Building Intelligence Capacity

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While the United States military successfully trained select elements of foreign armies throughout its history, it is not the primary mission of the Armed Forces of the United States to recruit, equip, and prepare the defense forces of other nations. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the exit strategy of the United States and its Allies was the recruitment, preparation, and employment of host nation forces. Unfortunately, Coalition Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines were not properly prepared for these tasks and due to a lack of cultural understanding, incorrect evaluation criteria and measures of effectiveness, the amount of time available to complete the mission, and the type of trainers and advisors selected, the results were poor and slow to develop.

The most glaring failure in both Iraq and Afghanistan was the inability of Coalition military personnel to grasp the cultural differences between themselves and those they were directed to prepare to conduct counterinsurgency and internal defense operations. Specifically, the social, economic, and technological limitations in these countries, particularly the low literacy rates and educational levels of the population, had a direct impact on the operational readiness and capability of the local forces. This caused timelines to lengthen and forced training to be modified or revised.

In Afghanistan, materials and resources to support both the Dari and Pashtu language were required to successfully train recruits. Due to legislated quotas

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regarding the make-up of the Afghan Army, large numbers of Southern Pashtuns were brought into the training base. The majority of these recruits were illiterate and spoke only Pashtu. To ensure training continued, introductory reading and writing materials were developed and all courses were conducted in both Dari and Pashtu. These modifications required the allocation of extra time to complete basic training, individual job training, and unit collective training and resulted in additional costs for personnel and materials as well as to conduct training and operations.

Progress was also hindered by the addition of unnecessary requirements and the creation of complex systems that were too complicated to be understood, maintained, or implemented by host nation personnel. Instead of recognizing and accepting Afghan capabilities and limitations, the US and its Allies forced their own familiar processes and expectations upon a government and military that could not comprehend or sustain them. For example, over 10,000 vehicles were purchased to support a light infantry army. However, the Coalition overlooked the fact that while competent and capable drivers and mechanics are commonplace in the ranks of Western Armies, they are virtually non-existent in Afghanistan. Not to mention, that the money required to purchase repair parts and the fuel to sustain them must be programmed and available after Coalition departure. If that alone was not enough, tens of thousands of computers and printers were bought for security forces, but less than ten percent of the Soldiers and Police Officers were familiar with how to use them. In addition, none of the computer and printer manufacturers were the same and the disparate number and type of printer cartridges did not support bulk purchasing or sustainment over time. In the

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end, training centers were built, vehicle fleets purchased, and IT systems installed that quickly fell into disrepair, were misused, or failed to improve the situation on the ground.

Military professionalism is not the cornerstone of third world militaries. The failure of strategic leaders to understand and take into account the very principle that makes the US and Western militaries so unique and invincible is astounding. Commanders in the West expect Soldiers to take care of their subordinates and assigned equipment, follow orders, and not to be influenced by those outside the chain of command. However, when Iraqi or Afghan senior leaders argued that new vehicles, equipment, and supplies would end up on the black market, that Soldiers would not return from leave until after the planting season, and that political influence would dictate the outcome of a particular course of action, those same commanders failed to plan for or comprehend the impact on training and operations. The time, money, momentum and lives lost because the Coalition did not understand the culture of those they stood "Shona ba Shona" with led to feelings of disillusionment on both sides.

The Unit Status Report is a tool used by the US Army to evaluate personnel, training, and equipment readiness levels of its Brigade Combat Teams. It is an excellent way for Western militaries to assess themselves, but fails to accurately judge third world forces who should be compared to one another not the US or NATO. Better evaluation criteria for Iraq and Afghanistan are military effectiveness and the ability of the security force to prosecute operations and employ itself. As was seen in both Iraq and Afghanistan, until the host nation force was required to operate in the lead or independently, there was little effort on the host nation's part to perform. The longer a

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Western Army avoids focusing on advice and assistance, the longer the host nation's strategic and tactical level leadership will remain underdeveloped and untested. When Coalition Forces ensure on time delivery, Iraqi and Afghan logistic and maintenance requirements are not stretched or stressed. Whether training, maintenance, or execution is evaluated, if host nation forces are not held accountable for shortfalls, they will avoid responsibility. Unfortunately, very few times in the past decade has the teacher been allowed to let the student learn by failing due to the political pressure to succeed.

Technology may be a force multiplier for Western militaries, but it not trusted or willingly used by pre-industrial militaries. More importantly, it is not required for success on the battlefield. When developing force structure, fielding equipment, and designing systems and training for third world militaries, Western powers must step out of their comfort zone and deliberately avoid the tendency to give them what "we" have or what "they" want. For example, the US Army would never fight without Unmanned Aerial Vehicles on today's battlefield, but providing the same to the Afghan National Army in order to defeat the Taliban is unnecessary and ill advised. Finding recruits capable of employing these assets, obtaining the money to maintain them, and building a communications infrastructure to share the data was not within the realm of the possible. In addition, forcing a computer based 21st century logistics and supply system on a population that is mostly uneducated and not familiar with computers as a whole makes no sense. It is even more ridiculous when the host nation is perfectly capable of maintaining accountability of equipment and tracking the status of parts with pencil and paper and has done so very efficiently and effectively for decades. In the end, ease of

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use, affordability, and sustainment capability must be the standard for building host nation armies.

Time is critical to the success of training host nation forces. Time is required to build trust. Time is required to build relationships. Most importantly, time is required to allow the host nation to gain the confidence necessary to conduct training and execute operations for themselves. When the host nation cannot fight or perform a task on their own or does not want to follow a process that has been forced upon them, they will stop doing it as soon as the Western power departs. If, after twelve years of nation building that is the desired end state, then not only has the West failed miserably, but the lives lost and money spent have been wasted.

There are three important things that must be addressed to improve the likelihood of success. First, the length of combat tours for those working for training organizations in Afghanistan are very short and often work against what is trying to be accomplished. Every time a new trainer or advisor is introduced, there is a period of time required to establish confidence between the advisor and advisee. In many cases, by the time a positive relationship is built, it is time to depart. This constant stopping and starting does not allow any progress to be made and significantly reduces the accountability placed upon host nation units and their Soldiers.

Second, the pre-deployment selection and training process for trainers and advisors is critical to mission accomplishment. Selecting the wrong person to teach, coach, and partner with host nation forces has the potential to reduce the credibility of the US and its Allies in the eyes of the local military and civilian population. Every

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Soldier does not possess the ability to train another nation's Soldiers; they may not have the right background, temperament, or skill set. The bottom line is, if the trainers and advisors do not understand training and advising, the potential coaches and mentors will spend half their tour learning what they should have already been teaching or advising their counterpart to do.

Third, we must not fall victim to the belief that the only good military force is one that looks like us. We must recognize that complexity does not add value when the force being built is one of the most illiterate in the world. We must understand that sustaining large numbers of personnel and large amounts of equipment requires food, fuel, and electricity. Those same things must be cared for and paid for by the host nation at some point. If we are not realistic in our outcomes from the beginning, the systems we build will not be accepted and will fail. Simple programs that focus on quality and performance will defeat those that focus on quantity without standards every time.

In the past, training foreign militaries was a niche operation for Special Forces and mercenaries. Today, it is a core mission of US and Western militaries. In order to be successful, Western personnel sent abroad must not only understand the culture of those they are attempting to train, they must recognize the host nation's strengths, weaknesses, and limitations as well as the time it will take to get them to perform the tasks to a predetermined level of proficiency. In the end, strategic level decision makers must determine if it is more cost effective to attempt to make the host nation look like a

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Western army or help them achieve a level of expertise that allows them to maintain their sovereignty and protect their citizens from terrorists, revolutionaries, and thugs.

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