"We're fighting an intelligence war."

A Strategic-Level Intelligence Advisor's Lessons Learned

Welton Chang

Welton Chang is a Defense Department analyst. He was a senior civilian advisor to Iraq's National Intelligence Cell in 2011. He served as an Active Component Army intelligence officer from 2005 to 2009. He holds a B.A. from Dartmouth College and is an M.A. candidate in security studies at Georgetown University. He is also an associate fellow at the Truman National Security Project.

PHOTO: U.S. Army LTC David Haugh, center, from Security Forces Advisory Team, speaks with Afghan village elders and Afghan Border Police regarding additional security checkpoints in the local area during Operation Koranai Permakhtag in Bora Jengi, Afghanistan, 22 December 2010. (U.S. Army, SPC Ian Schell)

"**H**OW WE PERFORM will determine whether we win against the terrorists. We're fighting an intelligence war," said Major General Hasan Daim Rasan al-Burhami, director of Iraq's National Intelligence Cell, to a conference room full of Iraqi intelligence officers representing several agencies.

As U.S. forces in Iraq shifted focus to advise-and-assist efforts, success in Operation New Dawn now equated to the success of Iraqi Security Forces in securing the population and defeating the insurgency.

While valuable for guidance during deployment and developed for primarily tactical-level use, U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, fell short in providing insight for the optimal conduct of strategic intelligence advising.

We learned many good strategies through trial and error and from other advisors who worked with us in Iraq. The observations offered here come from the experiences of numerous military and civilian advisors to Iraqi intelligence agencies from late 2010 through 2011 during Operation New Dawn.

Predeployment Preparation

Understanding the host nation's society, culture, and language is important. A one-hour cultural awareness class will not prepare an intelligence advisor for deployment. Spend the time to understand the history, traditions, and contemporary issues facing the host nation; they provide the context for why things are the way they are. How your host nation partners phrase their responses to you and the nuances in their statements convey meanings that you will miss if you do not understand their cultural context. For example, an Iraqi may not actually agree with you, but will frequently do so out of politeness. When he does agree with you, he may say he really agrees. The nuance almost certainly will be lost if you do not understand Iraqi conversational subtleties.

(U.S. Marine Corps, Sgt Marcy Sanchez)

U.S. Marine Corps LCpl Dylan F. Bodkin takes notes during a Dari language course at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, CA, 22 March 2011.

Advisors should have language training prior to deployment, not only to read documents but also to be able to build rapport by using key phrases in appropriate situations. This kind of language training is difficult and resource-intensive, but critical to the success of the mission. Advisors encounter hundreds of pages of written material produced by their partners every day. Not being able to comprehend the gist of a page impedes an advisor's effectiveness. It is inefficient to rely on an interpreter for basic language needs.

If you must rely on interpreters, be sure the interpreters understand the language, local dialect, and culture and know how to use an interpreter effectively. We learned the importance of dialectical differences when we once issued invitations for a senior leader conference that instructed invitees to wear their casual underwear (not casual military attire) to the event. Our counterparts preferred to deal with interpreters who spoke the Iraqi dialect, not the Levantine dialect our interpreters used.

On the other hand, your interpreters may be able to build a special type of rapport with host nation counterparts that you will be unable to do. Many interpreters stay in theater for years through several advisory team rotations and become the organization's institutional memory. Some interpreters have the authority to relay information to counterparts and "massage" language used by the advisory team. However, it is essential to guard against overreach by striking a balance between giving an interpreter leeway to use his professional judgment and restricting him to specific "lanes in the road." Used properly, interpreters and cultural advisors will greatly amplify advisors' capabilities.

Before they arrive in country, leaders should know a great deal about the intelligence agency they are going to support (its mission, purpose, echelon, interagency responsibilities, mandates, key leaders, and so forth). At a minimum, the advisor team should have an understanding of who the agency's customers are and how the agency has been accomplishing its mission. Advisors should

also determine what projects previous advisors succeeded or failed at, if there were previous advisors. An advisor must learn the truth on the ground, modify his understanding as required, and continually reevaluate it throughout the mission.

Train as a team before deploying and stay together through the deployment. Combat zones and other nonpermissive or semipermissive environments are not ideal locations for advisory teams to complete their "forming, storming, norming, and performing" phases of team development. If possible, teams should train together *before* they deploy so they can develop team chemistry before putting boots on ground. Teams also should be tactically proficient in shooting, driving, convoy operations, and combat casualty care; know what to do in a kidnapping scenario; and be able to defend themselves in a hostile area.

We were not able to train as a team before we began our mission, so we had to learn each other's personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of expertise after we arrived in Baghdad. Our team consisted of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Special Forces personnel, and State Department and Defense Department civilians and contractors. Team members had differing predeployment training pipelines (although at a minimum we all met general Central Command requirements). Only a few of us had received training in Arabic or had experience in foreign security force assistance and working with interpreters. Each team member had a different level of experience in intelligence; a few possessed an analytic background, and some had worked with Iraqis before, but only a few of us had previous knowledge of the Iraqi intelligence system. We spent valuable time assessing team members' core competencies and integrating them into the team effort. We could have better capitalized on our time if we had conducted predeployment training together, using a tailored curriculum.

U.S. advisory team leaders should remain in command throughout the deployment. Due to circumstances beyond our control, our team leadership rotated out every three months or so in 2011 after a period of relative stability on the team. This caused numerous problems. The Iraqi director became frustrated at repeating himself and seeing advisors not living up to the promises (sometimes reasonable, sometimes not) made by previous advisory team leaders.

Developing a Plan of Action

Find the balance between rapport building and mission execution. The effectiveness of advisory efforts depends on the strength of the relationship the advisory team has with its partner agency. Developing rapport is especially important at the beginning of the advisory relationship. Friendships help facilitate projects. The advisory team should collocate with its host nation counterparts as much as force protection considerations allow. The team should share the same hardships and challenges as the partner force. In addition, when time-sensitive or ad hoc requirements arise, the advisory team will be nearby to assist. This is not possible if the team resides on a U.S.-only compound far away. Simply dropping in on an organization two or three times a week to socialize is not enough; the partner agency should come to see the U.S. advisory team as another "department" within its organization, fully integrated into areas where it can make a difference.

Respect your counterparts' time, and establish a clear purpose for engagement before execution. Your counterparts are professional intelligence officers who need to satisfy both their policymakers and their customers. Your advisory efforts should not interfere with their ability to complete essential tasks. Ensuring your advice adds value will make any time with counterparts time well spent. Building rapport is essential, but once you have done so, you must strike a balance between personal and work-related conversations. It is easy to cross the line from value-added to time-wasted, although the moment that the line is crossed is sometimes not readily apparent. In many non-American cultures, it is extremely rude to tell a guest that you are busy or that other tasks take precedence over talking to him. In addition, it is easy for us Americans to misinterpret Iraqi cultural obligations as an innate enthusiasm for long discussions. Providing meals and gifts to guests is often obligatory in Arab culture, and an advisor who receives them should not regard them as proof that his advisory efforts are succeeding.

During our time in country, we learned of several incidents where advisors crossed the line from being personable to being distracting. For example, Iraqi intelligence officers at one agency told us that they were considering barring another group of U.S. advisors from the agency compound because they never did anything but make small talk for hours on

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end. The Iraqis were planning to tell the guards at the front gate not to let this group of U.S. advisors onto their compound. Despite this situation, this group of advisors continued to brief their leaders daily about their accomplishments and the good rapport they had with their Iraqi counterparts.

There were also success stories. Some Iraqi officers who were initially apprehensive about forming relationships with U.S. personnel became like family to our team. Change was not initially welcome, but after we demonstrated the value of our advice, the Iraqi analysts became more open to it.

When asked for help, help. You, your advisory team, or higher echelons may envision how the host nation intelligence service should conduct business and what it can become. You should develop that vision together with your partners. Too often, we allow such visions to override the more legitimate concerns of our counterparts, many of whom are at risk because they interact with us. If your counterpart comes to you with a legitimate concern, do not dismiss it simply because it does not fit within your "agenda." Helping your counterparts with the things they value can help encourage their support for your plan.

Sometimes the guidance from our leaders was not in our counterparts' best interests. For example, our leaders wanted information about upcoming demonstrations while our counterparts were interested in discussing the recent spate of assassinations of Iraqi government and security officials in Baghdad. We recognized that we needed to be responsive to our chain of command but we found discussions and engagements were most fruitful when we talked about our counterparts' priorities.

Prioritize objectives and initiatives; do not try to solve everyone's problems all the time. Measure results, not actions. Advisory efforts must have focus to be successful. Overall strategy should arise from careful analysis of the challenges facing the host nation intelligence service. You can focus scarce resources by prioritizing and carefully choosing which objectives to reach for. Initiatives take a long time to accomplish because you have to work through foreign security force issues and your own issues, while trying to solve the problem at hand. Advisory teams often assume that constant activity is a sure path to success, but in fact, *results define success*. Do not become a victim of the "good idea fairy." Hold advisory teams accountable for sustainable results to prevent overreaching.

Know where you want to go, know how you want to get there, and prepare for setbacks. Even a well thought-out plan may not get you to your desired end state. You and your partner agency may encounter obstacles. Working in a combat zone makes everything more difficult, and collaborative projects take at least three times as long to complete as projects handled unilaterally. For example, a lack of Iraqi funding once delayed acquisition of a data system. Then, U.S. advisors did not know which system would be best for the Iraqis. Finally, when our Iraqi counterparts came up with the funds for 90 percent of the costs, the vendor was unwilling to change the terms of the contract and insisted that they pay the full costs from the original contract.

Intel Lessons Learned

Use examples to show why new methods will solve problems. New solutions should be replicable and not create more problems than they solve. Inefficiencies exist in every organization, and can cause major problems. Existing processes are sometimes the result of tradition, culture, or bureaucratic overgrowth. Changing them requires host nation buy-in. Achieving buy-in requires building strong personal relationships and demonstrating that change adds value. Examples help to illustrate how changing an existing process will eliminate a problem. When advising partners on the use of structured analytic

techniques, practical exercises are important. Analysts readily accepted techniques such as Team A and Team B, Red Teaming, and Alternate Futures Analysis when advisors applied them to a high priority topic such as insurgent assassinations or threats against critical infrastructure. Even though the analysts had been taught these techniques before, they never used them until the advisory team demonstrated their value. Synchronize training engagements with the overall capacity-building strategy. The overarching strategy should establish clear guidance on what to accomplish.

You are more likely to achieve buy-in from your counterparts by showing tangible gains from changing the process. In the best of cases, you may only have to point out that the problem exists, and the partner organization will decide to try to solve it. Advisors should not create a relationship that makes the host nation depend on advisor team solutions. An internally resourced solution reduces dependence on U.S. efforts and can be an enduring one.

Instead of providing maps and imagery to our counterparts, we encouraged them to fulfill their needs by collaborating with another Iraqi agency's imagery and mapping directorate. We could have simply handed over the imagery ourselves; however, we knew the easiest route was not always the best route. Advisors should remember that externally resourced solutions sometimes have unintended consequences. While a workaround or stopgap measure may suffice while the advisory team is in place, the goal should be to achieve enduring solutions.

Avoid jargon when you are writing training materials or correspondence. Intelligence doctrine and training materials are full of U.S. military jargon and technical terms such as "fusion" or "Ground Moving Target Indicator" or "time-dominant." Choose your words carefully when writing and speaking for translation to your host nation counterparts. An interpreter can mistranslate jargon with grave or comic consequences. We were once embarrassed to discover that our interpreters mistranslated "predictive analysis" as "fortune telling"! After we drafted a document on trends analysis, one of our translators asked us why we were writing about clothing styles. He had mistranslated "trends" as "fashion." We also encountered several instances where surface-to-air fire (SAFIRE) was mistranslated as small arms fire (SAF)!

Even spending more time with linguists to teach them the right terminology to use may not produce the results you are looking for because interpreters and translators are not intelligence experts; in our experience, it was always best to avoid jargon and stick with basic terms.

Don't feel compelled to force impossible standards on your counterparts. One of our Iraqi advisees once informed us that he was writing an intelligence product to depict a neighboring country in a negative light. It should come as no surprise that partner intelligence organizations do not always perform analysis that conforms to Intelligence Community Directive 203 standards. If such analysis provides policymakers with insight and information of a sufficient quality to make a good decision, then the analysis is good enough. While an advisor should try to improve a partner's tradecraft, argumentation skills, report structure, and writing abilities, he should not expect overnight change or the sudden achievement of the analytic gold standard.

Changing the way people think about and approach problems is most effective when efforts are incremental and slow. For example, in 2009, the Iraqi prime minister established the National Intelligence Cell (NIC) in response to a series of high-profile, vehicle-borne, improvised explosive device attacks in Baghdad. The ensuing investigation found that all Iraqi intelligence agencies had

U.S. service members of the Security Forces Advisory Team, 3rd Zone Afghan Border Police, prepare for a patrol during Operation Koranai Permakhtag, Zabul Province, Afghanistan, 25 December 2010. (U.S. Army SPC Ian Schell)

pieces of information regarding the attacks but none had shared the information. Although it took more than a year to become accepted within the community, the resulting intelligence community message dissemination capability that the NIC provided changed the way Iraqi agencies functioned. While not yet performing daily collaboration, each agency now has at least a basic common intelligence picture.

Lessons Learned and Tips for Advisors

The advisor's mind-set and knowledge base is critical to mission success. While no one mind-set is ideal, certain traits do make some advisors more successful than others. Not all competent leaders are cut out to be advisors. Some extremely talented persons make poor advisors because they are impatient and unable to communicate their expertise in a way that their foreign counterparts can understand. Being flexible, culturally aware, conversationally adept, and patient are traits that help make advisors successful.

This is not to say that introverts are never successful or that extroverts always are. Our advisor team had a mix of personalities. We quickly learned to put team members in the positions for which they were best suited. Our introverted members gradually built-up their comfort level in advising and presented detailed, well thought-out plans to their counterparts. Our extroverted members helped guide them by sharing their established relationships with counterparts as well as learning more patient advising methods.

At the end of the day, our counterparts respected us most for our subject-matter expertise. Because of the ad hoc nature of some organizations, personnel assigned to advisory teams were not always experts in intelligence disciplines relevant to the host nation. While these advisors provided value-added input to the team, their lack of expertise forced them to rely on others to train, mentor, and advise their counterparts. Nonexperts must develop a network of persons they can rely on to channel intelligence expertise to their clients. If nonexperts act as though they were experts, they may ultimately do more harm than good.

(U.S. Army,SPC Ian Schell)

Members of the Security Forces Advisory Team gather for a quick briefing before performing a dismounted patrol through Storianna, Afghanistan, 22 December 2010.

When I first began advising, one of the senior Iraqi analysts I worked with asked me where I had obtained my college degree, had I previously served in Iraq, and how many years of analytic experience I had. He said previous advisors had wasted his time by teaching him the same basic analysis courses that he had participated in for years. Unspoken between us was his hope, as well as a subtle challenge, that I would not do the same. As I counseled him on approaches to structuring analytic papers, constructing arguments, properly selecting and weighing evidence, and writing predictive analysis, he came to rely on me for advice on special reports the director had requested. At the end of my tour of duty when I told him that I was leaving, he put his hands on his hips, visibly upset, and told me this was "unacceptable" because I still had much knowledge and analytic tradecraft to impart. I also felt a certain pride that a man initially hostile to any advisory presence was fighting to keep me around. By demonstrating my value, I convinced an obstinate analyst to actively learn and adopt advanced analytic methods that he otherwise would not have considered or been able to access.

Do not promise what you are not sure you can deliver. Be sure your actions match your words and vice versa. Do not make promises you may not be able to keep. The host nation may make requests outside the original scope of the advise-and-assist mission. Advisors should be especially careful about how they phrase their responses to such requests. Use qualified language such as "I will try" or "Let me look into that." This is particularly important when it comes to acquiring resources, as advisory missions are not always the best equipped and resourced. Similarly, if your partner agency makes a promise to you, hold the agency to it, but do not be surprised when they break a promise to you. Still, know that allowing this to become a common occurrence will damage advisory efforts. Everyone in the advisor-advisee relationship must understand that accountability is critical to mission success.

Advisors should also clearly state when they cannot support a request. Be knowledgeable about a request before replying to a client and buy time by performing the groundwork to address the topic later. For example, to avoid losing rapport with a client when faced with a difficult or impossible task, tell your client, "I'll research it, but this is difficult.

> *"Progress" in advisory missions is rarely measurable on a daily basis. Headquarters asked us to provide weekly "wins," but advisors never "win"; they help their partner agency succeed.*

I will look into it and speak with you more about it next week."

Advice to Leaders

Be engaged and allow subordinates the freedom to maneuver. Headquarters should be engaged and give their subordinate elements space to operate without unnecessary interference. Headquarters must strike a balance between simply maintaining situational awareness and micromanaging the mission. If your leaders are not working as advisors themselves, they should make every attempt to understand the cultural and institutional challenges faced by their subordinates and strive to resource and equip their subordinates to the best of their ability.

Our headquarters element gave our team numerous reporting requirements, including participating in two daily meetings and writing daily and weekly reports, and two sets of biweekly and monthly reports, all in different formats. An engaged, sympathetic headquarters element can diminish the need for such requirements. "Progress" in advisory missions is rarely measurable on a daily basis. Headquarters asked us to provide weekly "wins," but advisors never "win"; they help their partner agency succeed.

Coordination and collaboration with other advisory teams can prevent miscommunication, misunderstandings, and duplication of effort. Advisors do not work in a vacuum. Other advisors, possibly from other services and agencies, often work in close proximity on related projects. Advisors must interact with other advisory teams. Sometimes, host nation security and intelligence organizations have uncooperative attitudes because of competing interests. Advisors should avoid reflecting these quarrels, synchronize their efforts with other teams,

and ensure their efforts complement existing efforts. Cooperation among teams helps complete broad, government-wide initiatives such as developing an Iraqi intelligence collection management system. Interagency infighting could also cause Iraqis to play one set of advisors off against another. Ideally, all advisors should fall within the same chain of command to achieve unity of effort.

During my tour, another advisory team began a concerted effort to procure copies of *Jane's Defense Weekly* for their Iraqi counterparts. The Iraqi officers were interested in the weaponry in neighboring countries' inventory. For several weeks, the U.S. team worked to transfer manuals from various places in the United States to Iraq. Then, another U.S. team told them that the same Iraqis had asked them for *Jane's* as well, and they had already purchased new copies of the manuals for the Iraqis. If the teams had communicated more frequently, they might have avoided this duplication of effort.

Advising at the strategic level sometimes means you are at the mercy of the vagaries of national politics. Advising a national-level agency means navigating around, between, and through political obstacles ranging from budget battles to party affiliations. Unfortunately, our leaders could not mitigate the influence of host nation politics on our advisory efforts. For instance, talks about merging two governmental organizations stalled when the discussion turned to who would lead the new organization. Everyone on the committee agreed that the merged element would tremendously benefit Iraq by providing centralized information and command and control during crises. However, the newly merged organization would only need one leader. The more capable administrator of the two organizations was a politically neutral military officer. The less capable administrator was a politically connected and influential civilian. A deadlock ensued and in the end, the merger was called off.

Helping U.S. Partners

Intelligence advising in security force assistance is a critical capability the United States needs to retain for the near future. With increasing DOD financial restrictions, we must be more efficient to get the most value out of our expenditures. In his *Foreign Affairs* article "Helping Others Defend Themselves," former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated, "In coming years, the greatest threats to the United States are likely to emanate from states that cannot adequately govern themselves or secure their own territory. The U.S. government must improve its ability to help its partners defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside U.S. troops."**MR**