U.S. Army (Caleb Barrieau)

Vice President Biden, Ambassador to Iraq, and Iraqi officials meet for start of Government of Iraq Day of Commitment ceremony

Building Ministerial Capacity in Host Nations

By KEITH M. BOYER *and* ROBERT R. ALLARDICE

The United States seeks an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, and self-reliant with a just, representative, and accountable government; a state that is neither a safe haven for, nor sponsor of, terrorism; an Iraq that is integrated into the global economy and a long-term U.S. partner contributing to regional peace and security.[1]

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Long-term success in Iraq as measured by attainment of our strategic objectives as presented above surely relies on a robust, focused, and unified whole-of-government advising mission. Sustainment of gains in physical infrastructure, training, and equipment is largely dependent on institution-building at the ministerial level. Yet Service and joint doctrines are lacking regarding building partnership capacity (BPC) and security force assistance (SFA) at the strategic level, especially in the area of military support to the development of self-sustaining institutional capacity within host nation ministries.

This article proposes a framework based on experiences in Iraq that could be used by joint or multinational force senior leaders to help focus an engagement strategy aimed at developing a self-sustaining ministerial institutional capacity, specifically in war-torn host nations where force generation is part of the mission set as well. The intent here is not to endorse one organizational construct over another, or to address the specific advising skills and/or education and training needed to effectively influence behavior in an advisory role. Rather, the purpose is to highlight key elements for consideration by senior leaders in creating an

effective mission environment for ministerial institutional capacity-building.

Background

Given experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, much has been written recently about the need for changes in the U.S. approach to BPC/SFA—from how we train and organize within the Department of Defense (DOD) to how we partner with other nations and governmental and nongovernmental agencies. Scott Wuestner, for example, proposes a Security Advisory and Assistance Command (SAAC) as the "capstone proponent"[2] of his detailed force structure operational concept. Under Wuestner's concept, SAAC is a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Table of Distribution and Allowances unit responsible for all DOD BPC/SFA issues, and includes, among many ideas, a deployable Joint National Ministry Team directed by a State Department representative.[3] While wholesale reorganization of the way we organize, train, and assist the world in BPC/SFA operations may well be the long-term answer, additional guidance is needed immediately to address shortcomings presented below as documented in our own authoritative writings as well as those of others.

U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, correctly points out that "Perhaps the biggest hurdle for U.S. forces is accepting that the host nation can ensure security using practices that differ from U.S. practices."[4] Rather than learning a nation's processes, our tendency is to interpret and "shape and influence in a Western way" by using U.S. processes. In Iraq and Afghanistan, much of that tendency is due to the security situations; we have been involved in fighting at the same time that we are building, equipping, and sustaining host nation troops and developing institutional capacity within the ministries. We often have a sense of urgency not necessarily shared by the nation we are assisting. However, a big part of that tendency has to do with the fact that it is our own processes we are most comfortable with, and it takes longer to learn the host nation's processes, many of which may be informally or poorly defined or fundamentally different from ours.

The following assessments regarding advising in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI) are certainly applicable to the advising mission in Iraq's Ministry of Defense (MOD), and are based on the authors' experiences in 2007–2008. According to the Libra Advisory Group seminar report:

> *The U.S. military deployed a large number of advisors into Iraqi ministries including the MOI to work on developing management capacity. . . . Many advisors sought to import processes and systems from their own home departments (U.S. Army, FBI* [Federal Bureau of Investigation]*, DEA* [Drug Enforcement Administration]*, etc.) without consulting Iraqi partners on what was required and increasing their competence to build their own systems—they grew frustrated when their solutions were not implemented and in many cases essentially took over the running of the directorates they were supposed to advise. This in turn inhibited the development of Iraqi capacity.*[5]

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Andrew Rathmell provides two basic guidelines for addressing institutional capacity-building:

> *First, to resist the tendency to use the following phrases: "What the Iraqis need are . . ."; "putting an Iraqi face on . . ."; "obtaining Iraqi buy-in. . . ." Sometimes, Iraqi officials will play the game astutely. When asked by the umpteenth set of Coalition visitors if they have documented plans or procedures on topic X or topic Y, they will dust off a beautifully presented set of slides handed to them by previous generations of advisors. . . . The point is not that Coalition advisors should not be providing their Iraqi counterparts with good ideas, international examples, or advice. It is that the aim of the advisory process should be either to support and inform existing reform efforts or, where these do not exist, to help Iraqi officials to understand how their problems—which they usually understand all too well—can be addressed in new ways. . . . Second, any work on institutional development and reform must be as holistic as possible.*[6]

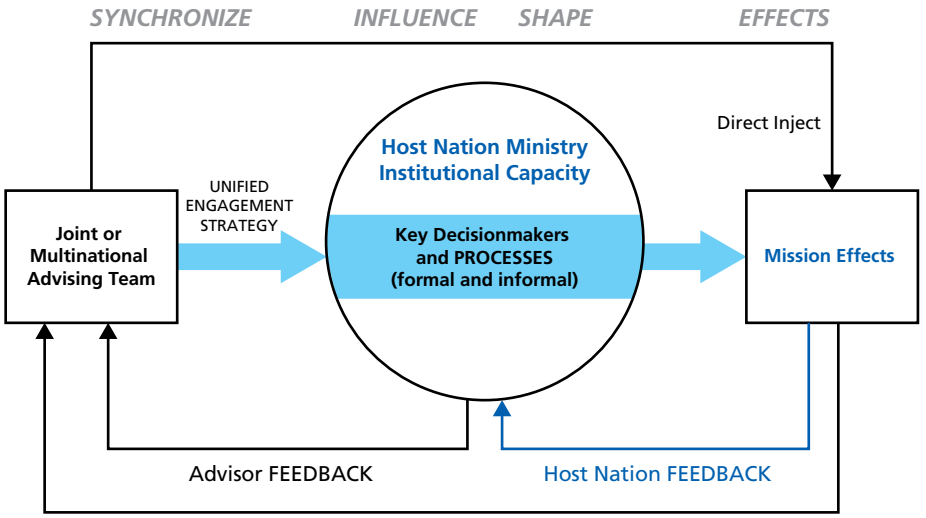
U.S. doctrine provides little specific guidance aimed at strategy to develop self-sustaining ministerial institutional capacity. In discussing BPC, Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, uses mostly generic descriptions and language such as "Successful collaboration, requiring Airmen to have detailed knowledge of the local culture, society, language, and threat, may foster enduring relationships,"[7] and really does not address the strategic issue of successfully building ministerial capacity. Chapter 6 of FM 3-24 is a 22-page segment on "Developing Host Nation Security Forces," including a framework for that development based on the SFA organize, train, equip, rebuild, advise (OTERA) mission, but it too offers little at the ministerial level.[8] The *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance* was published in 2008 to "fill a gap in the doctrinal literature"[9] on SFA at the brigade and regimental combat team (BCT/RCT) levels, specifically with best practices and lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, since it focuses at the BCT/RCT levels, it also offers little guidance regarding the OTERA mission as it applies to ministerial institutional capacity-building, a key strategic consideration if long-term success is to be realized.

Given our tendency to fall back on processes we are most comfortable with at the peril of prolonging our involvement or, worse, hindering ultimate success, it is incumbent on the senior leadership of the units/teams involved in ministerial capacity-building to establish a strategic common operating picture (COP) that targets host nation processes. We must shape and influence their processes in a Western way rather than replace or impose our Western processes on them. This article proposes a strategic framework that can help guide a commander's development of such a COP. The proposed model relies on basic elements applicable regardless of whether the "right" organizational construct of the advising team and individual or collective training of the advisors exists. In other words, "It will work with whatever you've got."

Strategic Framework

The proposed strategic framework for building host nation ministerial capacity

Figure 1. The Strategic Framework



has as its basis the authors' experiences in standing up an interim organizational construct, the Directorate of Defense Affairs (DDA),[10] during reorganization within Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC-I) in early 2008. The reorganization placed the appropriate transition teams and advisory teams under the newly established Director of Interior Affairs and Director of Defense Affairs. The DDA had teams assisting the Iraqi army, Coalition Army Advisory Training Team, Coalition Air Force Transition Team, Navy Maritime Strategic Transition Team, MOD Civilian Assistance Team, and MOD Military Joint Headquarters Assistance Team institutional leadership, and included the coalition Functional Capability Teams (FCTs) discussed below. Previously, the individual training and advisory teams reported directly to the MNSTC-I three-star commanding general.

To focus the strategic direction of the newly formed DDA organization, a COP was developed that included four key elements:

- Clearly define the target: transition and advisory team advisors engage and influence their Iraqi principals with a synchronized strategy to shape Iraqi processes to achieve desired effects.
- Engage with a unified strategy: engagement strategy is developed with advisors and FCTs.
- Identify their processes: FCTs focus on institutional issues related to Iraqi processes aligned with their function; the "process experts."
- Ensure appropriate feedback: transition and advisory team advisors provide feedback relative to effectiveness of the strategy.

These elements form the basis of the strategic framework depicted in figure 1.

One of the main goals of the framework is to focus attention where it should be when developing institutional capacity: the host nation key decisionmakers and *their* processes (the circular "target" in figure 1). The banner words across the top capture the essence of the model: *synchronize* an engagement strategy to *influence* host nation leaders to *shape* their processes to achieve desired *effects*. Specifics of the synchronized engagement strategy are constantly refined (or completely overhauled) based on change of commander's intent, redefined security posture, and maturation of institutional capacity. Continuous multiple feedback loops must be included to make an effective assessment. Lessons learned and best practices should be captured and communicated. The "Direct Inject" line bypassing the ministry development target recognizes that factors such as the security situation may dictate immediate results largely independent of institutional capacity-building. This may take the form of direct infusion of multinational funds to generate and train host nation troops during early or "surge" stages of assistance.

The remainder of the discussion focuses on the four key elements of the strategic framework within the context of the authors' experiences, but we contend that the basic principles apply irrespective of the particular organizational structure of the advising team or whether the lead advising agency is DOD or the State Department.

Clearly Define the Target. For building ministerial institutional capacity, clearly the "targets" are the key decisionmakers, and in the current context, the main Iraqi civilian and military leaders within MOD. However, as with any successful advisory mission, key decisionmakers and influential relationships, both formal and informal, must be understood. This may or may not be difficult based on the nature and scope of the advisory effort, especially when that effort is occurring in war-torn nations such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Consider, for example, the DDA mission statement: "Develop Iraqi Ministry of Defense capability in order to generate and replenish Iraqi joint forces and develop Ministry level institutional capacity." The need to replace U.S. and coalition forces with Iraqi forces to perform basic security functions (force generation) in a timely manner can easily overwhelm the development of the ministerial management functions (institutional capacity) needed to support them. Yet, as pointed out in the Libra Advisory Group seminar report, "Without creating the management functions to effectively employ and control the available resources, the resources themselves are at best inefficiently utilized, and at worst can be dangerous."[11]

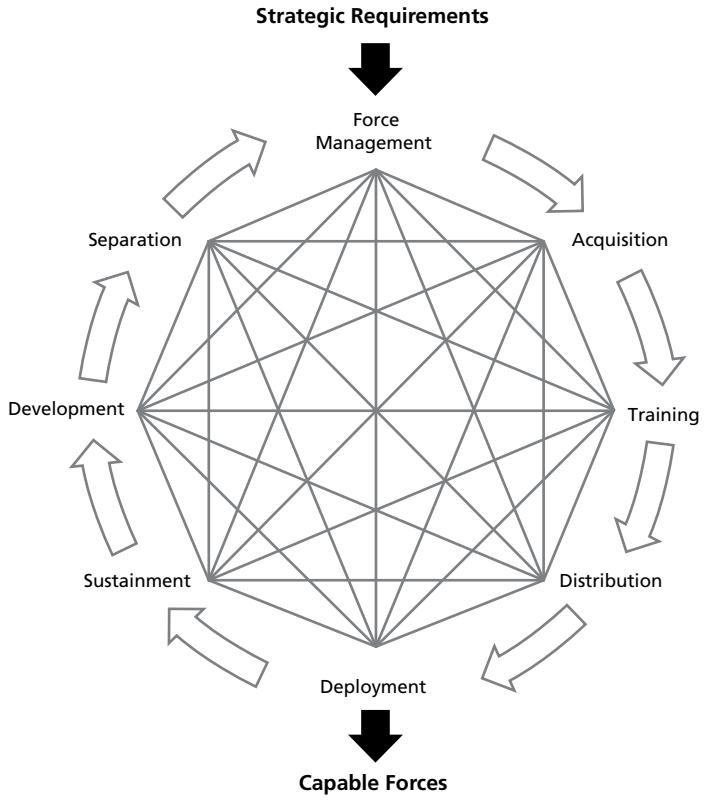
Characteristics associated with support of force generation often include:

- generation of forces as an "end"
- relatively fast process with joint/multinational team leading
- not waiting for full host nation participation/decisions
- minimizing requirements for host nation to deal with tough problems.

Characteristics associated with institutional capacity-building include:

- generation of forces as a "means"
- slower, less formal process with host nation leading
- requiring full host nation participation and decisionmaking
- maximizing requirements for host nation to deal with tough problems.

Figure 2. Army Organizational Life Cycle Model



These characteristics clearly can be at odds. The security situation largely dictates the balance between them. The U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, which includes "developing more self reliant Afghan security forces,"[12] continues to place our coalition forces in this same force generation versus institutional capacity balancing act, which can create, in essence, a moving target that exacerbates an already complex and dynamic environment.

Engage with a Unified Strategy. As stated in the *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance*, one of the SFA imperatives is to "ensure unity of effort/unity of purpose."[13] This is another basic premise that can easily be ignored in our haste to get to the job of "advising." In the current context, unity of effort is interpreted as engaging the MOD with a synchronized strategy—synchronized in message, in approach, and in a timely manner with key Iraqi MOD process milestones. Clearly, this necessitates an understanding and communication of Iraqi processes. It also comes down to commander's intent and focus, as well as affording means for and encouraging frank, open, and honest communication and feedback. One such example is presented in the "Ensure Appropriate Feedback" section below.

Additionally, the MNSTC-I interim reorganization itself helped facilitate an improved engagement strategy by aligning "its structure more effectively to support building MoD and MoI capacity in these key institutional functions."[14] The DDA was stood up to better synchronize the efforts of the five advisory teams previously mentioned within the areas managed by FCTs: acquisition of people, training and development, force management, budget, acquisition of materiel, and sustainment. The basis for these six functional areas was the Army Organizational Life Cycle model shown in figure 2.[15] This illustration can be used as a conceptual framework showing general organizational development and progression (clockwise around the figure), but also showing the complex, dynamic interaction between the various functions (interconnecting lines). Any change to a resource in any one functional area is likely to affect most if not all of the other functions.

The point here is not to endorse an organizational structure—the DDA was the right choice at the right time and was in effect for about 1 year—but to provide insight into the context in which the current strategic framework is presented. Regardless, the model in figure 2 is a fair depiction of how security institutions build and sustain forces and the complexities associated with institutional capacity development that necessitate a common strategic engagement strategy with robust communication and feedback.

Identify Their Processes. This is probably the most challenging element for reasons discussed previously. Additionally, what makes it even more challenging is that it is not enough to simply identify host nation ministerial processes, but it is needful to understand and shape them from *their cultural viewpoint*, not ours. While it may be possible to implement Western-style processes, advisors will usually be more successful influencing their principals if they understand their host nations' processes and cultures. Similar to identifying key decisionmakers and relationships, both formal and informal processes must be identified. Learning host nation ministerial processes and shaping those processes and/or decisions made within them through the host cultural lens are keys to establishing influential relationships. It is the way to "win hearts and minds" at the ministerial level.

As basic as this premise is, it can be (and is) easily overlooked. In the current context, it was not until the January 2008 MNSTC-I reorganization that key MOD processes were identified, cataloged, and discussed regularly by coalition DDA forces; MNSTC-I was established in June 2004. During the standup of the DDA organization in January–February 2008, over 50 processes, some more formal than others, were identified in the various functional areas (acquisition of people, training and development, and force management, among others). While not every advisor could or should be expected to fully understand each of these processes, having knowledge of and access to those processes that affect decisions made in that advisor's area are needed. For example, an advisor to the MOD Director General, Defense Policy and Requirements, has to have a good understanding of MOD budgeting and the key players in that process to help influence requirement decisions in a timely manner with budget decisions.

Ensure Appropriate Feedback. Continuous multiple feedback loops must occur in order for the strategic framework to be effective in the complex, dynamic SFA environment. As depicted in figure 1, one loop from the host nation ministry back to the joint/multinational advising team should be accomplished primarily by the advisors in relation to the effectiveness of the engagement strategy. This is the "how are we doing" regarding the day-to-day business of developing ministerial institutional performance. To be most effective, this feedback must be shared openly and honestly among the advisors who are the most visible face to the ministerial leaders and entire SFA team. In this case, the FCTs focused on coordinating the engagement strategy with the advisors.

For example, a weekly "sync meeting" was chaired by the DDA and attended by all key advisors and FCT leads. During the meeting, advisors shared important decisions and outcomes from crucial Iraqi meetings held within the MOD. Important insights into principal advisees' cognitive maps and key formal or informal Iraqi influencers were gleaned. Furthermore, FCT leads would highlight current and future issues within their functional areas based on their involvement with the five primary advising teams and interaction with the MOD. The feedback was provided in simple one-page summary formats developed during the reorganization standup and cataloged by date. Both of these important feedback mechanisms helped synchronize a common advisor engagement strategy with MOD principals and identify critical emerging issues potentially requiring the commanding general's intervention.

The other feedback loops in figure 1 are more about the "how are we doing" regarding mission effects. For example, building and replenishing forces use metrics that are generally easier to define and measure. Ideally, the feedback loop from mission effects back to the host nation ministry is developed by the host nation, but in the case of a newly developing ministry, it is likely that the SFA team would aid in the development of these metrics.

Conclusions

The establishment of an effective mission environment for ministerial institutional capacity-building is challenging, especially when force generation is part of the mission set. U.S. doctrine and handbooks are "vague at best"[16] at providing guidance in this area, which is so critical to long-term success of military support to missions focused on developing self-sustaining capacity. In fact, our own authoritative guidance and numerous independent studies point out that one of the single biggest problems we face in performing such missions is overcoming tendencies to impose Western-style processes without attempting to learn and use host nation processes, however ill-defined they may be. Such an approach, however well intended, is likely to prolong our involvement or, worse, hinder ultimate success.

The strategic framework presented here provides a simple but effective template for focusing advisory efforts aimed at developing self-sustaining institutional capacity in host nation ministries. In doing so, it helps fill a crucial doctrinal gap in the BPC/SFA mission area. Senior leader consideration of the four basic elements contained in the model will help create a mission environment that facilitates effective advising at the ministerial level. The basis for the framework is proved through application within MNSTC-I in early 2008, which provided the context for the current presentation. Application of the model better synchronized the coalition advising team efforts working within Iraq's MOD by:

- mapping out over 50 Iraqi processes
- providing a clearer understanding of formal and informal MOD decisionmakers, influential relationships, and processes
- establishing regular forums and feedback mechanisms that promoted open and frank communication between advisory team members and senior leaders of the DDA.

In war-torn nations such as Iraq and Afghanistan, there is likely to remain a challenging balancing act between force generation and institutional capacity development, the latter generally regarded as being much slower to achieve. However, given that self-reliance is likely to remain one of our long-term objectives in these state-building efforts, commanders must effectively manage that balance in a focused, strategic manner. The framework provided here will help. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: September 2009 Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, November 4, 2009), available at <www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/9010_Report_to_Congress_Nov_09.pdf>.

[2] Scott G. Wuestner, *Building Partner Capacity/Security Force Assistance: A New Structural Paradigm*, Letort Papers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, February 6, 2009), 38, available at <www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=880>.

[3] Ibid., 40–46.

[4] Field Manual (FM) 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), 6-3.

[5] Centre for Defence Studies and Libra Advisory Group (LAG), Security, Stabilisation and Development, "Building Security Institutions in Conflict-affected Environments: Learning from Iraq," Seminar Report, LAG and King's College London, April 30, 2009, 2.

[6] Andrew Rathmell, "Fixing Iraq's Internal Security Forces: Why Is Reform of the Ministry of Interior So Hard?" PCR Project Special Briefing, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2007, 12–13.

[7] Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, *Irregular Warfare* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Air Force, August 1, 2007), 27, available at <www.fas.org/irp/doddir/usaf/afdd2-3.pdf>.

[8] FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5.

[9] Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA), *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: JCISFA, July 14, 2008).

[10] *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: March 2008 Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 2008), 33, available at <www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Master%20%20Mar08%20-%20final%20signed.pdf>.

[11] "Building Security Institutions in Conflict-affected Environments: Learning from Iraq," 1.

[12] Seth G. Jones, *U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan*, CT-324 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, April 2009), 1, available at <www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2009/RAND_CT324.pdf>.

[13] JCISFA.

[14] *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: March 2008 Report to Congress*, 33.

[15] *How the Army Runs: A Senior Leader Reference Handbook, 2007–2008* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College), 10.

[16] Colonel Terrance McCaffrey III, USAF, chief, Doctrine and Education Group, U.S. Joint Forces Command, J7, personal correspondence, February 25, 2010.