent and specialised advisory formation, designed expressly to improve consistency in advisory mission results and to alleviate the strain of advisory mission requirements on the conventional force.

The Current Army SFAB/SFAC Design

Noting the impacts on the force from the ad hoc use of volunteers in the early stages of the Global War on Terrorism and then the impacts on conventional brigade combat teams as they were converted to advise and assist brigades for specific deployments, the Army’s answer turned to a formal, organised, standing advisory formation. The SFABs emerged within the Army’s formal organizational structure in 2018.²⁴ This idea, a cadre of experienced, professional officers and NCOs, was not out of the blue. The idea of an “advisory corps” had been proposed before, most recently by retired Army Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, and the concept in multiple variations debated on different stages and venues, but the SFAB would be the first to materialise

²² Potter, *American Advisors*, pp. 33 and 43.

²³ Mosul Study Group, *What the Battle of Mosul Teaches the Force*, No. 17-24, (United States Army Combined Arms Command, September 2017), p. 24.

²⁴ With the USMC facing similar problems with their advisory programs, the Corps followed similar path of the Army in establishing formal advisory specific formations. The USMC formal advisory structure intent includes four companies, currently only two are formed, the first ones in 2019, and they are all in the USMC Reserves. In contrast to the Army structure of hand-selecting specialists from among the forces to man the SFABs, the first Marine Corps Advisor Company (MCAC-Alpha) was formed by the nucleus staff of the recently deactivated 2nd Civil Affairs Group (CAG). See Serine Farahi, “Marine Corps Activates Advisor Companies,” *DVIDS News*, 6 July 2019.

in the Army as a formalised unit with the sole purpose, structure, and intent to advise foreign forces.²⁵ In contrast to other previous Army advisory formations that were temporary, ad hoc, or, like Army Special Forces, supporting multiple missions in addition to advising, SFABs are dedicated solely to advise-and-assist missions.²⁶ Another critical purpose behind the creation of these formal advisory formations was to support service readiness and aid traditional combat formations' focus on near-peer competition and conflict. Then-Secretary of Army Mark T. Esper's congressional report said, "SFABs reduce the demand on conventional Brigade Combat Teams enabling them to focus on high-intensity conflict against near-peer threats."²⁷

Secretary Esper testified before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in 2019 that the US Army established the SFAC, which initially included six SFABs, to support US allies and partners.²⁸ The SFAC oversees the SFABs for coordination, management, and training oversight.²⁹ To achieve this, the SFAB's "core mission...is to assess, organise, train, advise, and assist foreign security forces in coordination with joint, interagency, and multinational forces to improve partner capability and capacity and facilitate achievement of U.S. strategic objectives throughout all phases of conflict."³⁰ Advisors are second-time leaders, meaning the advisor company commander is a major instead of the typical captain and has already served as a company commander in a traditional

²⁵ John Nagl, *Knife Fights: A Memoir of Modern War in Theory and Practice* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 158-160. referencing his own article "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisory Corps," *Center for a New American Security*, June 2007.

²⁶ John Nagl, *Knife Fights*, 158-160, referencing his own article "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisory Corps," *Center for a New American Security*, June 2007.

²⁷ Secretary of the Army Mark T. Esper and Chief of Staff of the Army Mark A. Milley, *United States Army Posture Statement* (Washington, DC: 26 March 2019), p. 10.

²⁸ Esper and Milley, *Army Posture Statement*, p. 10. 1st SFAB is out of Fort Benning, Georgia; 2nd SFAB stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina; 3rd SFAB is in Fort Hood, Texas; 4th SFAB is out of Fort Carson, Colorado; and the 5th SFAB is based on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, while the 54th SFAB is in the Army National Guard with the brigade headquarters in Indiana and portions of the unit's advisory formations are in Texas, Florida, Ohio, and Georgia.

²⁹ "TCM SFAB Operational Concept Brief," TCM-SFAB, slide deck, dated October 2018, author's files.

³⁰ Jeff S. Hackett, (Commander, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade), "SFAB BCT Readiness," correspondence with Author 11 December 2020. Organize – create, improve, and integrate doctrinal principles, organizational structures, capability constructs, and personnel management. Train – create, improve, and integrate training, leader development, and education at the individual, leader, collective, and staff levels. Equip – integrate material and equipment solutions into the foreign security forces; includes procurement, fielding, accountability, and maintenance through life cycle management. Rebuild or create – create, improve, and integrate facilities and supporting infrastructure. Advise – provide subject matter expertise, guidance, advice, and counsel to foreign security forces while carrying out the mission assigned to the unit or organization. "TCM SFAB Operational Concept."

formation. Advisory platoon leaders are captains instead of the typical lieutenants and have already served as platoon leaders. This trend is carried on throughout the SFAB positions to ensure advisors have already shown successful leadership at the level at which they will be advising.³¹ Successful leadership in a traditional unit is a prerequisite to becoming an advisor, as is the volunteer aspect and successful completion of the required training. Advisory teams typically are made up of twelve-man teams with a breakout of specialties across the range of combat arms maneuver, engineers, artillery, support, and staff functions.³²

The Army conducts Advisory training at Fort Benning's Military Advisor Training Academy (MATA) in Georgia, through the Combat Advisor Training Course (CAT-C).³³ The foundational CAT-C training for the combat advisor is 54 days long, centrally occurring at Fort Benning as part of the MATA. This training, though, follows a 3–5-day selection and assessment course, typically conducted at Fort Bragg and designed to determine if individuals already possess the requisite experience and maturity to operate as a small team advisor. The CAT-C training includes topics such as basic advising techniques, planning, foreign weapons, culture and negotiation fundamentals, air and ground fires training, and survival techniques.³⁴ SFABs are regionally aligned to allow them to become regional experts and have reoccurring

³¹ This is in contrast to the Army Special Forces which take soldiers from any branch or military occupational specialty background and then train them in Special Forces core competencies. For example, in most cases, Special Forces captains have never commanded a company of any sort, and Special Forces are not required to even have a combat arms background, receiving specialised training during their qualification course instead of relying on direct experience in the level and military role for which they are providing advice and assistance as the SFAB does in its conventional manner.

³² Hackett, "SFAB BCT Readiness." For the Marine Corps, the primary formal advisory formation is the MCAC, which is composed of Marine Corps Advisor Teams (MCATs). The MCAC and there subordinate MCATs are far more limited than SFAB in scope and support. The MCAT is designed to advise partner forces at the brigade or higher level, and the MCATs are structured to replicate a standard Marine Corps battalion staff structure to provide the command and staff section advisor pairs to their partner force command and staff. See Serine Farahi, "Marine Corps Activates Advisor Companies," *DVIDS News*, 6 July 2019.

³³ Hackett, "SFAB BCT Readiness." For the Marine Corps the training is conducted at the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) in Fort Story, Virginia in a four-week long Marine Advisor Course. The MCSCG was established in 2012 to train Marines preparing to conduct advisory missions in skills including culture, foreign weapons handling, and rapport building interpersonal relations, in addition to providing courses on foreign military training and cooperation. See Shawn Snow, "Counterinsurgency is here to stay: Marines plan to double foreign military training adviser group," *Navy Times*, 10 October 2018 and "The Marine Corps Advisory Company (MCAC)," *Small Wars Journal*, 13 (June 2019), originally posted in *SOF News*.

³⁴ Hackett, "SFAB BCT Readiness."

deployments to the same areas assisting in building enduring relationships.³⁵ This supports their ability to develop deeper cultural understanding, language familiarization, and relationships, which are all identified as critical to advisory success and maximise impacts.

SFAB Deployments and Residual Readiness Impacts

As the SFAB conducted operations in Afghanistan, the theatre command weighed the risk to force and requested additional force protection for the advisory teams. The request resulted in the Army providing the addition of a conventional infantry battalion to support the advisory operations. Each SFAB rotation required one infantry battalion, broken up into smaller company, platoon, and even squad-size elements divided up among the SFAB contingents scattered across the theatre to provide *guardian angel* teams to accompany the advisors wherever they went as a protective detail. This consumed the readiness of the 32nd IBCT (Wisconsin Army National Guard) over three rotations adversely influencing its readiness and training focus.³⁶

One combat brigade fills the requirement for an AAB in Iraq to support the ongoing counter-ISIS mission in Operation Inherent Resolve, meaning two or three brigades are affected annually. These units work with regional partners, building them up to not only counter immediate threats such as the Islamic State, but also to fortify relationships, perform deterrence, and counter the influence of other regional actors opposing American vital interests.³⁷ It is another example of the drain on traditional combat forces - conducting an advise-and-assist mission instead of training, preparing, and establishing readiness for their core missions. Instead, combat brigades are breaking up and reforming with non-traditional training and deployments in support of advising and assisting the Iraqi security forces. The theatre commander assessed threat-level for the advise-and-assist mission in Iraq requires an enormous footprint of the combat brigade to provide the advisory teams across the entire brigade structure (combat, combat support, and combat service support specialties) along with security

³⁵ Taylor, "Security Force Assistance in an Era."

³⁶ Timothy McCormic (Army National Guard Theater Security Officer for Central Command and Africa Command, previously Army National Guard Global Force Manager, Readiness and Plans Division, G-3), "MMS Response", correspondence with Author, 20 December 2020.

³⁷ Tim Ellis, "Most of Fort Wainwright's Stryker Soldiers Deploy to Iraq for 'Train-Advise-Assist' Mission," *KUAC*, 9 September 2019, <https://fm.kuac.org/post/most-fort-wainwright-s-stryker-soldiers-deploy-iraq-train-advise-assist-mission>, accessed 13 September 2020.

similar to those applied to the SFABs when they deployed to Afghanistan.³⁸ Thus far, the Army has continued to meet Iraq's advise-and-assist mission with traditional combat brigades, even with the implementation of the SFAB concept. The Army has met this demand with a rotation of two active component infantry brigades for every one Army National Guard combat brigade.³⁹

Even outside of conflict theatres, the structure and current employment of these advisory formations still have residual impacts on the readiness of the force. While in Europe, deterrence efforts occur beyond the traditional North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance to include strategic partners like Ukraine.⁴⁰ For Ukraine, this manifests in the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U) Army advisory efforts to support “up to five battalions of Ministry of Defense forces per year...The training is focused on partnering at the brigade-level and below, building professional and capable Ukrainian units to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”⁴¹ One traditional combat brigade headquarters was deployed to Ukraine with the brigade leadership running the JMTG-U advisory and training mission to the Ukrainian forces, based in southwestern Ukraine. This mission consumes one combat brigade each year, which deploys in a non-traditional structure for an out-of-design mission, one for which it is not habitually trained, staffed, or prepared. Instead, the combat brigade was broken up with its senior officers and NCOs reorganised to staff advisory and training teams in support of JMTG-U. This mission requirement became filled annually by an Army National Guard combat brigade, which came at a cost of the brigade's limited training time and focus diverted from its traditional combat role to that of advisors.⁴² This is an ideal mission for an SFAB to assume, thereby relieving the conventional combat brigade formations from expending their readiness and redirecting their training and focus from their core mission tasks to reorient for an advisory mission to conduct a one-off non-standard deployment. However, due to the 2022 Russo-Ukraine War, it currently is unclear if this mission will continue either as an SFAB or a conventional brigade combat team task.⁴³

³⁸ Mosul Study Group, *What the Battle of Mosul Teaches the Force*, p. 58.

³⁹ McCormic, “MMS Response,” correspondence with Author.

⁴⁰ United States Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Ukraine,” *Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, dated 10 October 2019.

⁴¹ JMTG-U Official Webpage, Seventh Army, <https://www.7atc.army.mil/JMTGU/>, accessed 13 September 2020.

⁴² McCormic, “MMS Response,” correspondence with Author.

⁴³ As the SFABs fully come online and gain more credibility in proof of concept, there is discussion that the European regionally aligned SFAB may take on the JMTG-U mission from the conventional combat

In the Indo-Pacific region, the Army conducts the Pacific Pathways initiative, a program that annually deploys Army units across Asia to various allies and partners supporting training and exercises intended to deepen relationships and improve interoperability. Recently, SFAB advisors participated in Pacific Pathways highlighting multinational training across the region, which emphasised Army training partnerships and the importance of close relationships in key areas. This is typically conducted by several combat brigades broken up into smaller teams from both the active-duty Army and the Army National Guard, and in the current employment, the SFAB is in addition to many of these traditional combat brigades still attending. However, the SFABs are designed to take over the advising and assistance portions while the combat forces still conduct their joint training and multinational integration events without any additional burden of providing advisory or training teams.

In addition to the high-profile advisory efforts in combat theatres and their direct employment in theatres of great power competition, these formations also support partners and allies and contribute to pursuing American interests and spreading influence in less developed theatres of conflict. In Africa, the SFABs have partnered with local forces across the continent, addressing terrorist threats while also supporting American attempts to counter competitors' influence.⁴⁴ The SFAB formations have been selected to take over the counterdrug mission in Latin America with its rotational deployments beginning in Colombia.⁴⁵

When the SFABs deployed to other theatres to conduct operations in a permissive environment, additional security was not required. Thus, when the SFABs deployed to Africa, Latin America, and recently to the Pacific, they did not consume the readiness of traditional combat formations the way they did in its Afghanistan deployment or would if they took over missions like that of the AAB in Iraq. In these

brigades. While this is not formalised at the time of this study, it would be most applicable use of the SFABs while benefiting the combat force.

⁴⁴ Kyle Rempfer, "Army sets end-of-year window for SFABs to deploy outside Afghanistan," *Army Times*, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/01/16/army-sets-end-of-year-window-for-sfabs-to-deploy-outside-afghanistan/>, accessed 13 September 2020 and Matthew Fontaine, "1st SFAB begins advising mission to Africa with vehicle maintenance training in Senegal," *Army Times*, https://www.army.mil/article/235353/1st_sfab_begins_advising_mission_to_africa_with_vehicle_maintenance_training_in_senegal, accessed 13 September 2020.

⁴⁵ US Embassy Bogota, "SFAB Mission arrives in Colombia," *News Release*, 28 May 2020, and Steve Balestrieri, "Army Chooses Security Forces over Green Berets for Counter-Drug Deployment to Colombia", *SOFREP*, 1 June 2020. With the SFAB replacing the Army Special Forces who had previously fulfilled that mission, the high demand, low density Special Forces gained additional bandwidth to fulfill other missions, assisting in balancing their ever-increasing diversity of operations.

environments, below the threshold of war in more safe and permissive environments, the SFABs succeed in preserving combat brigade readiness and training focus on their core functions while these designated advisory formations take over those assistance missions. However, it leaves a much-needed solution to mitigate the remaining impacts from supporting advisory efforts in non-permissive, combat theatres where SFABs still negatively impact combat brigade readiness and training. In the contemporary active and fluid global environment, an SFAB conducting assistance missions even in a permissive theatre could quickly find itself in an environment that rapidly escalates to war, involved in a security condition more like Iraq or Afghanistan. They must be prepared for operating in such dynamic and contested environments, and the joint force must be prepared to address the question of risk to the force while maximising the use of these advisory units. When the theatre is violently contested is precisely when the finite amount of combat brigades are most needed to be trained and ready for their core, traditional combat tasks. In this environment, it is riskier for their readiness to be used in an out-of-design, or ad hoc manner for an advisory role, or be diverted from combat missions for advisory security and support missions.

The Question of Risk in Employment

If the Army accepts a degree of higher risk to force to reduce the risk to mission, then a cultural and institutional shift is required.⁴⁶ To embrace more risk with the employment of advisors in non-permissive, combat environments mitigates the additive forces drain on the rest of the force to provide force protection and support. This directly addresses risk aversion prevalent in the employment of advisors compared to risk mitigation measures, determining what level of risk is appropriate. Over the course of the Global War on Terrorism, the approach to embedded advisory teams grew more restrictive with evolving theatre risk assessments. The initial Special Forces teams into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban were unaccompanied by any

⁴⁶ As recent as the Special Forces ambush in Niger (October 2017) that killed four soldiers, the US military has faced public scrutiny and backlash. While this backlash and scrutiny was more focused on the clarity on US military presence and operations in Africa and less on the security details of the team, it is indicative of the cumulative overall risk aversion the US military faces. However, for the scope and focus of this article, this ambush is less applicable as it was conducted in an offically non-combat theater and conducted by SOF advisors in their more traditional role as opposed to this analysis focusing on large scale conventional advisory methods for improvement. United States Africa Command, "OCT 2017 Niger Ambush Summary of Investigation," 10 May 2018.

additional security force.⁴⁷ Similarly, the early conventional military transition and advisory teams in both Iraq and Afghanistan initially did so without additional protection.⁴⁸ However, as these wars intensified and casualties increased across all combat operations, evolving risk aversion led to additional security for embedded advisors in both theatres as early as 2004-2005.⁴⁹ This risk-averse practice culminated in the SFAB and AAB approach to combat advising. This method resulted in the burden to combat brigades' readiness to provide the additional security to advisory teams, as in the SFAB in Afghanistan model, or transform into a temporary advisory formation themselves, as in the Iraq AAB model.

Advisors accepting a higher level of risk support the mission better by strengthening the connection with the partners. US Army historical examples of this include Korea, the first large-scale American advisory effort in war, and Vietnam, America's largest wartime advisory effort, where Army advisors, singly or in small groups, were embedded with their South Vietnamese partners, living, eating, moving, and dying with them.

Though this concept comes with notable risk, there is historical precedence for US military advisors to undertake elevated levels of risk while operating largely isolated with their partners. In Korea, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) advisory effort grew from only 500 in 1949 to advise eight Republic of Korea (ROK) army divisions to its max over strength of 2,866 with 1,918 authorised to support three ROK corps.⁵⁰ In many cases during the early reversals, the combat field advisors faced isolation, cut off from American support or communication in response to the initial invasion in June 1950 and the collapse of the South Korean defense, and again after the reversals of the Chinese communist intervention. At times, these advisors took direct

⁴⁷ Charles H. Briscoe, et al, *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), pp. 117, 122-127, 155-158; Donald P. Wright, et al, *A Different Kind of war: The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) October 2001-September 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Pres, 2010), pp. 73-82, 93-107.

⁴⁸ Clay, *Iroquois Warriors*, pp. 122, 127-186; Wright, *A Different Kind of War*, pp. 264-266; *Eyewitness to War Volume III: US Army Advisors in Afghanistan – Oral History Series*, edited by Michael G. Brooks (Fort Leavenworth KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), pp. 94-95, 223, 276.

⁴⁹ SOF advisory efforts in Afghanistan supporting the Village Stability Platform (VSP) program included additional conventional security teams attached to the special operations teams as they embedded within local villages throughout the country as early as 2009. As exemplified with the evolution of the early transition and training teams to the SFATs which predated the SFAB teams, the SFATs began to be surrounded by additional security forces for their advise and assist missions.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Ramsey III, *Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 18. Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), p. 10.

control of ROK units in an effort to stem the tide of the rout. KMAG advisors did this through threats and by force to make the South Koreans take up defensive positions and continue to delay the communist advance. Once the retreat had stabilised in the Pusan perimeter on the southern end of the peninsula, the KMAG advisors assisted the flow of US and UN forces and returned to their role of advising and assisting the ROK army.⁵¹ At other times these advisors were isolated with their partners and unable to convince them or make them do anything due to the KMAG advisor's rank and questionable status as a combatant.⁵² This was also an occurrence later in the war, notably when the Chinese communist assault rolled over the advancing forces. The advisors not only found themselves isolated with their partner Korean forces and out of contact with American forces but also, in many cases, took command of local forces in emergency circumstances.⁵³ In one instance, on 29 October 1950 along the Yalu River, the Chinese surprise assault destroyed 75 percent of the ROK 7th Regiment overnight and captured or killed all its KMAG advisors.⁵⁴ While these risks seem shocking, it must be remembered that these losses occurred in a war that saw American battalions destroyed as well, in places such as the Chosin Reservoir. Serving as a lone advisor attached to a ROK unit was not necessarily that much riskier than service in an American combat unit.

During the US advisory effort in Vietnam, from 1945 to 1973, 66,399 Americans served as combat advisors of a total advisory effort of 115,427, with 378 killed and 1,393 wounded. Eleven received the Medal of Honor.⁵⁵ In the Marine Corps zone, the Marines implemented the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) concept, which stationed small teams or squads in an isolated village. The Marines combined action company (CAC) and its smaller derivative within the CAP program embedded small Marine teams with local forces, which provided the South Vietnamese forces training, additional firepower, and access to capabilities through the Marine teams, as well as a living example of what an effective, disciplined small tactical unit looked and acted.⁵⁶ In an era dominated by body count obsession, the Marine Corps CAP kill ratio in 1966, for example, stood at fourteen enemy combatants for every one Marine or partner forces. In 1968, the CAPs

⁵¹ Robert K. Sawyer, *Army Historical Series. Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2000), p. 140.

⁵² T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Dulles Virginia: Brassy's Inc, 2000), pp. 38, 41.

⁵³ Ramsey III, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, pp. 8, 18-19, 24.

⁵⁴ Ramsey III, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Worthington, *Under Fire with ARVN*, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Worthington, *Under Fire with ARVN*, pp. 63-65. For a classic account of CAP operations see Bing West, *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972).

comprised only 1.5 percent of the total Marine force in-country but accounted for 7.6 percent of enemy kills, far higher than the ratio for the conventional operations.⁵⁷ One of the most telling aspects of this is that even in a USMC official history of the combined action program, they did not differentiate in their kill ratio calculation between Marines and their partner forces, nor did they highlight the specific number of CAP Marine casualties.

A strong contemporary security concern for embedded advisors is the military euphemism *Green on Blue* attacks when the advisors are attacked by the very people they are advising. While this concerning phenomenon is not limited to Afghanistan, there were instances of these attacks in Iraq and even in neighboring Jordan, it was a grave threat from the Taliban and Afghan-based terrorist groups.⁵⁸ These attacks typically settled in one of two reasons: grievance-based or deliberate infiltration and conversion. Depending on the report, emphasis by the US placed most attacks on the former while the Afghanistan leadership placed blame on the latter, indicating the Taliban and others were infiltrating the local security forces with agents. Both of these threats remain regardless of the US changes in its approach. The first one, grievance-based is that many of the insider attacks are conducted by individuals who turn on their advisors from some cultural slight or personal insult, driving the local to strike back at the advisor or his security force. These attacks have occurred before and even after the addition of protective security forces to advisor teams.⁵⁹ Arguably, this is a question of cultural sensitivity and understanding for advisors in their delicate rapport building, relationship development, and near-constant close interaction with a foreign culture. Additionally, it could be reasoned that by including additional non-advisor trained or selected personnel in the close and continuous presence of the partner force along with their advisors potentially one would be increasing the possibility for offensive actions, either intentionally or accidental, whereas if the consistent, close interaction between the local forces and the advisors is mainly with the trained advisors this grievance-based risk is not eliminated but is minimized.

⁵⁷ Ronald E. Hays II, *Combined Action: U.S. Marines Fighting A Different War, August 1965 to September 1970* (Quantico, VA: History Division, Marine Corps University, 2019), p. 52.

⁵⁸ Krishnadev Calamur, "How 3 Americans Were Killed in Jordan," *The Atlantic*, 25 July 2017.

⁵⁹ R. Hossain, "Afghanistan: Green-on-Blue Attacks in Context," *Institute for the Study of War*, p. 13 November 2012; Javid Ahmad, "Dress Like Allies, Kill Like Enemies: An Analysis of 'Insider Attacks' in Afghanistan," *Modern War Insitute*, 4 April 2017, pp. 3, 5-6, 10-12; Jeffrey Bordin, "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and U.S. Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF-Committed Fratricide-Murders," *N2KL Red Team*, 12 May 2011, pp. 3-6.

The second common explanation for insider attacks against advisors is infiltration or cooption of local forces to attack their advisors. This is another risk that is outside the scope of solutions presented in this analysis. For infiltration, this is an issue tied directly to host nation recruiting and screening efforts. Whether the US works its way more into the oversight of screening applications or has to rely largely on the host nation's screening and recruitment procedures, this is outside the realm of advisory formations and is a risk the advisors must rely on the broader military and intelligence enterprise to mitigate. Likewise, co-option of local forces already in the host nation's security forces is beyond the control of advisory formations, however, training and intelligence support would be a possible way to mitigate this risk as well.⁶⁰ While the two trends for Green on Blue attacks are grave risks associated with serving as an advisor, the advisory teams in both Iraq (MiTTs) and Afghanistan (ETTs) had additional security forces assigned to them as early as 2004-2005, before any identified insider attacks. While insider attacks do not appear to have inspired the increased risk aversion, they likely reinforced it as casualties increased across all combat operations as the war efforts intensified and grew.

In addressing risk and decision-making, the Army's discourse on critical, creative thinking and problem solving, states "Some barriers to creative thinking include...hierarchal structures, emphasis on uniformity and training standards, and a predilection for risk avoidance due to the potential for severely negative outcomes of flawed decisions."⁶¹ These barriers are why an institutional shift from risk avoidance to risk mitigation is critical in addressing the problem of SFABs and their impact on combat brigade readiness and training. A change in risk analysis and acceptance achieves two things relative to alleviating the burden for combat brigades' support to the SFABs in more dangerous environments. First, by choosing to accept more risk to the advisor teams it outright eliminates the additional overhead of the additive security teams. This directly relieves the pressure on combat brigades providing these out-of-design security missions that interrupt their training and readiness focus for traditional combat duties necessary for growing great power competition. Secondly, it provides additional benefits by forcing the advisors and their partners to emphasise shared responsibility and developing deeper trust in advisor internal and partner-provided protection and support. This forcing function drives advisor and partner to develop a closer rapport based on reliance rather than convenience.

⁶⁰ Ahmad, "Dress Like Allies," pp. 23-26.

⁶¹ Training and Doctrine Command G-2 Operational Environment Enterprise, *The Red Team Handbook: The Army's Guide to Making Better Decisions*, Version 9.0 (Leavenworth, KS: University of Foreign Military and Cultures Studies), pp. 57.

With relationship bonds being the critical factor to a successful advisory effort, it is imperative to support the development of trust between advisor and partner. Some leaders approach SFA missions with a risk-averse mentality. As one advisor put it, you “probably need to remember why you are paid for hazardous duty pay and qualify for tax-exempt status.”⁶² Infantry soldiers receive the requisite training and proper equipment to conduct their assigned missions, and receive compensation for associated risks – the hazards of their duty – when overseas. Likewise, the administration clerk and the advisor receive compensation to take the associated risks with their military occupation overseas. The clerk does not receive additional security forces to support their assigned duties for which they are trained and properly equipped and neither do the infantrymen receive additional security forces to reduce their risk conducting their assigned missions. In this manner, the advisers’ maturity, experience, and abilities leading to their selection, coupled with their training to operate in small groups can facilitate more risk without catastrophic consequences for greater mission impact. These advisors could go without accompanying security forces, relying on their own training and experience, professionalism, and emphasizing their trust in their partners for protection, sustenance, transportation, and support. This keeps a measure of honor and feeling of responsibility for their guest and partner protection on the host force rather than allowing them to disregard it with the presence of additional American security forces present to protect the advisor.

The message would be clear: the advisors are treated no differently, their conditions no more enhanced than their partners. What message is sent when advisors accompanying their partner forces need outside security and protection? Their presence undermines relationship building, the sense of shared exposure between the counterparts, and can be overbearing for the advisor to try and work with.⁶³

In addition to the physical risk it would entail, as outlined above, it also comes with a distinct risk that such independent, isolated advisors may lose their way, *going native*, or suffer exposed character flaws. Advisors can be susceptible to the *snafu threshold* of response to multiple deployments and high stress as advisory missions can be extremely stressful. This can manifest itself in poor decisions out of the ordinary, indicative of breakdowns in discipline standards.⁶⁴ One advisor, possessing both Special Forces and Civil Affairs qualifications, encapsulated the warning with, “Do not violate that duty [to American ideals] in hopes of gaining greater acceptance into the [foreign

⁶² Potter, *American Advisors*, p. 50.

⁶³ Joseph M. Miller LTC (ret.), (former AF/PAK Hands and Afghanistan SFAAT advisor to TAAC-South and Corps-level), “Advisor Interview,” correspondence with Author, 16 December 2020.

⁶⁴ Potter, *American Advisors*, p. 62.

security forces] mindset...value as an American advisor is more prized than any desires of complete acceptance into the [foreign security forces] culture.”⁶⁵

Service Force Structure Adjustments to Support Advisory Formations

If the Army chooses to continue providing additional security to SFABs, the solution leads in some manner to a new force structure designed to protect the advisory teams. In a time of more restricted fiscal and manpower limitations, a new structure must come at the expense of cutting the current structure in some manner.

The six SFABs, five active duty, and one Army National Guard, are a high-demand capability for the combatant commanders.⁶⁶ Even with these brigades, there is continued use of combat brigades used in advisory roles, being broken up and readiness lost as they conduct missions, which SFABs could take, such as the aforementioned JMTG-U and Iraq AAB missions. The use of combat brigades to fill advisory missions in place of SFABs detracts from the combat readiness of the component that expends its combat brigade in a broken up, advisory-type deployment instead of holding or employing that ready and trained combat formation in its intended and designed mission set. A primary purpose of the formal advisory formation creation in the Army was to provide relief to traditional combat units from having to either lose individuals to man ad hoc teams or to expand their readiness when reformed into an advisory-specific deployment. This is still happening, impacting the readiness of the force as a whole.⁶⁷

An option to address this impact on the traditional combat forces is to have a dedicated infantry advisor security brigade (for ease of reference an IASB) assigned for advisory support. This is similar to a traditional infantry brigade combat team structure, slightly modified to remove the cavalry squadron, leaving only three maneuver battalions (either infantry or cavalry in designation) task organised as combat arms security battalion (for ease of reference this formation could be called a CASB). This allows for a coherent command and control and support apparatus inherent in the brigade combat team structure to oversee the training and management of the additional forces. With three battalions, this IASB could support three advisor brigades simultaneously in a high-demand environment, assigning one battalion to a specific

⁶⁵ Potter, *American Advisors*, p. 71.

⁶⁶ Taylor, “Security Force Assistance in an Era.” and Hackett, “SFAB BCT Readiness.”

⁶⁷ Kathleen McDill (Deputy Chief, Army National Guard Readiness and Plans Division, G-3), “SFAB BCT Readiness Impacts” correspondence with author, 23 October 2020, and McCormic, “MMS readiness,” correspondence with Author, 12 November 2020.

advisor brigade, or managing a rotation of battalions for advisor brigade security. Likewise, the artillery battalion in the IASB could support the advisor formations with its artillery batteries. With this structure, the current SFAB inventory of six advisory brigades requires two IASBs to provide habitual aligned security battalion coverage to each active duty SFAB and one CASB assigned to the Army Guard SFAB.

The IASBs would assign each CASB to a specific, regionally aligned SFAB. Assignment of the CASB and one direct support artillery battery to a specific advisor brigade comes with distinct benefits in reoccurring, habitual training, commonality and familiarization of key leader relationships, reporting, and standard operating procedures as well as allowing for rudimentary regionally aligned familiarization for the CASB personnel. This regional familiarization does not exist if the Army continues to randomly pull a traditional infantry battalion from a combat brigade to support an SFAB for a specific deployment. These benefits can be gained through rigorous pre-deployment training, consistent training, and sharing the same deployment cycle as each other, the habitual relationship increases the ability to develop strong institutional bonds between the aligned CASB and its SFAB.

These IASBs could come from either the active-duty Army's conversion of infantry brigade combat teams or they could come from the Army National Guard's infantry brigade combat team conversions or a mix of the components similar to how the SFABs are cross-component. However, it is readily apparent with the current policy of taking Army National Guard brigade combat teams and breaking them up to provide a task organised infantry security battalion leads to the distinct possibility that the Army National Guard could take the mission of creating the IASBs. This approach allows the active component Army's brigade structure to wholly focus on their combat missions. While this is a distinct possibility, it is an important factor to consider having an entire type of formation isolated in one component involves accessibility risk. By not having an element in the active component these formations would lack an active, full-time formation to serve as the flagship and proponent of the formation and immediate, ready access as reserve component units inherently require mobilization time.

Aside from a directly dedicated IASB structure as outlined above, another possibility, which equally supports the mission but allows for additional employment of the infantry formation is the idea of a counterinsurgency (COIN) brigade. This COIN brigade would have soldiers trained and educated in COIN tactics and strategy, while also having them mentally oriented towards the proper mindset to work alongside

advisors and their partners.⁶⁸ Appropriately manned, equipped, and trained, these forces could be deployed in a COIN environment as a whole organic brigade as needed, but also possess the training, mindset, organization, and structure to support advisor formations, allowing one new force structure to address two service deficiencies, as opposed to the singularly focused IASB concept addressing directly only one service need.

The institution of a COIN brigade also brings with it the economy of a dual-purpose mission. In an increasingly fiscally restrained environment for the US military, there is minimal room for force structure growth, in contrast, any new capability comes with a trade – some formation is lost for a new one to exist. By converting a minimum of two infantry combat brigades to a COIN formation the Army could have a COIN trained and prepared formation already ideally trained and structured immediately for those contingencies, but simultaneously a formation readily applicable to support advisory efforts, inherently similar in environment to COIN atmosphere. Again, these formations could come from the active duty or the Army Guard, or ideally a combination of both. They also serve as the flagship formations for preserving and promoting the service's institutional knowledge and experience in COIN operations while also ideally suited to support advisory efforts across the spectrum of conflict. Whereas the IASB concept solves the problem of supporting the SFABs, it does not fully resolve the readiness issue. Since there is no room to grow the force, converting IBCTs in either component to IASBs the force is losing those IBCTs to create advisor support specific IASBs. While this does assist the SFABs with more aligned, habitual support structures and helps the force better focus training by identifying better which forces will do which missions (IBCTs for decisive action and IASBs for advisor support), it still reduces the IBCT force overall.

An additional benefit of having an infantry security force and artillery is these formations provide the partners a conventional American combat force parallel for comparison. This was common in the early days of the Korean advisory effort when the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) teams sometimes “borrowed” nearby American infantry squads or individual soldiers “for demonstration purposes.”⁶⁹

While either new brigade concept provides a tailored solution to the risk to force focus on SFAB employment, it does so still at a cost to the combat brigade community. Without room for growth in size, the Army would have to take from its current force

⁶⁸ Ryan P. Hovatter, “The Need for an IBCT (COIN): Maintaining Focus on an Almost Forgotten Mission,” *Infantry Magazine*, January-March 2018, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, p. 25.

structure to create either brigade-type designed specifically to support SFABs in non-permissive, combat theatres. A residual benefit would be that although this costs the force traditional brigade combat power through converting some of the force to these new advisor support brigades, it limits readiness impacts to training to these converted formations. With these formations, the combat brigades' training and readiness are not impacted by advisory missions, allowing them to consistently focus and prepare for their traditional missions.

Organizational Changes to the Advisory Structure

Another option incorporates the elements the advisory formations take from outside their formation and directly adds them into their force structure, growing the advisory formation to organically include all that it needs. This includes a dedicated security force (roughly an infantry battalion per advisory brigade,) a dedicated artillery battalion (roughly a battery in direct support to each advisory battalion,) and a more robust command and control and support element now that the brigade manages diverse, additional forces. This solution provides the most direct and consolidated command and control relationship between the SFAB and its additional security force.

Adding these additional security capabilities to the SFAB eliminates breaking up and modifying combat brigades to serve as the Operation Inherent Resolve AAB used in the counter-ISIS fight and the requirement of the additional infantry battalion to the SFAB as was done for the Afghanistan SFAB deployments. More robust SFAB organizations with inherent self-protection and support allow for these ready and trained combat brigades to remain prepared and consolidated for their designed mission sets while the SFABs undertake these more dangerous combat advisory missions previously filled by modified combat brigades.

While this provides an applicable solution to mitigating the risk to the SFAB employment by providing additional security to the advisory teams, it still requires a distinct change in force management. Without room for additional force growth, these infantry battalions would come at the expense of the current standing combat units. Virtually two combat brigades would have to be dissolved to provide the requisite infantry battalions to be added to the SFAB formations. Also, these infantry battalions being organically incorporated into the SFABs would be even less flexible than the IASB or COIN Brigade solution for supporting joint force emerging requirements since they are not standalone formations but individual battalions incorporated into the SFABs.

It creates an organic element to the SFAB that, although critical to the risk calculation, is only applicable to SFAB employment during non-permissive, combat theatre deployments. All SFAB deployments in competition and semi-permissive and permissive environments would not need additional security force protection, leaving these assigned infantry battalions without an active mission for the majority of the SFAB use.

In both cases, while creating additional brigade types tailored to support the SFABs or directly adding traditional combat forces into the SFABs for organic security support, there remain some elements still coming from outside the advisory organization, namely theatre-level assets, such as aviation, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, and theatre sustainment support. Making the advisors fully self-contained with organic elements would be both unrealistic and unsustainable within force structure limits and demands, and there are currently no units at the brigade level and below that are supported in perpetuity in such a manner. Rather, they are task organised specifically for deployment. Advisory formations would be treated likewise based on mission requirements, these recommendations focused on the additional security aspect demand on the combat brigades to address a risk to force focus on the SFAB impact to combat brigade readiness and training.

Conclusion

Army combat brigade readiness remains negatively impacted by fulfilling out-of-design advisory missions even after the creation of advisory-specific formations, and through providing support to SFABs deployed in non-permissive, combat theatres for additional protection. As it stands, a brigade combat team is consumed with the AAB mission to Iraq and another brigade combat team to the JMTG-U mission, if it continues. For each brigade combat team mission, three brigade combat teams' readiness is affected – the one preparing for the mission, the one conducting the mission, and the one refitting from the mission. Even with the creation of specifically manned, trained, and equipped advisory formations such as the SFAB, conventional brigade combat teams are still being used for these missions. Additionally, with the current model, every SFAB deployed to a non-permissive environment consumes at minimum a conventional brigade combat team's infantry battalion. If in a large-scale conventional advisory contingency where all six SFABs are involved, that would consume roughly two full brigade combat teams' worth of conventional infantry battalions in protection roles. Likewise, in a non-permissive environment, SOF advisors teams are now consuming conventional infantry battalions for protection, varying force

size based on SOF footprint, roughly an infantry squad per SOF detachment. In an era of growing great power competition, the maximising of building and holding available readiness is paramount, emphasising the need to resolve the impacts on their readiness through the effective and efficient use of advisory formations.

The question of how to resolve the issue of combat brigade impacts from advisory missions and support is encapsulated in a discussion of risk to force and risk to mission management by the theatre commanders. While three broad solutions present themselves including accepting greater risk to advisory operations by not providing additional force protection and emphasising reliance on partner force support and relationships; creating additional force structure brigades designed to specifically support advisory missions; or adding identified additional force structure organically to the advisor organizations directly addressing the risks, the assumption of more mitigated risk is best. In a fiscally limited environment with no indication of new force growth, working with what the service already has is the most effective. With the acceptance of elevated risk to the highly selective, trained, and experienced advisory teams, this option allows the current combat structure to focus on training and conserve readiness for core traditional functions. Both formations benefit, with the combat forces' undistracted focus and preparation for great power competition and the advisory teams able to build stronger rapport through trust and deeper relationships based on shared dangers and reliance between advisors and their partners.

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