



(Photo by Spc. Luther L. Boothe Jr., 4th Brigade Combat Team PAO, 101st Airborne Division)

Spec. David A. Bryan, a combat medic with 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, checks an Afghan National Army combat medic's aid bag during a class provided by U.S. Army medics 27 September 2009 at Combat Outpost Munoz, Afghanistan. Bryan took the time to go through each item in the bag, explained the importance of carrying only the items needed while on patrol, and replenished the medic's bag with new supplies.

# The Advisor and the Brigade Combat Team Toward an Enduring Solution for an Enduring Requirement

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In August 2010, the 4th Brigade Combat Team “Currahees,” 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) deployed to Regional Command-East (RC-East) as one of the first brigade combat teams (BCTs) augmented with additional advising personnel for security force assistance (SFA) in Afghanistan. Using this new model, the Army assigned several dozen personnel—commissioned officers from captains through colonels and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs)—to the BCT during the intensive training period of Army force generation (ARFORGEN), centrally trained them as combat advisors, then deployed them as an integrated part of the formation. This change represented a shift from the Military Transition Team (MiTT) concept; it is the next evolution of the Army’s approach to organizing units for SFA.

In May 2013, 4th BCT again deployed to RC-East, augmented in much the same manner with additional officers and NCOs to serve as the foundation of the brigade’s advising effort. In fact, 4th BCT was the last BCT to advise and assist at the subprovincial or infantry *kandak* (battalion) level, as the focus was shifted to the Afghan Army, corps level and higher. In this regard, the Currahees have seen the model of the BCT augmented for security force assistance (SFA) through its entire life cycle in Afghanistan. As Army leaders determine how to organize for advising foreign security forces (FSF) going forward while maintaining full-spectrum capability, a closer examination of 4th BCT’s experience is useful.

Having deployed with the BCT in 2010 as an augmentee combat advisor and again in 2013 as the BCT operations officer, I have had a unique opportunity to gain a variety of perspectives on this topic. Despite the differing roles, however, I have grappled with the same questions every time: Will conventional Army forces retain this type of mission post-Afghanistan? Is a BCT the right formation for advising missions in Afghanistan and elsewhere? If so, how should the BCT organize for SFA or related building-partner-capacity missions? Are we doing the right things to select and train officers and NCOs to be advisors?

This article attempts to address these critical questions, concluding that the mission is here to stay, and the BCT, augmented and task-organized as the mission demands, is still the right approach to SFA. In

order to realize the full potential of the model, however, the Army should formalize the process for selecting, training, and managing the careers of advisors.

## Competing Concepts

Discussions of institutionalizing advising capability in the Army often start with mention of John Nagl’s 2007 proposal for a permanent advisor corps.<sup>1</sup> With a 20,000-strong formation commanded by a lieutenant general and organized exclusively for advising FSF, the advisor corps arguably occupies one end of the spectrum of solutions with respect to cost and scale. Another concept, developed by the Army but determined in 2008 not to be an Army requirement, was the Theater Military Advisory and Assistance Group, or TMAAG. The TMAAG concept proposed a smaller organization, tailor-made for advising, and assigned to the geographic combatant commands (GCCs), under the respective Army Service component commands.<sup>2</sup> As an indicator of the direction in which the Army was moving, the desire to retain the BCT as the focus of our advising efforts was cited as the reason for the chief of staff of the Army’s decision to abandon the TMAAG.<sup>3</sup> Published in 2009, Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, established the BCT as the formation of choice for SFA, able to be augmented with advisors but also retaining “the capability to conduct full spectrum operations—offense, defense, and stability.”<sup>4</sup>

## Will we ever do this again?

While the United States is unlikely to take on another large-scale, prolonged stability operation in the near future, the tempo of training and advising missions with FSF will likely continue to increase. Witness the sizable training and advising component to coalition operations to defeat ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), Operation Inherent Resolve. Of the 10 primary missions of the U.S. Armed Forces listed in the 2012 Department of Defense strategic guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, three of the missions (counter terrorism and irregular warfare, provide a stabilizing presence, and conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations) explicitly mention either SFA, building partner capacity, or military-to-military cooperation.<sup>5</sup> The guidance does not restrict these activities to the





(Photo by Sgt. Timothy Kingston, 3rd Infantry Division PAO)

Pfc. John Henry, from the 0832 Military Transition Team, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, helps train Iraqi Army soldiers from the 2nd Light Infantry Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 8th Army Division, at Battle Position Eagle in Tanmiya, Iraq, 14 February 2008.

domain of special operations forces, and the 2013 Army Posture Statement provides further reinforcement to this fact, stating that the regionally aligned forces that will provide these capabilities to the combatant commanders will be drawn from the Total Force.<sup>6</sup>

## Is the BCT the right formation, and how should it organize?

Given the current budget-constrained environment and the ongoing reduction in the size of the force, it is not surprising that discussions about creating large, entirely new organizations have all but ceased. Even the regionally aligned forces concept, which allocates and apportions corps, divisions, and brigades to a GCC, retains the BCT as the centerpiece unit—a utility player able to be tailored as the mission dictates. 2nd BCT, 1st Armored Division, supporting United States Africa

Command (AFRICOM) in 2013, is one such example. Subsequent to establishment, it has conducted capacity-building missions with units as small as several dozen soldiers in more than 30 nations.<sup>7</sup>

In Afghanistan, where MiTTs had operated previously under reporting chains separate from the battlespace owner, who was typically a BCT commander, there was a cost in terms of unity of effort.<sup>8</sup> Since 2010, however, BCTs have deployed with their own advisor augmentation. In this way, the commander is able to harness the considerable mission command capabilities resident in a brigade as well as meet other needs of advisor teams, such as logistics and security. This model also lends considerable flexibility to commanders when organizing for the mission. When 4th BCT deployed in 2010, the entire BCT had advisor teams assigned at either the brigade or battalion level, depending on the echelon of Afghan unit being advised.

For the brigade's next deployment in 2013, the unit was under significant force cap constraints, requiring that several thousand soldiers remain at home. In the intervening years, the mission had also evolved. The decisive operation was now building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces. With this new focus in mind, we organized the BCT around our advisor teams, which included both augmentees assigned earlier in the ARFORGEN cycle as well as soldiers organic to the BCT.

Having observed numerous brigades deploy since then, each one has organized its advisors and organic units differently based on its own unique advising requirements. The one constant is the necessity for great flexibility to analyze a complex problem, task-organize accordingly, and then remain flexible as the campaign progresses—a capability that single-use advising formations would be hard pressed to replicate.

## How should we select and train advisors?

One solution to the problem of selecting and training FSF advisors is for units assigned such missions to use their organic personnel. In the case of some very limited-scale engagements, this may fit the bill. However, an SFA mission need not be on a large scale, such as that of advising the Afghan Army, to require

that brigades be augmented with additional specialized personnel to serve as advisors.

For example, while a mission-tailored BCT or subordinate unit is well suited to a variety of SFA and other building-partner-capacity requirements, one drawback is the frequent mismatch of ranks and skills needed for the purpose of direct counterpart advising and mentoring. When Army forces are actively participating in combat operations in a *partnered* rather than *advising* capacity, as was the case in Afghanistan until several years ago, the organic formation may suit just fine.<sup>9</sup> However, when the mission is primarily advising, as was the case recently with 4th BCT, there exists a much greater focus on one-on-one interaction between advisors and host-nation key leaders and staffs. As a result, such situations call for a more top-heavy organization with larger complements of officers and senior NCOs than are organic to a BCT. This requirement has compelled the Army to augment BCTs with additional officers and senior NCOs, as discussed earlier.

When the Currahees deployed in 2010, the unit was augmented with approximately 40 additional

personnel, including myself, to serve as advisors. Some of us volunteered for the assignment. Others were picked by their respective branches based on a variety of factors, of which demonstrated potential to serve as a combat advisor did not appear to be included. The BCT's deployment was part of the surge of forces to Afghanistan, stressing the personnel system to provide anyone to augment the BCT, much less a carefully selected group arriving early in the ARFORGEN cycle.

Compounding the issue of whether an individual selected for advisor duty actually had the temperament or potential to serve effectively was the short timeline for deployment and the relatively superficial training given. For example, my cohort arrived at Fort Campbell during the BCT's predeployment block leave with just enough time to attend the two-week Advisor Academy at Fort Polk and to complete other required theater-specific training and administrative tasks before deploying on the BCT's last main-body flight.

Similar challenges seemed to persist over time. Two years later, in the summer of 2012, the BCT



(Photo by Sgt. Eric Provost, 10th Mountain Division PAO)

Staff Sgt. David Flores provides a final safety briefing to his students from 4th Brigade, 201st Afghan National Army Corps, to kick off the final day of their monthlong 60 mm mortar system training course 8 January 2014 at Forward Operating Base Gamberi. Flores, who hails from Agaña Heights, Guam, serves as a mortar system lead trainer with 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment.



was again executing the intensive training cycle of ARFORGEN. With about nine months remaining prior to the next deployment to Afghanistan, the BCT had already begun to receive its complement of advisor personnel. This lead time enabled the formation to integrate the advisor teams at the brigade and battalion/squadron level, train with them at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and deploy as units tailored for the mission. However, while this change represented a vast improvement over the previous iteration, much had remained the same. All evidence indicated that the personnel system had used much the same selection process to determine who would augment the BCT as advisors, and, other than training conducted with the unit, the only specialized training remained an updated version of the two-week Advisor Academy.

Despite these challenges, the vast majority of advisors—augmentees as well as those organic to 4th BCT—performed exceptionally well. They endured harsh conditions, shared sacrifices, and put forward a 100-percent effort to accomplish the mission.

## Institutionalizing Advising Capability

Assuming that SFA and other missions involving engagement with FSF are enduring Army requirements and will continue to be filled by BCTs, there is significant room for improvement in how the Army selects, trains, and manages the careers of soldiers serving as advisors.

The Army's own SFA doctrine provides extensive guidance regarding the qualities advisors should possess as well as the training required. Of note, many of the sixteen advisor traits listed in FM 3-07.1, such as "tolerance for ambiguity," "flexibility," and "perceptiveness" are innate qualities rather than skills that can be taught.<sup>10</sup> Not listed, but perhaps more important, is a strong desire to work closely with foreign militaries. Other skills that can be learned, such as foreign language, require a significant investment of resources in an individual. The experience gained serving as an advisor represents another type of investment, which could be lost entirely if advising is just a one-off assignment during an officer's or an NCO's career. To mitigate these issues, Army leaders should consider the following recommendations to institutionalize the selection, training, and management of advisors.

- ◆ Create a career field for volunteering officers and NCOs who pass advisor assessment and qualification courses. Subdivide the career field by regional orientation.

- ◆ Unlike a single-track functional area, manage the advisor career field in a dual-track manner, whereby the officer or NCO continues to serve in key positions within his primary branch or military occupational specialty, including traditional, centrally selected positions such as battalion command. This allows advisors to retain operational proficiency, a critical quality for those advising FSF.

- ◆ Expand the training course for advisors at Fort Polk. Include a capstone exercise similar to Robin Sage in the Special Forces Qualification Course but for SFA rather than unconventional warfare.

- ◆ Include a language immersion course based on the individual's regional orientation. In conjunction, consider an abbreviated in-country training portion similar to that which foreign area officers undergo.

- ◆ Assign qualified advisors either to augment BCTs for SFA or directly to units preparing for a regional alignment or similar mission. The advisor's regional orientation and language skills should be a desired but not a required match to the mission.

An example career path of an officer under this model might look as follows. Following company command, Capt. Smith, an infantry officer who has volunteered and been selected for the advisor career field, attends a six-month qualification course at Fort Polk. The course includes several months of language immersion in French and three weeks of in-country training in an African nation. Following completion of training, Smith is assigned to augment a BCT that is entering its intensive training cycle prior to assuming a regional alignment with AFRICOM the following year.

During the BCT's year in the force pool available to AFRICOM, Smith deploys to Africa twice for eight- to ten-week training missions as part of a task-organized team working with host-nation brigade-and-below units. After attending resident Command and General Staff College, (now) Maj. Smith is assigned as a battalion S-3 (Operations) in another BCT aligned with AFRICOM, where, even if he does not deploy, he is able to leverage his considerable regional expertise to develop relevant training for his unit.

From there, Smith may choose to remain at the same installation to work in the corps G-3/5/7 where he can develop plans and orders in support of the corps' permanent regional alignment. Alternately, he could take a position instructing future advisors at Fort Polk, attend full-time graduate school, or accept another broadening assignment before competing for battalion command.

While this model does add additional complexity to the personnel assignment system, it is entirely feasible and represents a considerable improvement in the way we manage those soldiers with regional expertise and advising experience.

## Conclusion

My time with 4th BCT, combined with that from earlier assignments working around MiTT teams in Iraq, has provided me with insight and experience regarding how the U.S. Army can improve the career management of advisors.

In my view, the BCT is the proper formation of choice for SFA and other capacity-building missions due to its inherent mission command strengths and its wide array of tailorable capabilities. In contrast, even if it were desirable, the wholesale creation of specialized units to perform advising missions overseas is not realistic in the current environment.

However, while BCTs have performed admirably in this capacity in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, the Army can significantly improve its ability to execute this critical mission by institutionalizing the selection, training, and career management of those personnel who are either assigned or serve as augmentees to BCTs at the decisive point of SFA: the advisors. By taking the recommendations in this article, the Army can close the gap between patchwork solutions—which allowed us to “make do” for 10 years—and a future where Army forces are increasingly engaged in advising and capacity-building activities around the world. ■

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## Notes

1. John A. Nagl, *Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Advisor Corps* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2007), [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/Nagl\\_AdvisoryCorp\\_June07.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/Nagl_AdvisoryCorp_June07.pdf) (accessed 23 February 2015).

2. Scott G. Wuestner, *Building Partner Capacity/Security Force Assistance: A New Structural Paradigm* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), (Superseded by FM 2-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation*, in 2013) <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=880> (accessed 23 February 2015).

3. Ibid.

4. Field Manual (FM) 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009).

5. U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, January 2012, [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf) (accessed 23 February 2015).

6. John M. McHugh and Raymond T. Odierno, *2013 Army Posture Statement*, May 2013, [http://www.armyg1.army.mil/HSI/files/2013\\_Army\\_Posture\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.armyg1.army.mil/HSI/files/2013_Army_Posture_Statement.pdf) (accessed 23 February 2015).

7. Kimberly Field, James Learmont, and Jason Charland, “Regionally Aligned Forces: Business Not as Usual,” *Parameters* 43(2) (Autumn 2013).

8. The term battlespace owner is being used in this case to refer to either an area of operations commander or area of operations supporting commander, the terms currently used within ISAF Joint Command.

9. FM 3-07.1 differentiates partnering and advising where-by partnering is the attachment of partner and host-nation units at various levels to conduct operations, and advising is the use of influence to coach, teach, and advise FSF to accomplish a mission.

10. FM 3-07.1.