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## Challenges to Advising Above the Tactical Level

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### JCSP 48

#### Exercise Solo Flight

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**Challenges to Advising Above the Tactical Level**

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## CHALLENGES TO ADVISING ABOVE THE TACTICAL LEVEL

United States and allied military advisor activities are amongst the most important efforts in the contemporary, heavily alliance-driven operating environment (OE). However, U.S. advisors, particularly those executing Security Force Assistance (SFA) missions, have been historically employed in ineffective ways due to unrealistic expectations of their capabilities. The U.S. usually commits this error in attempts to create sustained effects through partner forces at the operational level echelons and above.

*While advisors can effectively create significant tactical effects by transferring materiel and knowledge to their partner force, it is unrealistic to expect they can accomplish the same sustained success at higher echelons in the partner force if their partners diverge significantly in motivation, context, or ends. Advisors should seek to amplify partner capabilities and provide support in adjusting their methods of employment to accomplish their mutually understood objectives, within the strategic trends in their OE.*

As the advising force engages higher echelons in the partner force, the advisors' ability to influence partner 'ways' to accomplish the 'ends' with the given 'means' decreases due to the complexities of the transfer of knowledge, contextual understanding, and the difficulty of building entire systems in a weak state. As advisor influence decreases over time due to re-alignment of national resources, advisors should not expect longevity in their partner force's operational effects.

This is not to say that advisors cannot have operational or strategic effects. Those effects will be briefly discussed in this paper, as well as some cases of advising higher echelons with successful effects. But militaries should not expect their advising forces to achieve national ends exclusively through influencing their partner's operational or strategic leadership. Rather, if military or political leaders assess the risk to their mission is appropriate and their partner shares similar enough ends, military advisors should focus on amplifying their partner force tactical capabilities within logistical constraints while taking advantage of larger political, social, and societal trends in the OE.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the effectiveness of advisor operations in relation to the different levels of operations. In broader terms, it concerns the transfer of concepts and materiel from one body to another with particular (and possibly different) ends in mind in the context of a given environment.

### **The Uses for Advisors**

Advisors can facilitate partner force unified operations in the transition periods between competition and crisis. They also set conditions for winning prior to open conflict by amplifying partner capabilities and building joint relationships with partner forces, enhancing partner interoperability. During conflict, they can provide an effective liaison function between the partner force and their parent military, leveraging previously developed relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Advisor units also provide a disruptive effect on the strategic scale, particularly in the competitive space with adversarial world powers. By partnering with other nations'

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<sup>1</sup> United States Army, *ATP 3-96.1: Security Force Assistance Brigade* Headquarters, Department of the Army, (2020)1-1, 2-1.

militaries, they represent a degree of military commitment and cooperation with NATO aligned countries. Competitive adversaries such as Russia and China are then either deterred, denied access to desired areas for fear of larger escalation, or pressured to commit their own resources to the contested space. If an adversary does commit resources to influence a contested space that advisors occupy, they will likely commit more resources than the advisors are spending, contributing to over-extension in elements of their national power.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary examples of this type of effort are found in central Asia, the Balkans, and the Indo-Pacific.

Advisors act as a reconnaissance asset to assess a partner force. While partner nations may provide the exact strength and composition of their forces, their actual capabilities in the context of their current or potential OE can be more nebulous. Advisors, through joint training exercises and partnered operations, can provide a more accurate assessment of what an allied military can actually do under given conditions. This gives the national security strategy an accurate picture of allied forces; a contemporary example of this is the persistent U.S. advisor engagement in the majority of Middle Eastern nations.

Advisors are commonly deployed in lieu of a greater combat force to effect change in a given OE through a partnered force, with the intent of avoiding larger military commitment. Historically, this method has achieved mixed results, largely as a miscalculation of the potential advisor effects on a complex partner force in a complex operational environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Phillip Lohaus, "Special Operations Forces in the Gray Zone: An Operational Framework for using Special Operations Forces in the Space between War and Peace," *Special Operations Journal* (Philadelphia, Pa.) 2, no. 2 (Jul 02, 2016), 75-91.

## Technical and Tactical Levels

Past conflicts have shown that advising efforts are effective at the technical and tactical level for producing effects in the partner force. These partner force tactical actions can accumulate into operational or strategic successes for the advising force. Ideally, advisors conduct train-the-trainer operations as part of SFA operations, which effectively certifies and promotes an institutionally sustainable training path for the entire partner nation force. Advising to achieve partner effects at the tactical level involves conveying techniques, tactics, and procedures (TTPs) from the advisor to the partner. The simpler the TTP, the more easily it can be reduced to conceptual or physical components, and thus accurately conveyed from advisor to partner, assuming there is a sufficient linguistic understanding between the two. A common area for simple materiel and TTP conveyance is found in key weapon system transfers.<sup>3</sup>

Key weapon systems such as the man-portable Stinger anti-air missile or the Javelin anti-armor missile are emerging as assets that can tip the balance of power in both irregular fighting and open conflict between nations. While the systems are relatively simple to use, they do require a basic understanding of the operation, maintenance, and tactics for successful employment; this necessitates an advisory relationship along with the materiel transfer. Cumulatively, key weapons effectively employed across a battle space in the tactical realm can have operational and even strategic effects, as seen in the Soviet-Afghan and Russian-Ukrainian conflicts. These weapons effectively contested

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<sup>3</sup> United States Army, *ATP 3-96.1: Security Force Assistance Brigade* 1-1

and degraded the key assets needed for air superiority or effective ground maneuver; this denied the aggressors' operational and strategic success.

In the Soviet-Afghan conflict, the U.S. military was able to quickly and effectively convey the operating procedures and basic tactics for the employment of the Stinger missile system in 1986 to Pakistani military counterparts. The Pakistani trainers then trained Mujahedeen fighters in the missiles' use against Soviet aircraft in Afghanistan. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and American military advisors were able to train the Pakistani trainers, equip Mujahedeen fighters, and see the Stinger employment in only two months (June through September 1986). This efficient conveyance of a technical skill set led to the Mujahedeen fighters using the Stingers to destroy about 270 Soviet aircraft.<sup>45</sup> After Soviet forces withdrew, advisors were able to assess the effectiveness of the Stinger missile in a real-world setting by engaging with the Mujahedeen missile operators. This assessment was critical to the objective evaluation of the anti-air missile system, which then informed future equipment U.S. and allied procurement for the following years.<sup>6</sup>

This quick conveyance of a technical skill was largely enabled by three major factors. First, the system and its supporting components were relatively easy to use, unlike British supplied anti-air weapons previously employed in Afghanistan. Second, the Mujahedeen fighters already had a strong understanding of basic tactics for employing the weapons in their home terrain. Their existing capabilities and commitment to their

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<sup>4</sup> Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 235

<sup>5</sup> While the actual contribution of the Stingers to the overall outcome of the war is contested, the operational impacts were still significant, as Soviet air power was significantly degraded in the second half of the war.

<sup>6</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. No. 2 (1999) 246.

military ends were simply enhanced, not created from an unfamiliar concept. Third, through “train the trainer” operations, U.S. military trainers used Pakistani trainers as the primary medium to convey the Stinger operation TTPs to the Mujahedeen. The Pakistani military trainers were already integrated with the Mujahedeen in language and culture; they served as a more effective bridge to overcome the strong linguistic and cultural barriers that would exist between American trainers and the Afghans.<sup>7</sup>

The key weapon systems must also be distributed to the right people in the partner force. This is a challenge for less developed nations and their militaries; weapons distributed to a partner force through a central channel in the partner organization have a natural entropy after the distributing nation loses control of the equipment. An example of this was the proliferation of Stinger missiles following the U.S.’ CIA centralized distribution of the assets through Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organization during the later years of the Soviet-Afghan conflict. The CIA intended to maintain plausible deniability in supplying the missiles by using the ISI as a buffer organization; however, they over-supplied the missiles meant for the Mujahedeen, and largely lost control of the systems as soon as the ISI accepted them. This led to the sale and widespread distribution of the Stingers across Asia and Africa in the following decades.<sup>8</sup>

A current example of weapon distribution and TTP transference is found in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which saw more accurate distribution of equipment to the partner force.<sup>9</sup> The Ukrainian and NATO militaries’ continuous working relationship and

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<sup>7</sup> Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 244.

<sup>8</sup> Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 256

<sup>9</sup> School of Advanced Military Studies, *Ukraine-Russia Case Study Observations, Insights, Lessons* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army,[2022]).



interoperability over the last decade, facilitated by advising operations, set the conditions for a deep understanding of Ukraine's military structure and supply system. This allowed NATO nations to quickly increase Ukraine's tactical capabilities by sending effective weapons like the Javelin to the correct personnel in the Ukrainian military for employment. In the months prior to the Russian invasion, NATO members supplied over ten thousand anti-tank weapon systems and other key capabilities to the Ukraine military, and were able to continue the supply through Poland after Russia invaded.<sup>1011</sup>

An example of creating partner force effects on a larger scale is the U.S. partnership with Iraqi and Peshmerga forces in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) from 2014 through 2020. Here the U.S. used the "By, With, Though" approach to operations, which entailed coalition forces employing all of their own warfighting functions with the exception of substantial maneuver forces; the partnered Iraqi forces provided the majority of maneuver effects. These operations proved to be largely successful at achieving the both the Iraqi government and U.S.' ends- the severe degradation of ISIS.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. used their Iraqi and Peshmerga partner maneuver forces, augmented by small advisor cadres at the partners' division levels and below, to accomplish tactical objectives such as clearing, seizing, and holding terrain. The U.S. military provided and managed the majority of logistical support, fires, and reconnaissance assets. Unity of

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<sup>10</sup> "Fact Sheet on U.S. Security Assistance for Ukraine," last modified Mar 16, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/16/fact-sheet-on-u-s-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>.

<sup>11</sup> As noted in the case of U.S. Stinger supplies to Soviet-Afghan conflict, some risks will remain from the possible over-supply of the anti-armor and anti-aircraft weapons. Following the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, advising forces should seek to reassess the status and accountability of these weapons, in addition to assessing their tactical effectiveness for future employment.

<sup>12</sup> Michael X. Garrett et al., "The by-with-through Approach: And Army Component Perspective," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 89 (2018) 51.

effort between the partner force and the higher echelons of the U.S. forces was enabled by embedded advisor teams.<sup>13</sup>

This effort properly integrated partner operational effects, rather than primary reliance on them, to accomplish the ends. Most importantly, the partner and advising forces shared a common and clear objective- defeat ISIS in Iraq. The approach did require a significant commitment of coalition resources, and was plagued by complications created by the larger Iraqi government sectarian policies.<sup>14</sup> However, the ends were met with a realistic balance of coalition and partner force effects.

### **Challenges to Advising at Higher Echelons**

Directly advising partner leaders and shaping their organizations at echelons above the tactical level has been far more unlikely to achieve sustainable success, largely due to two challenges. First, advisors struggle to understand and affect partner behavior through concept transfer. Second, shaping large partner organizations must be conducted within the wider partner nation political context.

### **Concept Transfer**

Once a concept that must be conveyed to the partner can no longer be reduced to component parts for explanation, an advisor requires a strong situational understanding of the partner force, the partner's environment, and the partner's true motivations to accurately communicate the concept. They require a strong degree of empathy to gain a

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<sup>13</sup> Brendan C. Aronson, "Operation INHERENT RESOLVE: Advise and Assist," *Marine Corps Gazette* 101, no. 6 (2017), 49-51.

<sup>14</sup> Jahara Matissek and William Reno, "Getting American Security Force Assistance Right: Political Context Matters," *Joint Force Quarterly : JFQ*, no. 92 (2019) 70.

holistic understanding of their partner in context. Additionally, the number of factors that influence a given partner's behavior grows exponentially with their scope of control over an organization or situation. These factors may include motivations, limitations, political ties, moral compromises, cultural nuances, and religious influence; for example, a military officer in Afghanistan may have multiple religious, societal, political, and tribal considerations that factor into his military decisions. Even if the concept is accurately communicated, it is often rejected as impractical or too outlandish given the partner's contextual perspective. The language barrier also increases in effect because of the need to accurately convey these often nuanced factors, even with an experienced linguist. Partners may omit key details while communicating because of assumptions of a common truth or a hesitancy in understanding, and barriers to the mutual empathy needed for collaborative work increase. U.S. advisors began realizing these challenges while advising the South Korean and South Vietnamese militaries in the 1950's, and experienced the same issues in the post-9/11 Afghanistan conflict.<sup>15</sup>

By U.S. advisor doctrine, advisors may be assigned a foreign partner up to two echelons above their position;<sup>16</sup> this may be appropriate at face value, given the level of professionalism when comparing the U.S. military to a developing foreign security force. However, this means that tactical level advisors are often assigned in a position that requires them to advise a partner that is responsible for political level decisions in their military, their region, and possibly larger nation. This is especially true for regions that still maintain tribal affiliations as a major source of social and political power, such as

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<sup>15</sup> Robert D. III Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces : American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press,[2006]). 11.

<sup>16</sup> United States Army, *ATP 3-96.1: Security Force Assistance Brigade* 1-77

Africa or the Middle East. These tribal dynamics bring politics to the local level, where partner units that are traditionally considered tactical assets must operate in a political context. In this case, advisor requests to the partner may seem sound in the tactical sense, but absurd in the partner's political, ethical, or social context.<sup>17</sup>

An additional challenge to military advising at the operational level is the translation of concepts across entirely different military paradigms. The advising force may approach military problems with the assumption of completely different means and ways than the partner force, based on their own culture and 'military upbringing'. This is especially true when considering interactions between the militaries of liberal democratic nations and the militaries of nations with more centralized power, such as former Soviet nations or Middle Eastern nations.

A common example is the translation of mission command and other methods of operation that require greater initiative from subordinates. This concept does not readily translate from the typical western military paradigm to militaries influenced by Soviet military models, where authority is relatively centralized and commanders micromanage decisions to the lowest levels. This is also true for militaries that developed outside liberal democracies, where power is centralized at higher echelons- examples of this are the militaries of Middle Eastern nations or in the 1950's era South Korean military. In addition to the lack of flexibility caused by direct command, junior officers and non-commissioned officers are left under-developed for lack of practice in exercising their own authority and initiative in training or operations.

### **SFA in the Context of the Partner State**

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<sup>17</sup> The author routinely observed these dynamics among senior partner force officials while conducting advising operations in both Africa and Afghanistan in 2012, 2013, 2018, 2019, and 2020.

Since greater SFA operations must be conducted in the political context of the partner force nation, the amount of time and resources needed to achieve any lasting effects correlates to nation-building efforts, as entire organizational structures, institutions, and new military culture must be created.

The nature of SFA generally leads to operations being executed in weak or failed states, where the potential for emergent threats is high. However, creating a strong military in a country with an otherwise weak national government can itself have a destabilizing effect. This is especially true for advisors who assume the existence of the western governmental paradigm where the military is reliably subordinate to a relatively strong, legitimate state. In weaker states, the military can easily disrupt the state balance of power if it becomes the strongest national institution.<sup>18</sup> In the best case, this can lead to a military that lacks the wider government framework needed for longevity and legitimacy, as seen in Afghanistan and Somalia. In the worst cases, the military can attempt to seize power from the otherwise ineffective or corrupt state, as seen in coups led by American trained officers in South Vietnam, Gambia, and Mali.<sup>19</sup>

### **Historical Examples**

Clear examples of challenges in advisor concept transfer to enable a partner nation military at its highest echelons are found in the Vietnam and Afghanistan conflicts. In both of these cases, the advising forces were operating in a greater political context

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<sup>18</sup> Matisek, "Getting American Security Force Assistance Right: Political Context Matters," 68

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Meiser, "The Dilemma of an African Soldier," *War on the Rocks* (Jan 26, 2015). <https://warontherocks.com/2015/01/the-dilemma-of-an-african-soldier/>.

that ran counter to their advising efforts, in addition to the other challenges to advising at the national military level.

### **Vietnam: Misreading the Trends of a Weak State**

After WWII and prior to the Global War on Terror in 2001, the majority of western nation SFA operations were conducted under the strategic goal of containment of communism, often in support of a greater irregular or conventional operation. This led western nations to direct their advising efforts towards parties in contested nations who simply were not communist, often regardless of their potential to create a legitimate, stable government with long-term viability.

In Vietnam, the U.S. backed the anti-communist government of President Diem in 1956 following the cease-fire between South Vietnamese forces and the Chinese-backed Viet Minh. However, Diem and his regime were largely seen by the South Vietnamese people as a corrupt puppet of Western powers. Additionally, as a Catholic, Diem persecuted the country's majority Buddhist population; this led to further social unrest.<sup>20</sup> Although he was forcibly removed from power in 1963 by his own generals, the South Vietnamese government would continue as unstable and illegitimate in the eyes of its people for the duration of the war. In this context, the U.S. failed to identify the true political and societal dynamics of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese, who were under colonial rule since the French occupation in the 1850's, desired independence, and used communism as a vehicle to gain it. The U.S., by supporting a series of anti-

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<sup>20</sup> Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War*, 1st Edition ed. (London, U.K.: William Collins, 2018)142-143.

communist regimes who lacked legitimacy amongst the people, effectively extended the idea of colonial rule, which fueled the insurgency.<sup>21</sup>

The U.S. advisory effort during the early years of the Vietnam conflict from 1955 through 1961 focused on preparation for open conflict through SFA operations. The Military Advisory Assistance Group Vietnam (MAAG-V) prepared the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) to fight a North Vietnamese conventional invasion for the first five years of the effort; however, given the previously noted challenges of cultural barriers, corruption, and political complexities of partners, the RVNAF proved to be an ineffective force against the unexpected Viet Cong insurgency. Indeed, the corruption of the political rulers would lead to many ineffective RVNAF commanders, who were selected not for their merit, but rather their loyalty to the struggling regime.<sup>22</sup>

It was clear by the early 1960s that the RVNAF would not be capable of holding South Vietnam with only advisory efforts to adjust their systems and methods of operations. So, the U.S. gradually replaced the RVNAF capabilities starting in 1965 with their own military forces until the RVNAF was little more than a token force to the war effort by 1968. As U.S. reduced forces after President Nixon's Vietnamization policy in 1969, advising efforts shifted primarily to the regimental and divisional level of the RVNAF until the full U.S. withdrawal in 1973. Despite having a force of 550,000 personnel with modern military equipment in 1973, the RVNAF fell to North Vietnamese offensives in 1975 after the 20 year advisory effort.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War* 90-93

<sup>22</sup> Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War* 160-169

<sup>23</sup> Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces : American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* 27-32

Among other mistakes in Vietnam, the collapse of the partner force and subsequent commitment of regular U.S. forces represented a poor evaluation of the potential for the RVNAF to become sustainable organization as a result of advising efforts. This is because RVNAF lacked a stable, legitimate government to offer the necessary support for a long term defense of their nation. Additionally, the lack of legitimacy in the South Vietnamese government fueled the opposing North Vietnamese nationalist objectives.

### **Afghanistan: Logistics and Corruption without Nationalism**

The post-9/11 Afghan conflict serves as a contemporary example of a failed attempt to create a sustainable military through advisor efforts. With the end of formal NATO combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014, the coalition transitioned to Train, Advise, and Assist (TAA) efforts until the full withdrawal in 2021. Advisors became the key actors to achieve the coalition's strategic ends during this period, among which was the creation of a sustainable Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) capable of defending the larger government of Afghanistan against the Taliban and other violent extremist organizations.

The creation of logistical dependency without a sustainable solution was one of the greatest challenges the advisors in Afghanistan faced, and was the crux of many of the operational failures of the ANSF.<sup>24</sup> There existed little idea of a national army prior to the U.S. led invasion, let alone a national logistical system to sustain the entire Army. The U.S. advising effort attempted to shape the Afghan logistical system to resemble a

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<sup>24</sup> Edward F. III Dorman and Christopher P. Townsend, "Laying the Foundation for a Strategic by-with-through Approach," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 89 (2018), 69-75.



“hub and spoke” system similar to their own when conducting distributed operations- however, it failed to translate across the military paradigm between the two forces. Even with robust U.S. logistical support injecting funding, fuel, munitions, and other supplies into the higher echelons of Afghan supply systems, the ANSF routinely failed to sustain their units in the highly compartmentalized terrain of the rural areas. This resulted in routine operational delays and mass soldier desertions for lack of supplies.

The failures in logistical system development extended to the Afghan military’s equipment, particularly operational level assets such as aircraft or heavy artillery. Each of these pieces of equipment required a regular maintenance cycle and a tailored supply chain to deliver repair parts. This meant that in addition to training operators for the new equipment, an entire system of specialists had to be trained to perform maintenance. Additionally, while the equipment was furnished by coalition forces at no initial cost, regular maintenance and sustainment costs of the equipment averaged over 5 billion USD per year.<sup>25</sup>

Corruption is one of the most underestimated challenges to influencing militaries at the operational level, as it hides the true motives of the partner force and usurps the strength of all the partner’s systems. The cause and effect relationships of advisor-partner actions become even less apparent, adding more levels of complexity to the problem. For example, NATO advisors often pushed their ANSF counterparts into conducting large scale-clearances of particular regions in Afghanistan to deny Taliban influence in those areas. However, the ANSF leaders often refused to conduct the operation for lack of fuel, forces, or ammunition. Upon investigation, advisors found that many mid-level Afghan

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<sup>25</sup> *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, VA: ,[2014]).

officers were selling their military fuel and ammunition to local vendors for profit. Personnel officers over-reported the amount of soldiers on their records so they could collect their government wages for themselves. Furthermore, the senior Afghan officials often had economic conflicts of interest in clearing objective areas- doing so may disrupt the poppy production or mineral mining operations therein, for which they may receive payments from the producers.<sup>26 27</sup> Indeed, the very word ‘corruption’ may be an inaccurate interpretation of the Afghan military leaders’ behavior; given their cultural and societal paradigms, their practices were well inside accepted norms. All of these factors (among many others) culminate in a lack of an operational effect by the partner force, due to advisor misconceptions of the true motivations of the partner.

Given the complexities of influencing high-ranking partners and their entire organization through persistent advisor engagement, alternative effects should be considered by advisors and policy makers. As noted earlier, advisors have historically demonstrated significant success at the tactical level through enhancing their partner’s means (i.e., key weapon systems) and ways (i.e., TTPs) to achieve their already existing ends. However, if NATO nations deem it critical to commit to advising and building long term capacity in their partner force to achieve their national ends, they must be prepared to take one of two courses of action. They must commit to a long term, persistent engagement that includes wider state building efforts, as seen in the Korean conflict. Alternatively, NATO advisory effort may identify that their partner force is ready and

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<sup>26</sup> "Measures Taken to Uproot Corruption in Afghan Military Ranks - Official." *BBC Monitoring South Asia* 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Zaid Rahmani and Vadym Tytarenko, "Corruption in Afghanistan: An Experience for Ukraine," *Ukrainian Policymaker* 2 (Jun 15, 2018) 29.

willing to accept reform under a sufficient state structure, as seen in advisory efforts in Ukraine.

### **Long Term Commitment in Korea**

There are some cases that show partner forces achieving long-term success at the operational level as a result of advisor efforts. One example is the U.S. support for the South Korean military during the Korean peninsula conflict in the early 1950s and thereafter. The challenges to advising at the operational level were the same as the later Vietnam conflict- difficulty in cross-cultural understanding, difficulty in the transference of concepts given language barriers, and misconceptions of the common ends of military efforts. Just like South Vietnam, South Korea had a series of autocratic leaders from the 1950s through the democratization movement in the 1980s that posed challenges for developing a strong government that could support a resilient military.<sup>28</sup>

Advisor efforts did not prove effective until long after the conflict came to a cease-fire in 1953; to a certain degree, the efforts are still ongoing today. The U.S. maintained a persistent and significant military presence in South Korea with American bases, logistical systems, command structures, and the ability to conduct unilateral operations with their own forces. South Korean military officers regularly attended U.S. military institutional training in the states beginning in 1948, effectively becoming their own advisors to U.S. methods and gaining a deep understanding of mutual concepts.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. did not exclusively rely on the South Korean military for effects, although the

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<sup>28</sup> Hyug Baeg Im, *Democratization and Democracy in South Korea, 1960-Present* (Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2020) 19-22.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Stoker, *Military Advising and Assistance : From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815-2007* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008) 92.

capacity to do so eventually grew over the decades with continued support.<sup>30</sup> With larger state building efforts under the persistent security of U.S. military presence to include economic and democratic reform, South Korea eventually transformed its government and institutions to a resilient, legitimate state capable of sustaining a strong military.

### **Ukraine: A Nation Ready for Change**

A contemporary example is the reformation of the entire Ukrainian military. This was largely an effort led by NATO member advisors from 2015 to 2022 following the Russian invasion of the Crimea region in 2014. Advisors in this operation did, in contrast to the advising efforts in Afghanistan, effectively transfer the larger organizational concepts, such as mission command, to the Ukrainian forces despite past the cultural precedent of Soviet military structure and methods. Additionally, the Ukrainian military and larger government suffered from a high degree of systemic corruption that may have inhibited the development of sustainable logistical systems.<sup>31</sup>

However, the Ukrainian forces were effectively ‘primed’ for receptiveness to NATO operational concepts since their departure from the Soviet Union decades prior to advisor efforts commencing. First, Ukraine realized the need for military reform at the institutional level following their defeats in Crimea in 2014 and the continuation of a Russian threat. Second, Ukrainian military leaders showed a level affinity for European concepts (largely based on proximity), and thus had greater potential for cultural understanding for concepts such as trust in subordinate initiative. Third, their adversary, Russia, still fought on their model of genesis (Soviet methods), except with far greater

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<sup>30</sup> Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces : American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* 11.  
<sup>31</sup> Rahmani, "Corruption in Afghanistan: An Experience for Ukraine," 31.

capacity to project military power. Thus, Ukraine identified the need to adjust their ways, and adopted NATO methods of operation that leveraged a smaller amount of forces in a far more cost-effective manner.<sup>3233</sup>

NATO nations established the Joint Multinational Training Group Ukraine in 2014, which allowed for seven years of persistent advisory presence that helped to reform Ukraine's logistical systems, professionalize their military, and properly equip them for a large scale conflict at both the tactical and operational level. Additionally, unlike the early years of Korea, Vietnam, or Afghanistan, the partner-force capacity building was performed without a pervasive conflict such as a counterinsurgency to disrupt efforts. These factors gave Ukraine the resilience and lethality needed to prevent a hasty defeat by Russia.<sup>34</sup>

Although Ukraine met Russia with tactical and operational successes in the short term, their logistical systems remain heavily dependent on western nation support, just as the former Afghan government. From 2014 to 2021, the U.S. government provided roughly 2.5 billion dollars in support to the Ukrainian military, with a continued flow of sustainment even after formal advisory forces departed.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the systems lack longevity once western focus shifts to other efforts. However, given the reform of their military, a sense of nationalism, a lesser degree of compartmentalization of terrain compared to Afghanistan, and possible integration with the European Union, the Ukraine

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<sup>32</sup> School of Advanced Military Studies, *Ukraine-Russia Case Study Observations, Insights, Lessons*

<sup>33</sup> Tom Blackwell, "How Training by Canada Helped Give Ukrainian Army a Fighting Chance Against Russia," *National Post* Mar 9, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> School of Advanced Military Studies, *Ukraine-Russia Case Study Observations, Insights, Lessons*

<sup>35</sup> Andriy Taran, "Ukraine : The Decision of the United States to Provide the Second Part of Security Assistance to Ukraine is Timely and Reasonable," *MENA Report* (2021).

military maintained better institutional resilience than the ANSF as a result of advising efforts.<sup>36</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Military leaders engaged in planning advising efforts must make careful and holistic assessments of their partner force to understand the partner's readiness to receive knowledge and material from an outside entity. Additionally, military leaders must be realistic with their superiors about the capabilities and limitations of their advising efforts, especially when trying to produce partner effects at higher echelons. Most importantly, military and political leaders must seek to gain a true understanding of their potential partner's ends in the context of the OE, and how those ends may change or fracture over the course of an operation.

If U.S. leadership decides to commit building a partner force capable and willing to carry out common operational or strategic ends, they must be willing to invest the time, resources, and political focus needed to build a partner force with longevity. This will likely include the need to build the capacity of the wider government in the partner nation to provide a legitimate framework for their military. If the partner force is similar in context, culture, and military lineage to the advising force, this development may take less than a decade, as in Ukraine. If the force and wider state structure is radically different, as in South Korea, it may take over five decades with a persistent military presence to achieve a sustainable result

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<sup>36</sup> As of May 2022, the Ukrainian military is still engaged in an existential conflict with Russia; their institutional longevity's greatest risk is currently the Russian conventional forces.

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