Determinants of Success
and Failure in US Advising of
Foreign Militaries, 1945-present

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Determinants of Success and Failure in US Advising of Foreign Militaries,
1945-present

A dissertation presented
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Abstract

Military advising is frequently touted as a high-impact, low-cost strategy that allows the United States to achieve its security goals without deploying combat troops. The US military now considers foreign military advising to be a core competency, and it has become increasingly involved in military advising missions since 2001, a trend most expect to continue well into the future. Remarkably, neither academic scholars nor the policy community has investigated how effective advising actually is or what factors determine success. Both the United States and others have pursued major foreign policy strategies based on this unproven assumption. No wisdom, scholarly or even within the military itself, currently exists about the overall utility of military advisory missions or how to effectively run one. This dissertation answers both questions and offers insight on how to determine the likelihood of mission success even before the United States becomes involved in a conflict.

This dissertation argues that institutional structures and processes in the host military and advisory group drive advisory mission outcomes. Changes in host military effectiveness are driven by an interaction between two independent variables: advisory group and host military institutional structures and processes that promote organizational learning. Advisory missions are more likely to succeed the more both sides adhere to best practices on a set of specific institutional structures and processes that are required for the effective development of a host military.

Drawing on archival documents, Army and joint publications, oral histories, memoirs and 43 interviews with former American military advisors, I investigate how effective US military advising has
been since 1945 and the factors that separate the successful missions from the ones for which the United States expended blood and treasure without substantially increasing the host military's combat performance. I illustrate how the institutional structures and processes in both the host military and the advisory group that promote organizational learning result in substantial improvements in the host military’s combat effectiveness at the unit cohesion, tactical, and operational levels. This dissertation focuses on four case studies: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War from 2003-present, and the War in Afghanistan.
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Over the past three years, I worked full time for the Department of Defense while also a full-time dissertation writer, giving me a deeper understanding of evaluating military capabilities and foreign military training from a practical perspective as well as how large bureaucratic institutions function, both of which feature prominently in my research. I could not have made this arrangement work without the willingness and flexibility of both my advisors and my supervisors. I’m deeply grateful to all of them for enabling me to forge my own path forward, despite how ill-advised they may have believed it to be. My bosses and mentors at the Department of Defense, Major Greg Czyzyk and Matt Pietruszka took a genuine interest in my research and professional development and advocated for me to the best of their ability. I grew intellectually and professional through my job in a way that informed and complemented my research, and this would not have been possible without them and my esteemed colleagues who kept me in good spirits.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Research Question

What determines the success or failure of military advisory missions, and in which areas of host military effectiveness can advisors have the greatest impact? Despite military advising's prominence in policy discussions, the academic literature has not yet addressed the issue, and existing theories on international relations and military effectiveness offer few potential answers. Moreover, no standard, recognizable, and widely agreed upon term to describe what I call "foreign military advising" currently exists. Therefore, in answering this question, I first begin by explaining what military advising is. I then explore the literature on military effectiveness and organizational learning and discern what these areas can offer this study. Finally, I detail the research design that following chapters will execute.

The United States and regional powers send military advisors abroad in service of key security objectives frequently, believing them to be a low cost and low visibility means of achieving security objectives. Remarkably, neither academic scholars nor the policy community has investigated this claim. Both the United States and others have pursued major foreign policy strategies based on an unproven assumption. No wisdom, scholarly or otherwise, currently exists about the overall utility of military advisory missions or how to run an effective one. This dissertation answers both questions and offers insight on how to determine the likelihood of mission success before the United States even before it gets involved in a conflict.

The US military considers foreign military advising as a core competency, and the scope and number of these missions over the past two centuries affirms the American investment in the practice. Since 2001, it has become increasingly involved in military advising missions since, a trend most expect to continue well into the future. Military advising is frequently touted as a high-impact, low-cost strategy, an essential item in the American military toolkit that allows us to develop host military capabilities in lieu of direct US combat involvement. Other countries have made similar choices; Iran has sent as many as 2,000 advisors to train the

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Syrian government forces in its civil war; while many are likely fighting on the regime's behalf, there is some advising going on.  

Historically, American advisory mission outcomes have run the gamut from resounding success to abject failure. What little discussion exists on this topic has generally focused on the extent and duration of the United States' commitment, cultural and linguistic differences, or building the border security and police forces' capacity in addition to that of the military. The missions in Korea and Vietnam were similar in these respects, as are most American advisory missions. In both cases, the mission lasted an extended period of time, lacked cultural and political understanding and language skills upon arrival, and advised a range of security organizations. Even so, these missions produced radically different results. Moreover, these variables function more like constants than true variables, changing very little if at all over the course of advisory missions. Moreover, these factors are present in similar degrees across virtually all cases. They are therefore poorly suited to explain variations over time and across units. What, then, explains whether advisory missions succeed or fail?

I. Military Advising in Context

This section offers context surrounding the many was that the US military offers instruction to foreign militaries. The extant literature has not seriously addressed military advising, and therefore no operational definition currently exists. Most military studies do not explicitly define the term. Army Field Manual 3-07.1 Security Force Assistance provides the only explicit definition of the term:

"unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host-nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority. SFA improves the capability and capacity of host-nation or regional security organization's security forces....including but not limited to military, paramilitary, police, and intelligence forces; border police, coast guard, and customs officials; and prison guards and correctional personnel- that provide security for a host nation and its relevant population or support a regional security organization's mission."

The Field Manual offers a much broader conceptualization of military advising than this dissertation; I restrict my study to improvements of host military performance. It uses the term "assistance," which includes

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financial and material help in addition to training. This dissertation focuses on the non-material help provided to the host military, and I use the term "advising" throughout to make this distinction. This study uses it to mean a formal advisory program in which US military personnel are stationed in the host country to teach its military to perform combat-related tasks, such as various tactics.

Advisory missions are long term endeavors. Most run at least ten years, and many continue for decades; for example, the United States has operated a number of training missions following World War Two that continue today. Military advising is not just an activity for powerful countries; many weak states send advisors to even weaker countries or anti-government groups in different countries. Cuba has sent military advisors to many countries throughout Africa and the Middle East, which began as an effort to promote revolutionary regimes in Africa. Saudi Arabia has recently solicited a Pakistani presence on the peninsula including military advisers, and many would consider Pakistan a nearly failed state. Moreover, Pakistan has operated training missions in nearly every state in the Persian Gulf, some beginning as far back as 1971. The number of advisers in each of these missions runs from less than 100 to 55,000. Sub-100 adviser missions are considered very small, and most missions have advisers numbering in the mid hundreds to low thousands. Recipients of IMET (International Military Education and Training) training may not have American advisers deployed to their home countries at all, as the program is centered on education at American institutions. Multiple advisory groups operate training missions in one host state simultaneously, with each mission responsible for the training of different units. Anti-government rebel groups are often on the receiving end of foreign military advising and training. Cuba trained Polisario guerrilla fighting for independence in Western Sahara, and more recently, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan began training Syrian rebels.

Military advising encompasses both limited advisory missions as well as those akin to nation building in which the advisory group state builds the military from the ground up and typically plays a pivotal role in developing defense-related institutions as well. The American mission in South Korea is among the best known examples. In 1946, the US established a military government which oversaw not only the training and

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3Khalid S. Almezaini The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests. (New York: Routledge Books) 2012, p 141
development of an indigenous South Korean military, but also the administration of the country as whole, including the development of the Ministry of National Defense beginning in 1948. Other missions are far more limited in scope, consisting of a host state with an intact and at least minimally functional military.

Advisory missions fall into one of four categories. The first of these is foreign exchange programs that bring small numbers of key officers from the host military to the advisory group state for training. This is the most common form of advising which the US provides it for nearly all of its allies. The second form involves a small number of soldiers deployed to the host nation, but teaching is restricted to technical matters. When one state sells weapons systems to another, the advisory group state also sends a small number of soldiers to instruct the host military in the proper use of that system. The advisory group does not advise on tactics or combat matters. The American and French involvement in Chad during the 1980s is a prime example of this second form of military advising. The third form involves deploying a large number of
advisors to the host and attaching them to many command-level units. Advisors can even follow these units into combat to better assess performance and offer guidance for improvement. Fourth, imperial states often built indigenous military forces from scratch in their colonies. The British-built Arab Legion in Jordan is among the best known examples. An initial survey of the data appears to indicate that instances of colonial military building have a higher rate of success than other case. That success may be attributable to the colonial power's control over the entire governing apparatus and the fact that senior officer corps were often staffed by relatively experienced Europeans rather than indigenous soldiers. This dissertation addresses the third type; specifically, missions in which the United States recruits and builds a foreign military practically from scratch under combat conditions.

Improvement in host military effectiveness is not always the primary goal for either host or advisory group. Military advisors can also function as a tool of economic penetration; historically, European nations and to a lesser extent the United States have used military assistance programs to facilitate the sale of arms. Economic penetration was the primary driving force behind the deployment of military advisory missions in the interwar period as Europeans battled over the Balkan states and Latin America as markets for their arms. Similarly, both advisory group and host states use such missions to deepen political ties. If performance improvement is not the primary goals of the cooperation for both states, effectiveness may not improve significantly. On the other hand, the Chilean military became the most respected and developed in Latin America through its cooperation with Germany and went on to similarly train a number of other militaries in the region.

For the purposes of this study, I consider instances of military-to-military advising that focus on tactical training and consisting of a advisory group troop deployment to the host nation lasting five years or more. Given the organizational inertia of military bureaucracies, making significant changes across a military requires a mission sufficient in duration and broad in scope. A five year duration requirement narrows the universe of cases to those in which some improvement may have occurred. It also diminishes the influence of

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a selection bias in which the most successful missions may be the shortest because the tasks outlined for these missions are comparatively simpler than those of longer missions. I focus on changes in effectiveness at the tactical level because combat skills at the tactical level are the most transferrable, and the impact of military advising is most evident in small units. The influence of political rather than military decision-making at the operational and strategic levels makes the transfer of knowledge and skills less observable.

The next section explores the how existing literature addresses the question of why these instances of military advising succeed or fail. There are three major categories—anecdotal accounts from advisors, explanations of military effectiveness, and theories of organizational learning.

II. Military Effectiveness and Change

For such an inquiry, there is no better place to begin than the literature on when states develop appropriate military doctrines and when military organizations innovate and change. The central debate at the core of this literature is whether military organizations can change on their own or require an external impetus to do so. This discussion draws heavily on several theoretical paradigms—organization theory, organizational culture theory, and bureaucratic politics theory, which I will explore in greater depth. Each of these theoretical paradigms offer different insight about the success or failure of the US military to develop effective advisory programs. Like any other military activity to which this literature has been applied, namely large conventional conflicts and more recently counterinsurgency, military advising is a skill that requires an appropriate doctrine and approach to perform well.

The central debate in the scholarship deals with whether change in military organizations occurs from within or whether such change originates in the political leadership that imposes change upon the military. Those who argue that change must be externally imposed contend that absent an intervention, organizational dynamics continue unmolested. Barry Posen highlights the importance of external pressure; absent a push for doctrinal change from civilian leaders, militaries resist change and pursue offensive doctrines as organization theory predicts. A military may adapt on its own when facing the gravest of threats, but otherwise, Posen argues that political leaders, ever mindful of the balance of power and the nature of the
international system, compel their militaries to adopt an appropriate doctrine where they otherwise would not have. Historically, however, political leaders' efforts to force a change have often proven unsuccessful. Most notable among examples is Kennedy's effort to force the Army to adopt a counterinsurgency doctrine during the Vietnam War.

The balance of power literature identifies the political system and nature of civilian oversight, maverick officers who work to affect change from within the military, and external threats as some of the driving forces behind the formation of military doctrine and military innovation. The works summarized above all draw upon one or more of the following theories: bureaucratic politics theory, organization theory and organizational culture theory; in the sections that follow, I outline each of these theories and how they relate to this research question.

Stephen Rosen attributes this resistance to military culture rather than organizational dynamics, and argues that change develops from within the military. He credits military culture for the inertness of these organizations, noting in particular that career structures within the military reward those who follow traditional paths. Armor officers secure promotions by mastering armor doctrine and tank driving skills, not for promoting tactics that emphasize light forces and small vehicles in urban terrain. Accordingly, Rosen argues that "maverick" officers who promote change within the military do so at the expense of their own career development, so incentives are misaligned to produce change. To affect change, the military leadership can alter the system of career incentives to favor young officers opting for non-traditional career paths.  

Kimberly Zisk also contends that civilian intervention is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain doctrinal changes as military organizations often innovate from within. While she acknowledges military organizations' tendency toward conservatism and the propensity to seek greater autonomy and resources, she first argues that militaries also respond to threats to their survival from foreign enemies. Military officers follow the changes in doctrine and force structures of potential adversaries and preoccupy themselves with

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foreign threats and forwarding the state's security interests. When officers perceive a change in their adversary's military, they assess the repercussions for the future conduct of war and whether the current doctrine adequately meets these needs. If it does not, then officers explore possibilities for doctrinal change. Second, Zisk contends that military officers are not monolithic, and receptivity to innovation varies from one individual to another. Decisions reflect the interactions of a community of individuals, which allows a small number of individuals to push for doctrinal innovation. Third, Zisk challenges assertion that civilian intervention always comes in the form of pitched bureaucratic battles, instead suggesting that such intervention can take one of several forms. When civilian leaders advocate a change that the military perceives as contrary to its organizational interests, they have several tools they can use to achieve this end. They can force the change on the military, which is likely to result in the bureaucratic struggle and organizational hostility that other scholars describe. Alternatively, civilian leaders can broaden the defense community, thereby exposing military leaders to the merits of other ideas and effectively affect a doctrinal change through persuasion and coalition building with less conservative portions of the officer corps. Bureaucratic politicking plays a much lesser role in situations like this.

Deborah Avant not only recognizes the importance of career incentives, but also considers the inner workings of military organizations and the political systems of which they are a part. She challenges the assertion that militaries are inherently change-averse, arguing instead that different government structures create different patterns of civilian oversight, which impact the military's ability to change. The British military adapted without civilian intervention during the Boer War, yet the US Army failed to do so in Vietnam despite persistent civilian intervention. Avant points out that the British political system allowed more unified civilian oversight of the military, which allowed the military to develop a more flexible and responsive culture.

The bureaucratic politics model views the military as both a composite of many smaller groups and one government agency among many. Organizational decisions are the outcome of bargaining games among subgroups as leaders strive to promote their own organization or sub-branch and preserve its nature and

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interests. Each player in these bargaining games represents a particular department or agency and that organization's constituencies and interests. Because each player serves a different function and has beliefs that align with those of the department they represent, they offer conflicting recommendations about what should be done. Divergent responsibilities on the shoulders of different individuals create differences in what each actor judges to be important. Given the high stakes of these situations, all actors involved fight hard for the approach that they believe is best. To illustrate, the same push-pull process that characterizes the political process among elected officials as the public knows it also characterizes decision-making throughout the government. This theory suggests that missions that do not further an organization's importance or influence will receive minimal attention or will be rejected outright. Whereas theories of institutional change and learning focus on the inner workings of the organization to the exclusion of external factors and organization theorists do not account for the full range of ways in which external pressures can influence the organization, bureaucratic politics theory highlights the context surrounding the military organization as an important factor in its development. This paradigm suggests that certain alignments of bureaucratic politics may prevent military organizations from adopting the features that advisory programs need to be successful.

Organization theory suggests that militaries are rational and goal-oriented institutions that seek to fulfill their functionally specialized purpose or mission. In order to do this, organizations develop norms, doctrine, or preferred patterns of behavior, or SOPs. Organizations are loathe to change their SOPs; militaries are therefore extremely change-averse, a trait that arises from organizational norms, structures, and SOPs that concentrate on desired objectives. These patterns give rise to an organizational culture that ossifies certain norms and patterns of behavior. Accordingly, even when actors within a military attempt to make changes, structural and procedural constraints forestall it. According to this model, the actual structures and processes in place must change before a meaningful shift in the organization can occur. Organization theorists credit militaries' resistance to change with seemingly formalized or inappropriate behavior. Certain circumstances can motivate militaries to make changes, including organizational failure, external pressure, or opportunities to expand or increase the organization's autonomy, influence, or funding. The organization theory approach suggests that standard operating procedures (SOPs) and organizational norms and culture
are not set up to promote advising missions and will not be absent external pressure, an organizational failure, or an opportunity to enhance the stature and influence of the organization.

Where organization theorists focus on procedures and protocol, scholars of organizational culture identify the prevailing patterns of thought within an organization as the man factor inhibiting organizational change and learning. Scholars of organizational culture employ varying but closely related definitions of the term. For example, Elizabeth Kier points to "the set of basic assumptions and values that shape shared understandings and the forms or practices whereby the meanings are expressed, affirmed, and communicated to the members of the organization."\(^8\) Others define in terms of institutional memory: "In a sense, institutional memory is what older members of an organization know and what new members learn through a process of socialization."\(^9\) Scholars look to an organization's history to understand the origins of organizational culture, since the formative years exert a great influence on the organization's development. Scholars of organizational culture suggest that organizations are created to serve certain purposes and accomplish certain missions, and as time passes, some missions are given priority over others, depending on the preferences of the dominant group. The bureaucratic politics model advocates a similar view but focuses on the bargaining process between competing interests rather than a normative preference for certain missions to explain organizational behavior. Organizational essence is "the notion held by members of an organization as to what the main capabilities and primary mission of the organization should be."\(^10\) Organizations favor policies that will augment their status and relevance, fight for capabilities that they see as integral to their essence, and pay little attention to functions that are not considered essential. "Career officials of an organization believe that they are in a better position than others to demonstrate what capabilities they should have and how they should best fulfill their mission. They attach very high priority to controlling their

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own resources so that these can be used to support the essence of the organization." Career incentives are structured so as to reward individuals whose role contribute to the preferred missions at the expense of those who do not. For example, military officers compete for roles in which promotion is most likely, which are those that best serves the essence. Specifically, military officers compete to participate in combat organizations but not advisory missions.

Characteristics of an organization's culture or "essence" can influence its ability to learn from experience. In John Nagl's study of the Vietnam War and the Malayan Emergency, he concludes that the British military had proven better able to adapt to the needs of counterinsurgency warfare because it had developed into a "learning organization," whereas the US Army had never established itself as a learning institution, which prevented it from adopting an effective counterinsurgency strategy. The American and British armies grew into different perspectives on their roles and the types of conflicts they would fight abroad as a result of differing histories and cultures. The British sought to preserve its capability to fight a large land war on the continent when absolutely necessary as well as policing its empire and putting down insurrections where they occurred. Such concerns lend themselves to a disposition toward limited war, whereas the Americans focused on mid to high intensity conventional warfare, favoring massive armies, tremendous firepower, and the total destruction of the enemy's fighting power. This attitude, what Krepinevich calls the "Army Concept," was so strong that it effectively stamped out suggestions that did not support it, thereby stifling the learning process. While the British army accepted suggestions from the field and other forms of questioning methods that were demonstrably not working, the American army squelched them due to a strong and unyielding organizational culture to the contrary. As a result, the advisory mission in Vietnam suffered as well.

Kier points out that militaries are limited not only by a culture of following particular career structures but also by limitations imposed by civilian leadership. Like other aspects of military culture, these constraints become absorbed into the organization's culture. Kier fuses considerations of institutional

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12 John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*
structure and organizational culture; the civilian leaders set up the structure in which the military operates, and the military adapts to work within those limits. She challenges the assertion that militaries inherently prefer offensive doctrines. Rather than having any inherent proclivities, militaries strive to protect their traditional ways of doing things that they believe are "integral to the success of their mission."13

Each of these paradigms has merit, but none of them fully explains the full range of advising outcomes. Organization theory and bureaucratic politics theory neglect the "softer" elements that are critical to advisory missions; advisors' accounts suggest that some of the most important components of an advisory mission require building relationships, learning to work in the local cultural environment, and finding ways to make the host soldiers receptive to the advisory group's presence and its teaching. Organizational culture theory fares better on this point, but "culture" is a nebulous entity that is difficult to establish as a causal factor. It is virtually impossible to distinguish an individual decision made based on values from one based on material incentives, and in any case scholars differ wildly on their chosen definitions of culture. For example, Nagl discusses culture in terms of institutional features and processes, while Pollack addresses learned behavior and preferences including deference to authority and which skills and careers are considered valuable. In the next section, I propose an alternative framework for situating my theory.

III. Insight from Advisors' Experiences

Scholars have given only cursory attention to the efficacy of military assistance and advisory missions. Although the Department of Defense, the RAND Corporation, and similar organizations have written extensively on the topic, there exists no comprehensive literature specifically addressing the question of military advisory missions. Despite the studies that percolate around cases of American advisors, none has offered a definitive theory, either explanatory or predictive. A fair amount, however, has been written on historical cases like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This question has two constituent parts: the features of the advisory group state's assistance program as well as the characteristics of the military receiving assistance. This dissertation will focus on the organizational characteristics of both the advisory group and

host militaries that affect their ability to devise an effective advisory program and employ the training respectively.

The existing literature has not systematically addressed military advisory missions, so this section beings with an overview of advisors' personal accounts and observations from case-specific experiences. This corpus of literature addresses what functional tasks may yield success. Most advisory missions stress the time spent in the host country, language and cultural barriers, limited funding and manpower, corruption, and illiteracy. These accounts do not address the underlying institutional structure that determines whether an organization can do these things. I therefore go on to draw upon the literature on organizational learning to provide insight on this question.

**Duration and Commitment of the Advisory Mission** The simplest potential explanation for advisory mission outcomes success lies in the length and extent of the advisory presence in the host nation. Host military effectiveness should increase with a longer partnership and more advisors. Anecdotally, however, Pollack and Eisenstadt find that while the Egyptian, Iraqi, and Syrian reliance on Soviet tactics varied considerably, no apparent correlation exists between the extent of the advisory presence in each of these countries and the degree to which each adopted Soviet tactics. Similarly, despite nearly 20 years of entanglement in Vietnam, the South Vietnamese demonstrated no improvement. While mission success requires a minimum level of commitment and time in the host country, empirics suggest that success does not otherwise correlate with the length of the mission.

On the other hand, others argue that advisory missions should maintain a small footprint to succeed. The benefits are twofold. First, the presence of fewer advisors requires the host military to shoulder most of the combat burden and develop its skills in the process. Second, a smaller presence keeps a local face on military operations. A visibly foreign-led effort can alienate the population, which is especially critical in counterinsurgency wars. Of course, limiting mission size and funding can be detrimental if the advisory group

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state deploys an insufficient number of advisors to affect real change in the host military. In the same vein, advisors who cannot accompany their units into combat missions forfeit the most valuable opportunity to observe, critique, and offer guidance to their unit. These advisors also forego an important means of winning their units' respect and therefore the ability to influence it. Thus, successful missions could be those that navigate a path between the Scylla of minimal involvement and the Charybdis of usurping operational control.

Organizational and political limitations have been drivers of small advisory missions in the past, which underscores the importance of looking for a deeper, institution-based explanation for outcomes rather than simply considering the "checklist" that advisors' accounts offer. In El Salvador the emphasis on host military independence resulted from organizational constraints rather than a conscious policy choice. Congress and the Reagan Administration reached a compromise that imposed a 55-man limit on the number of advisors who could be deployed to El Salvador. While the Reagan administration found a number of ways to circumvent the restriction such that it deployed about 150 men, but the compromise greatly limited the scope of the mission.

Advising vs. Commanding Advisors also indicate that limiting their activities to a strictly advisory rather than command role may lead to better outcomes because doing so encourages and allows the host military to learn to operate autonomously. Advisory who constantly intervene to command units in combat rather than advise them stunts these units' development by stripping the opportunity to develop skills through practice in a combat environment and trial and error. The Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) stressed the importance of the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) independence, "Koreanizing" doctrine and training, and empowering Korean officers to lead in training and combat and to make organizational changes. KMAG

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constantly strove to minimize ROKA reliance on the United States for equipment and logistical support.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, the US mission in El Salvador adopted the mantra "Keep it Simple, Sustainable, Small, and Salvadoran," employing a small number of advisors and barring them by law from participating in combat operations.\textsuperscript{17} This forced the Salvadoran armed forces to learn to fight the FLN because they knew that the United States could not do so for them.

\textit{Importance of Personality and Relationships:} Previous advisors have noted the importance of the individual personality, intellectual curiosity, and flexibility of each advisor for the success of the mission. Michael Metrinko describes the complexity of advisor selection, as the role of an advisor requires intangible skills that differ from those required of normal soldiers. He identifies knowledge of the human terrain, ability to work independently in a foreign environment, and the ability to negotiate as vital skills.\textsuperscript{18} He stresses the importance of learning a great deal about the political, social, and economic conditions of the host country, which requires initiative and flexibility to absorb information on the spot. Similarly, every account emphasizes the necessity of knowing the local culture, both in order to ensure the receptiveness of the host nation's leaders to heed the advice and to minimize communication errors. The advisor directs much of his effort toward persuading his counterpart of the wisdom of the policies, procedures, or assignments he wants his counterpart to adopt\textsuperscript{19}, so failing to respect local etiquette can create an adversarial relationship between the advisor and the host country's leadership. While the Soviet-Arab partnership was fraught with political and economic conflicts from the outset, poor behavior drove a wedge between them and the Egyptian officers, and ultimately was the final straw that led to the dissolution of the Soviet-Egyptian alliance. Egyptian officers


\textsuperscript{18} Michael J. Metrinko, American Military Advisor: Dealing with Senior Foreign Officials in the Islamic World (Place of publication not identified: LULU Press, 2014), 17.

and Soviet advisors did not get along; Egyptian journalist and Nasser's personal friend Mohamed Heikal noted that many Egyptian officers felt humiliated by the Soviets, had a low opinion of them, and unreceptive to their advice as a result.\textsuperscript{20} The Iraqi and Syrian officers experienced similar difficulties with the Soviet advisors.

Similarly, advisors must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the host country, lest the leaders of the host country disregard their suggestions or sideline them in the decision-making process. The advisor must absorb as much information as he can and display his commitment and enthusiasm for this learning process, because understand these things will determine both the advice he gives and how he delivers it. Such a job requires a deep sense of commitment to persist in learning so many new things. Furthermore, serving as an advisor is not a 40-hour a week job, and the advisor must be available to his counterpart as necessary. This is particularly important in situations when unofficial, causal gatherings at mealtimes or in the late evening hours offer greater opportunity for progress than the formal meetings.\textsuperscript{21} As such, the most successful missions may be those with the most qualified and motivated advisors. To this end, the prestige and perceived desirability of serving as an advisor is critical.

\textit{Development of the Advisory Program} Advisors have also noted that sometimes the advisory group fails to develop an advisory program that adequately addresses the needs and limitations of the host military. Advisory group states use advisory missions to spread their particular way of war, which may not be well-suited to the host state. In this case, the host military will not improve its performance because it did not build the right set of skills. Alternatively, the host state may deems the content of the training irrelevant to its particular military needs and therefore choose not to adopt the tactics of the advisory group state. In either case, the advisory group state will fail to improve the host military's effectiveness. Even if the ARVN had adopted all American tactics and suggestions, it likely would not have performed well since the American way of war was poorly suited to an asymmetric conflict. Host militaries, however, rarely embrace their advisory groups' tactics.


\textsuperscript{21} Metrinko 26-7
wholeheartedly, so the more likely problem is that the host would choose not to adopt the advisory group's tactics. For example, many company grade officers in the Vietnamese Army who received training in the United States believed that the tactics they learned in the US were not quite applicable to the situation in Vietnam. One American advisor recounted:

One day during practice in firing the 60mm mortar I was rather appalled at the complete lack of organization of the class...I asked [the lieutenant], "You're just back from Fort Benning aren't you? and he said "Yes, sir." And I said..."How do you compare the instruction you just finished giving with that which you received at Fort Benning?" and his answer was "Oh, it was much better at Fort Benning." So I said "Why?" and he said, "Well, sir, that was Fort Benning and this is Vietnam."

In order for the advisory group state to succeed in improving the host state's combat effectiveness, the host state must first adopt or modify at least some of the advisory group state's practices. A mismatch between the new practices and the host military's organizational goals and norms can limit the adoption of new tactics. On the other hand, military advisory efforts may be most successful when the host military melds indigenous tactics with those it learns in training. The Arab armies under Soviet advisory groupage selectively adopted Soviet tactics and discarded those that they regarded as irrelevant to their needs. Pollack and Eisenstadt find that the militaries of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq performed the best when they adapted Soviet tactics to their particular needs and capabilities.

Scholarly work addressing military advising is virtually nonexistent. An exception is Stephen Rosen, who argues that military advisory missions that focus efforts on improving unit cohesion are more successful in improving combat performance because poor unit cohesion is the biggest limiting factor for the armies of the developing world and little can be accomplished without its improvement. Advisory missions can do the following to improve unit cohesion: the mission can be headed by a charismatic leader who can pull the army together, advisors at the lower levels should be experienced soldiers who can professionalize units, and the mission can protect military leaders from political pressures and threats. Furthermore, poor unit cohesion

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23 Eisenstadt and Pollack

has plagued armies of developing countries much more than a lack of weapons and technical abilities. An army with poor unit cohesion stands little chance of performing well in combat even with the best of equipment and technical know-how. Similarly, insufficient equipment and technical skills can be taught relatively easily with adequate unit cohesion. Historically, the United States has adopted one of two approaches to military assistance, the first of which is to give the host nation sophisticated equipment and weapons as well as training to use them. Rosen argues that this approach can prove problematic because it requires that the military receiving the advising is well-developed enough to easily absorb new techniques and equipment and fight well. Host state militaries are usually not established enough for this approach to succeed. The second approach emphasizes the political and social aspects of the problem rather than the material. This approach assumes that a nation's army reflects its society such that social cleavages and political divisions result in a divided military that cannot function well. Similarly, a nation that does not suffer from such problems can produce a competent and professional army. Rosen's article offers valuable insight, but he does not draw upon in-depth case study comparisons, which is what this dissertation offers.

A comparison of advisers' firsthand accounts suggests that while successful advisory programs share a number of common characteristics across time and space (e.g. the importance of cultural sensitivity and remaining in an advisory rather than command role), other characteristics of successful missions vary tremendously with locality. For example, cultural sensitivity in El Salvador and Iraq differ from one another. The needs of each mission and the limitations of the host military vary with each mission, and therefore the ability to learn and adapt to changing circumstances is key to success. This dissertation asks what causes military advisory missions to succeed or fail with a particular focus on the advising country rather than the receiving side. This research question is therefore primarily one of how well the military organization draw lessons from these experiences and make the appropriate changes.

To my mind, however, developing an effective advisory program is largely a story of institutional change and organizational learning. Of course, these theories can apply to both the host military and the advisory group; they address both the host military's ability to learn from advisors and the advisory group's ability to devise an effective program. Given that this project focuses primarily on the features of advisory
programs, I will concentrate on what each of these paradigms suggests in terms of advisory program success. Finally, I will describe this research question in the context of organizational learning.

The phenomenon of military advisory missions has never before been the subject of systematic, scholarly analysis, so I draw alternative hypotheses that I expect to test in my dissertation from other work that addresses military change and learning. Scholarly literature in addition to the firsthand accounts of American military advisors identify the above factors as critical to the success of military advisory missions, but what determines whether the advisory group is able to adopt these features?

IV. Organizational Learning and Military Advising

In this section, I propose the organizational learning paradigm as a useful framework for understanding how to build effective advisory program. Scholars have applied an organizational learning framework to address how great powers with force structures designed to fight large scale conventional wars adapted to the needs of counterinsurgency missions. Like COIN, military advising is an activity that lies outside the organization's mission, and the military must therefore learn quickly when this occurs.

For this study, "learning" means different things for the advisory group than it does for the host military because the demands on each side differ; in order for the advisory mission to succeed, the advisory group and the host military must learn different things. Learning theorists all stress the importance of leadership, continuous practice, decentralized structures and information sharing, which are reflected in the following measures of institutional structures and processes that underpin organizational learning. Accordingly, I devise two measures of learning that reflect the importance of these factors and how they apply differently to the advisory group and host military. The nature of the activity that each military must learn and the time horizon available to do so differs. When the activity that a military must learn deviates considerably from the organization's main purpose, it must possess a robust institutional structure to rapidly process information, learn lessons, and make changes accordingly. Because such a military is oriented toward a different type of mission, it will not have trained extensively for the task at hand. For example, if the US military is designed to fight and win the nation's wars, it will not have trained extensively for counterinsurgency missions. When such a mission arises, the military will rely heavily on the structures in
place to rapidly process information and make changes. By contrast, host militaries usually receive training in their primary mission area. Therefore, while training is always an important component of learning and institutionalizing those lessons, it is less relevant for the advisory group because many of their challenges will be unforeseen.

The scholarship on organizational learning builds on that of individual learning, taking into account the processes by which the organization captures individuals' lessons learned and incorporates them into the institutional memory. The definitions of institutional learning that scholars employ vary widely. The two most notable differences lie in the relationship between learning and policy change as well as the accuracy of the lessons learned. For some scholars, "learning" only qualifies as such if a meaningful policy change occurs as a result. For others, learning is distinct from policy change; learning does not always lead to change, and policy changes can arise for a number of other reasons, such as shifts in the international system, a change in political leadership, or shifts in domestic politics at either the bureaucratic or societal levels. Additionally, some scholars assume that lessons must be accurate; "learning" occurs when an organization adapts to improve performance. Others such as Jack Levy define learning as any change based on experience rather than stipulating that organizations make the correct inferences from experience. According to Levy, such an approach is problematic because it demands a standard for assessing correctness. He concludes, as do I, that the accuracy criterion is best excluded given the absence of consensus on what constitutes accuracy. Scholars have suggested that organizations have a hard time learning the correct lessons, and that attempts at learning are "myopic, incremental, and ignorant." Scholars of sociology and organizational behavior observe that human beings tend to make systematic mistakes in recording events and make erroneous inferences from them. Recent and significant events as well as rare events that came to pass skew individuals' perception of risk and probability. They fail to consider sample size when making inferences and overattribute events to the


26 Jack Levy, "Learning in Foreign Policy" p 291

purposeful actions of individual people. They often confound correlation with causation. These proclivities thwart individuals' and organizations' attempts to draw sound lessons from experience. Jervis contends that:

People pay more attention to what has happened than to why it has happened. Thus learning is superficial, overgeneralized, and based on post hoc ergo propter hoc reasoning. As a result, the lessons learned will be applied to a wide variety of situations without a careful effort to determine whether the cases are similar on crucial dimensions.

Like other scholars of military change, notably John Nagl and Janine Davidson, I utilize Richard Downie's definition of the term "organizational learning", which is "a process by which an organization uses new knowledge or understanding gained from experience or study to adjust institutional norms, doctrine, and procedures in ways designed to minimize previous gaps in performance and maximize future successes." While organization theorists and learning theorists share commonalities, they differ in several key ways. First, where organization theorists regard the organization as a unitary rational actor whose attempts at change are limited by bureaucratic structures within, learning theorists look to the relationships between members or groups within the organization to explain how an organization decides to make a change. Second, the learning process is cyclical, beginning with members or groups within an organization identifying an anomaly that they believe violates the organization's core tenets. The organization assesses the validity of this finding and considers measures to resolve the matter if there is a consensus on the problem. Upon reaching a consensus for the implementation of a particular option, the leadership acts to amend organizational behavior and institutionalize the new norm. The change is then transmitted throughout the organization, thereby altering SOPs, doctrine, and organizational norms. Third, organizational learning theorists acknowledge the importance of organizational culture, but instead emphasize making structural and procedural changes and creating institutions in order to promote learning.


31 Downie 35
Downie's work on counterinsurgency doctrinal change following the Vietnam War also supports the use of an institutional learning framework over more commonly drawn-upon theories. He argues that the US Army learned little from its experience in Vietnam, and its foray into El Salvador reflects a startling counterinsurgency doctrinal continuity. Downie contends that this is a story of failed institutional learning due to a blockage in the learning cycle caused by a lack of organizational consensus, which stymied Army learning from the Vietnam experience. Moreover, other theoretical frameworks poorly capture the problem; organization theory suggests that organization failure and opportunities to increase the institution's autonomy and resources should have urged doctrinal change in the Army following the Vietnam War, but no such change occurred. Balance of power does no better; despite significant pressure from the Reagan administration, the approach in El Salvador remained distinctly conventional. In short, organizational explanations suggest a doctrinal change where there was none.⁴²

This research question centers on how well militaries learn; the success of military advising depends on the advisory group's ability to develop an effective advising program and the host's ability to improve combat effectiveness. Advisory group and host militaries should best develop effective advisory programs and learn tactics respectively when they are effective learning organizations. Despite the many obstacles to organizational change, militaries can and do learn. Renowned learning theorist Peter Senge advocates a systems thinking method to transform groups into learning organizations. He offers five habits that an organization must practice in order to learn well:⁴³

- Systems thinking: Senge underscores the importance of understanding the entire system—both the organization and its environment and how the different parts interact—as a whole rather than focusing on independent parts.
- Personal mastery: individuals' commitment to learning and improving. Organizations with members who can learn quickly and effectively have a competitive advantage over those that do not. The organization must have structural and procedural features that transfer individual lessons into organizational norms.
- Mental models: the assumptions that organizations and their members make, arguing that organizations must challenge these assumptions if they are to learn. Accordingly, an organization must develop an open culture that promotes scrutiny of existing practices and trust rather than a conservative one. Mechanisms that enable the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information

⁴² Downie 163-4

are critical.\textsuperscript{34} This suggests that organizations that institutionalized both horizontal and vertical information sharing will learn better.

- **Shared vision:** A shared vision offers a focus for learning and a common purpose that motivates and enables members to learn. The best visions are based on those of individual employees throughout the organization, so a traditional top-down structures can inhibit the formation of a shared vision. Accordingly, decentralized structures are characteristic of learning organization.

- **Team learning:** the sum of individual learning; freer access to knowledge and expertise improves the organization's problem solving abilities. Accordingly, a learning organization must have first rate "knowledge management structures" that facilitate the creation, acquisition, and implementation of that knowledge across the organization.

Common threads running through Senge's points are that a learning organization must be both "open" and "localized" in order to practice his five disciplines. Openness refers to the freedom to speak one's mind and the willingness to consider the merits of others' ideas. A lack of openness can cripple the mission if individuals do not feel free to share critical information with their superiors. The literature on military effectiveness supports this; militaries in which incentives exist to mismanage the flow of information perform poorly on the battlefield. "Localized" refers to delegating as much authority and responsibility away from the center as possible, giving authority to those at the local level as much as possible. Senge's reasoning for these things bears resemblance to discussions of military effectiveness. Localized authority allows the organization to respond to changing circumstances more quickly and effectively than waiting for directions from the central authority. Furthermore, Senge contends that individuals learn more quickly when they develop a sense of responsibility for their actions such that they believe their learning is consequential. Implicit in Senge's advice on how to build a learning organization is the assumption that changing an organization's structure and processes over time is the key factor determining learning ability as opposed to culture. Janine Davidson validates this assumption as she finds that new processes and institutions that the US army created after Vietnam were most influential in its quest to learn to fight counterinsurgency wars in recent years.

Accordingly, this study will focus on the systems and processes in place for learning as the independent variable determining advisory program success. The features offered by learning scholars inform the conceptualization and measurement of both this study's independent variables, explained in detail in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{34} Senge 258
The Learning Cycle

Military advising entails a long and drawn out process that requires a research design giving particular attention to processes and sequential events. Experiential learning is a process that occurs over time, and various factors can facilitate or impede the process at each step. Learning theorists describe a learning cycle that captures how individuals learn and disseminate the information to the rest of the organization. Scholars have described this cycle in a number of different ways, the simplest of which I present here:^35

![Figure 1: The Learning Cycle](image)

The cycle contains three major steps: scanning, interpreting, and acting. Learning organizations have procedural features that promote each of these steps. The scanning phase consists of a concerted effort to gather lessons from individuals' experiences. The ideal typical learning organization will have processes in place to collect and sort the data. A decentralized structure that encourages input from junior officers and enlisted personnel is useful in the scanning phase because these ranks interact most directly with host military personnel. Interpretation consists of the analysis of the collected information to discern casual relationships, trends over time, and to codify the information such that it can easily be disseminated. The active questioning of assumption is critical at this stage in order to create a valid interpretation that considers a full range of possibilities rather than only those that maintain consistency with current practices. Most organizations have particular trouble with the interpretation phase; in addition to the aforementioned problems people tend to exhibit in their analyses, members frequently disagree on which interpretation of events is correct and what

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changes should be made. Lastly, the acting phase consists of actively disseminating the new knowledge such that all members internalize it. Information sharing is key here as well as in the previous steps. Downie stresses the importance of building consensus about the events that occurred, the lessons that the organization should draw from them, and the actionable steps that the organization should take to improve its performance. Individuals interpret events differently and draw different lessons, so ambiguity or disagreement about these things is likely. The organizational learning process hinges upon individual learning, which is the most basic requirement for organizational learning but does not guarantee it.

Experiential, or hands-on, learning plays an important role in military change given how frequently unexpected events or circumstances arise. Based on first-hand experience, individuals learn different lessons based on a number of factors like previous knowledge, training, education, worldviews, previously held believes, etc. Theories of experiential learning proceed as follows: individuals take an action and observe a response from the environment, after which the individuals take further action that takes into account previous events.

A common assumption is that as the organization gains more experience, it learns more about interacting in its environment and handling internal problems. Afterward, the organization formalizes and disseminates its lessons. March and Olsen argue that ambiguity surrounding events and their significance can cause the learning process in practice to differ from the theory. Ambiguity refers to the fact that following an event, it is not always clear what happened, why it happened, or whether it was good or bad. Thus, the causal relationships between actions and events must be inferred, and lessons that the organization should draw remain unclear. In sum, experience frequently does not produce wisdom or improved performance. The challenges imposed by ambiguity are especially relevant to military organizations; ambiguity not only leads


members to draw erroneous conclusions from events, but also makes building consensus about what lessons to learn difficult.

In her study of American learning from its previous involvement in counterinsurgency (COIN) conflicts, Janine Davidson found that the US military developed a robust system after the Vietnam War for converting experiential learning into institutional knowledge. Key factors in this success were institutional mechanisms such as and support from the leadership. She writes, "formal mechanisms and processes such as the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the process for after-action review, the Combat Training Center Program, websites, and military journals reflect a dynamic institution-wide learning system that enables the organization to leverage bottom-up experiential learning in ways unseen in previous eras."\(^{39}\) The comparison of military advising to COIN is particularly apt because both are non-traditional military activities to which the US military has historically granted little attention. Moreover, the context of the conflict and local conditions vary tremendously from place to place, and learning to operate within those conditions is entirely critical to success. Davidson argues that before the post-Vietnam reforms, doctrine was driven by a top-down process informed by theory, but in the post-Vietnam era, the formation of doctrine was mainly driven by experienced mid-level officers in a bottom-up process.\(^{40}\) In short, senior officers institutionalized bottom-up experiential learning.

The above discussion applies to both the host and advisory group, but for the host we must also consider how current patterns and causes of ineffectiveness can inhibit learning and potential for improvement.

**The Host Military** While the advisory group and program are no doubt important, the host military's endowments and limitations are equally if not more important to success. This section draws heavily on scholarship on military effectiveness, as this literature addresses a number of constraints on a military's ability to perform optimally with a given endowment of resources. Characteristics of the host state and its military

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\(^{40}\) Davidson 132
that inhibit effectiveness may also forestall any attempts at improving battlefield effectiveness if they adversely impact the learning process. Explanations for military effectiveness or lack thereof address the following factors: material endowments, the external threat environment, regime type, culture and society, and civil-military relations.

_Economic Underdevelopment_ Underdevelopment theory is the most ubiquitous explanations for military ineffectiveness. Perhaps developing countries are simply unable to generate military power as effectively as developed countries given an equal level of material resources. Proponents of this theory cite historical correlation between economic development and victory in war. Paul Kennedy argues that modern warfare is, in effect, industrial warfare as developed countries have come to rely heavily upon their industrial capacity when they make war.41 Accordingly, developing non-industrialized societies should have a much harder time engaging in modern warfare than advanced industrialized countries. With regard to military advising, perhaps lesser developed states have more difficulty making use of the training they receive. The underdevelopment theory has little to offer beyond the idea that underdeveloped states struggle to use their limited resources effectively, as it fails to identify a mechanism by which this occurs. While economic wealth and resource endowments no doubt play an important role in developing military power, they alone cannot explain performance on the battlefield. Stephen Biddle finds that material indicators are little better than a coin toss in determining battle outcomes.42 If material factors do not drive military effectiveness, then an influx of funds and equipment alone cannot spur learning or make soldiers more adept at their craft. The relationship between development and military victory, however, is far from deterministic.


Regime Type Perhaps the oldest non-material explanation for military effectiveness is regime type. This school of thought observes that since 1815, democracies have won most of the wars they have fought, and scholars have put forth several explanations for this trend.

David Lake suggests that democratic systems impose constraints on rent-seeking behavior that allow these states to divert more resources to security, garner greater support from the population during wartime, and have an easier time forming coalitions against aggressor states. Lake contends that this allows democracies to win a disproportionate share of the wars they fight. Dan Reiter and Allan Stam point to two different mechanisms to explain democratic prowess on the battlefield. The first of these highlights better strategic assessment in democratic states, which allows them to choose to fight only wars with a high probability of victory. The second mechanism suggests that democratic societies' liberal values produces higher quality leadership and initiative, particularly at the tactical level. Empirically, democratic states fight with top-notch leadership and initiative compared to non-democratic states. Since modern maneuver warfare places a heavy burden on junior officers, democratic ideals and individualism offer a leg up on the competition. Stam and Reiter also contend that democratic militaries demonstrate higher organizational efficacy; democratic leaders are less likely to perceive the military as a threat and are therefore more likely to encourage meritocratic practices. Of course, few states on the receiving end of military advice have been democratic. Some of these militaries have improved enormously as a result of the military advising and others have not, regardless of regime type. Furthermore, cases of more extensive military advising virtually never involve democratic host states, as these missions largely include developing government institutions as well. Militaries of democratic states may learn better than those of autocracies because of the reasons cited above, but it is important to note that those reasons are not inherent qualities of a democracy, they are simply more likely to be found in modern democracies.


44 Reiter and Stam "Democracies and Battlefield Effectiveness"
Another set of theories focuses on the external threat environment, suggesting that the graver the danger a state faces, the more incentive it faces to perform well militarily. Accordingly, states should be more likely to execute the functions that comprise military effectiveness as threats escalate. Scholars have proposed a number of mechanisms at work. Barry Posen argues that greater external threats prompt civilian leaders, ever mindful of the balance of power, to intervene in military matters.\(^4\) He also argues that nationalism enhances a state's ability to mobilize soldiers' energy and "spirit of self-sacrifice," which in turn improves a state's military capabilities.\(^5\) Alternatively, military organizations respond to shifts in the international system independent of the civilian leadership.\(^6\) Militaries facing grave or existential threats may learn better because survival requires it. This theory lacks an explanation of the mechanisms that lead a state from perceiving a grave threat to developing sound learning practices beyond the self-interest incentive to do so. All of the cases that this study considers involves significant security threats, but learning as well as performance varies widely.

Social and Cultural Factors Stephen Rosen has demonstrated that social divisions impact military effectiveness. In particular, a divided society can either generate a military that reflects society and its divisions or a unified military that bears little resemblance to society writ large. Both paths can prove detrimental to military effectiveness. A military that reflects social divisions risks internal fractures that limit effectiveness, for example Italy in both world wars. Alternatively, one that does not reflect society is likely to appear alien and untrustworthy to the state's political leadership, who may be reluctant to deploy it. Accordingly, a host state plagued by social divisions may have a difficult time benefitting from military advising and improving performance.

In his study of Arab military effectiveness, Ken Pollack argues that characteristics of Arab culture bear responsibility for the persistent ineffectiveness of Arab militaries. The key features of Arab culture that

\(^4\) Barry Posen *Sources of Military Doctrine*


\(^6\) Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War*
he identified include conformity and the preference of the group over the individual, centralization of and submission to authority, group loyalty (especially to family), emphasis on etiquette and socially "correct" behavior, and aversion to manual labor and technical work. Once transmitted to the soldiers of the Arab armies and air forces, Pollack argues that these cultural elements led to deficiencies in the junior officer corps, managing the flow of information, and utilizing the full potential of their armaments and equipments. Syria, Egypt, and Iraq experienced many years of Soviet military assistance, yet experienced little meaningful change in effectiveness. Learning practices change more rapidly and easily than culture and society, if those variables were operative in advisory success, then change in performance should require more time compared to an advisory mission where only learning practices must change.

**Political Intervention in the Military** Politicization of the military also inhibits effectiveness and could therefore constrain what the armed forces of the host state are able to learn from its advisory group. In her study on variations in military effectiveness, Caitlin Talmadge argues that states that adopt what she calls "best practices" with regard to civilian intervention in military affairs exhibit a much higher degree of combat effectiveness than those that adopt "worst practices." For Talmadge, the relevant aspects of civilian intervention include promotion patterns in the military, involvement of political leaders in the development of training regimens, adoption of decentralized command arrangements, and information management policies. In particular, states that adopt best practices promote or fire their military commanders based on performance in battle in wartime or performance in training during peacetime. States that adopt worst practices use competence as one of many factors in promotions, and may prioritize factors such as political loyalty over competence. Best practices concerning training require that political leaders push military leaders to make training realistic and frequent such that members of a unit have an opportunity to bond with one another and build trust with their officers prior to combat. Political leaders also ensure that military training consists of small and large unit exercises that involve different parts of the military. Worst practices for training entail imposing restrictions on large or multi-unit training exercises or fail to offer high-quality, frequent, and realistic training. States that adopt best practices also adopt decentralized command
arrangements that delegate a high degree of decision-making power to more junior officers, which allows units the initiative and flexibility necessary for complex operations. Worst practices for command arrangements typically consist of over centralizing command such that the vast majority of decision-making authority, even for rudimentary tactical operations, lies with senior officers. Lastly, best practices with regard to information management entails encouraging the free flow of information both vertically and horizontally in the military as well as between military and civilian leadership. States that adopt worst practices limit the flow of information both vertically and horizontally that leaves military units unable to adapt to changing circumstances based on current and accurate information.48

Conclusion This dissertation’s argument for why some advisory missions succeed in developing a more capable host military while others do not draws heavily from the ideas described here. Now armed with a thorough understanding of advisory missions, the research question, and relevant research from the literature, this dissertation proceeds in six parts. The next chapter lays out an institutional argument for advisory mission outcomes, defines the independent and dependent variables, and articulates the research design. Chapters three through six explore the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in four different US advisory missions: Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Finally, chapter seven summarizes key findings, offers policy recommendations, and offers thoughts on future research.

CHAPTER 2: A THEORY OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN US MILITARY ADVISING

This theory has two constituent and interacting parts, both focused on the institutional structures and processes that enable or inhibit organizational learning. The first addresses the advisory group's ability to develop an advising program that addresses the host military's particular security needs and limitations and teaches key concepts in a manner that inspires trust and confidence in the advisors' commitment and competence. Otherwise, the advisory group could either teach lessons inappropriate to the host's security needs or the host military may not how to follow the advisors' recommendations. The second addresses institutional structures and processes that can impede host military learning and therefore improvement.

This dissertation argues that institutional structures and processes in the host military and advisory group drive advisory mission outcomes. A minimal level of host military motivation and commitment to the mission is necessary but not sufficient for improvement in combat effectiveness; without it, there are no institutional structures or processes that can yield mission success.

This chapter introduces the theory and proceeds in six parts. First, I explain the importance of learning for the advisory group and describe and propose a measurement of the first independent variable: the institutional structures and processes that promote learning. Second, I do the same for the second independent variable: the institutional structures and processes that promote learning in the host military. Third, I define and explain the dependent variable, change in military effectiveness, and its constituent parts: unit cohesion, basic tactics, and complex operations. Fourth, I lay out my theory of success and failure in US military advising in a discussion about the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Fifth, I consider alternative explanations. Finally, I detail the research design and plan for the dissertation and offer an overview of my findings.

I. Advisory Group Learning and the Institutional Structures and Processes that Promote It

Every host military is unique with a different set of threats, limitations, and regional and internal political environments, and each host nation's society has a different set of social and cultural norms. Each mission requires familiarization with a different set of local conditions, a firm understanding of which can mean the difference between mission success and failure. As a result, many lessons that advisors learn are
therefore case specific and not directly transferrable to other missions. An advisory group must therefore have institutional structures and processes that promote learning in order to run a successful advisory mission. Winning wars requires that a military be adaptable rather than following SOPs or doctrine by rote.\footnote{John A. Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2009),} That adaptability is required of both parties in an advisory mission, as both sides are trying something new. The advisory group in particular must learn two key things: the host’s security needs and how to work in that environment. Unfortunately, the US military cannot maintain expertise and a repository of this information for every possible combination of security needs and countries that may need advising, especially in an era of increasing budgetary pressure. Understanding how to quickly develop that information after an advisory mission begins is therefore critical to mission success.

**Host’s Security Needs.** The advisory group must learn to teach and run an advisory program that best serves the host military's particular needs. Accordingly, institutional structures and processes in the best case help the advisory group discern what skills the host military needs to learn. Advisory groups that with the institutional features enumerated below can better ascertain the needs and limitations of their counterparts and adapt accordingly. On a macro level, the advisory group must correctly discern what kind of conflict it must equip the host military to fight. It should not teach the host military to fight a conventional war if the most pressing security concerns are asymmetric. Highly successful organizations like the US military gravitate toward the ways of thinking that made the organization successful and therefore tend to make assumptions that may not reflect a host military’s needs. Institutional structures and processes can counteract these tendencies by incentivizing the organization’s members to reconsider data and potentially formulate alternative analyses of a host military’s situation and how to handle it. On a micro level, the advisory group makes regular assessments about the areas of relative strength and weakness among host military units and what kind of training or other measures will remedy problems. Typically, advisors in the field make these observations and assessments, and
the advisory group must have an institutional mechanism by which advisors transfer this knowledge to senior leaders, who then can make policy changes.

**Building Cross-Cultural Working Relationships** Advisors must bridge the cultural gulf between themselves and their host military students. Advisors work very closely with their local counterparts, and many former advisors have noted the critical importance of developing personal relationships, rapport, and credibility with advisees. Advisor arrogance and insensitivity have plagued advisory missions in the past; the Syrians and Egyptians in the late 1960s and 1970s were unwilling to take advice from Soviet advisors in part because they regarded their Soviet counterparts as boorish, arrogant, and incompetent; the Soviets failed to make a connection and establish credibility. While cultural sensitivity in personal relationships plays a role, its importance remains secondary only to the advisory group’s understanding of local and regional political conditions and its ability to work within them. Thus, advisory groups’ political choices must be heavily informed by the local context.

The US military cannot retain deep knowledge and expertise on every potential host country. Even if it could, political realities change so rapidly in conflict zones that only a military with robust institutional structures and processes for learning will be able to adapt and perform well. A military that promotes such learning can quickly collect and analyze information, make the necessary policy changes, and disseminate that information so the changes are enacted on the ground. Militaries without these institutionalized learning mechanisms lack the ability to recognize and respond to failing policies. For example, in Korea the Americans learned over time that their reliance on parts of the old Japanese colonial infrastructure engendered ill will from the Korean population and that the social construct "face" dictated that advisors must interact with their counterparts in particular ways. While theoretically possible, it is not realistic to expect that advisors could have known or been taught information like this prior to departure. An in-depth knowledge of the host nation's political history, culture, and society would help advisors hit the ground running at the outset of an advisory mission and would have reduce the reliance on the group's institutional learning mechanisms.

Furthermore, the level of personal understanding that an advisor must have is fairly high. It is not enough to
tell an advisor in Korea that he must give feedback in private, although that would help. Military advising is a relationship-based enterprise in which the counterpart needs to feel respected and to a certain degree understood. These sentiments engender the trust required for host military officers and men to follow the advisor's lead. Moreover, if circumstances in a host nation or host military should change over the course of a mission, foreknowledge alone will not enable advisors to adapt and respond to the new situation.

In defining the independent variable for this study, I draw heavily on Nagl's criteria for what makes a "learning organization:"

1. Are high ranking officers routinely in close contact with those on the ground and open to their suggestions? Does the army promote suggestions from the field? The army must systematically solicit suggestions and input from advisors in the field. This is the primary way to determine the “ground truth” and how the advisors’ foreign counterparts are reacting to the training. Does the training provided adequately address the host military’s weaknesses and prepare it to handle the particular type of threat it faces? For example, are advisors teaching COIN rather than conventional tactics to host militaries facing asymmetric, internal threats? Are there changes in the style of instruction and interaction with the host counterpart that advisors believe should be made? What methods of instruction work or do not work?
2. Are subordinates encouraged to question superiors and policies?
3. Does the organization regularly question its basic assumptions?
4. Are Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) generated locally and informally or imposed from the center? SOPs should be developed informally at the local level such that these procedures are helpful, efficient, and relevant to the advisors following them.
5. Does a process exist for formalizing lessons and incorporating them into the institutional memory? If such a process exists, how well does it function?

While Nagl conceptualizes these five things in terms of organizational culture, I attempt to pinpoint the institutional structures and processes that enable them and adapt them to the particular needs of an advisory mission. In defining this independent variable, I identify five such institutional structures and processes: a cycle wherein advisors submit reports that senior leadership reads and returns feedback in the form of amended SOPs or individual responses, visits to units in the field by senior advisory group leadership, restricting advisors' activities to advising rather than commanding as much as possible, the establishment of a

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military school system staffed by host military personnel, and the unification of all advising efforts in a single organization.

**Reports Cycle** Successful advisory missions employ a cycle of reporting whereby advisors submit regular reports to advisory group leadership that include an evaluation of their units’ development, an assessment on what to do about it, approaches they have found helpful in dealing with their host military counterparts, and any other problems they may have encountered. The advisory group leadership must then review these reports, discern key lessons from the aggregate and disseminate new SOPs back to the advisors, either through individual correspondence or more impersonal means. Both the bottom-up and the top-down aspects of this cycle are necessary to enable the advisory group to learn well and act on its new understanding. The reports and feedback system institutionalizes the learning cycle in which learning theorists contend that an organization must scan the situation for information, interpret it, and then act based on it.

**Field Visits** In successful advisory missions, senior advisory group leaders make regular visits to units in the field to ascertain the "ground truth." Routine field visits are the only way for leaders to gain both an accurate understanding of progress and problems units face and contextual understanding of what they read in reports. In every advisory mission—some more than others—advisors tend to exaggerate the progress their units have made. Routine field visits can minimize the effect that inflated assessments of host military progress has on the advisory group's decisions regarding how to move forward. Field visits assist advisory groups in “scanning” for new lessons.

**Military School System** Establishing a military school system in the host country run by host military personnel helps institutionalize the advisors’ lessons in the host military’s institutional memory. Host military personnel teaching new recruits or more junior members enhances teaching and leadership skills and offers both teachers and students a more robust understanding of the material than they would have otherwise developed.
Advising vs Commanding. An advisory group that limits its interactions with the host military to advising as much as possible enables host military personnel to learn key tasks through performing them themselves. When advisors begin to take a more active role in decision-making and directing operations, they limit the host military’s opportunities to learn. Equally important, doing so can sap the host military of its commitment to its own development and establish an expectation that there is no need to take on a larger role in operations-and with it greater personal risk- because the advisors and potentially US combat troops will do things for them.

Organizational Unity. As discussed above, information and assessments about the host military’s development and necessary changes need to flow freely in formal channels up to the advisory group’s leadership and down to field advisors. Informal tips and other information exchanged between advisors are of course helpful, but without a formal means of communicating necessary information both up and down the chain of command, advisors with fewer or less experienced informal contacts are likely to miss important lessons. To this end, centralizing an advisory effort in one overarching organization charged with running the advisory program and nothing else (e.g. US-led combat operations) will ensure that information is shared with all the necessary parties and is not overlooked in favor of other responsibilities. This organizational unity and responsibility is especially important because advising is often a secondary mission, e.g. in Iraq or Afghanistan, and might otherwise be more easily overlooked or piecemeal.

Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes that Promote Organizational Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the advisory group seek suggestions, feedback, or other reports from advisors in the field?</td>
<td>Yes, it actively seeks feedback from field advisors to identify areas for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does senior advisory group leadership visit units in the field and conduct thorough investigations?</td>
<td>Yes, the leadership frequently visits units to observe operations and provide guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the advisory group use advisors’ feedback to discern key lessons, modify SOPs, and disseminate those SOPs and new knowledge back to advisors in the field?</td>
<td>Yes, the group systematically integrates feedback into training and operations manuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the advisory group establish a military school system staffed by at least some host military officers so that the new lessons become institutional knowledge? If so how well does it function?</td>
<td>Yes, the school system is well-functioning and regularly updated with the latest lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does an “advisory group” exist that oversees all advising matters and no other major responsibilities?</td>
<td>Yes, the group focuses solely on advising, ensuring no conflict of interest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1: Measuring Institutional Structures and Processes in the Advisory Group
II. Institutional Structures and Processes that Promote Learning in the Host Military

While this study aims to identify ways in which advisory groups can position themselves well for success, institutional structures and processes that inhibit organizational learning in the host military limits how much its combat effectiveness can improve. The host military must learn and practice what it taught. While this sounds relatively simple, most recipients of military advising suffer from poor institutional practices that inhibit the host military's ability to learn, practice, and truly develop combat skills. Even well-run advisory missions are likely to fail when confronted with poor institutional structures and processes in the host military. A host military with none of the institutional characteristics below has a higher capacity for organizational learning and is therefore more likely to improve its military effectiveness through advising. The list of indicators below is drawn from Talmadge's work on military effectiveness. This dissertation posits that the same factors that inhibit a military from fighting well will also preclude that military from improving. These factors are focused on neither the lack of skill or resources nor are they things that an advisory group (or any other external entity) can easily fix. They are institutional structures and processes of the host military.

**Promotions** Promoting high performing officers and firing incompetent ones is critical to a military's ability to build the human capital and good leadership necessary to learn. This is particularly important because advisory groups are ill-advised to withdraw from the host nation until the host military can defend itself independently. Leaders play a critical role in either fostering or inhibiting organizational learning. They can establish institutional processes and structures that actively capture lessons from experience, cross-fertilization of new ideas and the dissemination of lessons learned. For example, Army leadership directed many changes in processes and structures for collecting and disseminating new lessons after the Vietnam War. Poor leadership can also hinder learning by failing to promote bottom-up communication or structures that capture and disseminate knowledge. The quality of military leadership varies much more in developing countries in which the US advises than it does in the US military, as many militaries promote and fire officers based on loyalty in addition to or even in lieu of performance. Underperforming or incompetent officers cannot provide the savvy leadership that learning requires. Thus, one important measure of the host military's
capacity to learn is the degree to which officers are promoted based on merit. Proper promotional practices improve chances of advisory success because they allow officers who have learned well to implement those lessons.

*Training Restrictions* Limiting or prohibiting large or multi-unit training exercises imposes a ceiling on military performance and therefore limits much of the positive effects that military advisors can have. Training regimens are another critical avenue for disseminating new knowledge. The training the host military receives must be extensive, frequent, rigorous, and realistic in order for soldiers to adequately internalize how to fight properly. Similarly, the training should encompass both large and small unit training across different parts of the military in order to learn complex operations. Historically, some political leaders imposed restrictions on small-unit training, severely restricting the development of tactical proficiency. Such limitations impose an even lower ceiling on improvement than large unit training restrictions; without robust small-unit training, even basic skills such as weapons handling and utilizing terrain for cover and concealment will suffer.⁴ Without frequent, realistic training that requires coordination across units, the host military cannot codify new knowledge that the advisors gave them and incorporate it into the institutional memory.

*Centralized Command* Top-down organizational structures are detrimental for three reasons. First, they inhibit a personal investment in the organization from lower-level personnel that is necessary for an organizational commitment to improvement—what Senge calls personal mastery. Second, they forestall the development of a common purpose that motivates the personnel—what Senge calls a shared vision. Excessively centralized command arrangements concentrate authority in the senior leadership, leaving little decision-making authority or autonomy to junior officers and enlisted personnel.

Poor Information Management, Senge stresses the importance of information sharing, both horizontally and vertically; a host military that compartments information is less likely to learn. Information about strengths and weaknesses of previous performances requires the availability and dissemination of this information and the willingness to discuss it openly. Otherwise, it is difficult to pinpoint areas of potential improvement, which impedes problem solving. Restrictions on horizontal communication also limits individuals' ability to share what they have learned informally. Militaries must therefore promote communities of practice and informal discussion, as ideas and lessons are often propagated horizontally in informal environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes that Inhibit Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military develop competent leadership by promoting and firing officers based on merit and performance rather than political loyalty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military restrict training exercises?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military centralize command arrangements, leaving junior officers little to no autonomy in the field?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is critical information held hostage for power rather than being freely shared both horizontally and vertically?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.2: Measuring Institutional Structures and Processes in the Host Military

The previous two sections have laid out which institutional structures and processes drive mission outcomes. Yet the degree to which each of these institutional features is present also impacts mission outcomes. Qualitatively better functioning institutional structures and processes will likely yield better mission outcomes. This section offers a scale for measuring the “goodness” of the institutional structures and processes employed by both sides. For each institutional factor, the tables below enumerate conditions for best practices, average, and worst practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best practices</strong> Promote primarily based on merit and combat performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong> Merit one of several factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worst practices</strong> Merit not meaningfully considered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Restriction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best practices</strong> Open and willing to participate in any advisory group suggested training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong> Mostly willing, but some reluctance either due to practical problems or because they believe other topics of training require focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worst practices</strong> Resistance or refusal to advisory group training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3: Best, Average, and Worst Practices in Institutional Structures and Processes
### Centralization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Relatively decentralized, field and company grade officers can make independent decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Tendency toward centralization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Overlapping chains of command, political authorities bypass normal command channels and issue direct orders to the field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Info Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Intelligence services focus on the threat, officers communicate freely, information goes to those who need it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Some combination of best and worst practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Internally directed intelligence services, restrictions on officers’ communication, information used as leverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reports Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Solicited, read, used to make key decisions, changes disseminated back to advisors in the field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Advisor reports solicited but top-down part of the process is lacking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Neither part of the cycle functions well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Field Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Occurred regularly, senior leaders visited, even to remote locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Visits occurred but infrequently or by more junior personnel to accessible locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Field visits do not occur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advising vs Commanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Advisors do not tell counterparts what to do or do tasks for them as appropriate for host military’s development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Some combination of best and worst practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Advisors have direct combat responsibilities and take over tasks that should be left to the host military issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Training System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Training systemic with multiple training programs, replacement training, train as units, programs for various combat support functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Ad hoc, not all soldiers receive training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>A training system is nonexistent in practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Organizational unity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Advisors do not have combat responsibilities and are united under a separate single command that oversees training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Some combination of best and worst practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Advisors are primarily combat personnel and there is no organizational separation between advisors and combat personnel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3: Best, Average, and Worst Practices in Institutional Structures and Processes (continued)
III. Military Effectiveness and Improvement

The dependent variable is the change in the host military's effectiveness. "Military effectiveness" captures how well a military can fight with a given level of material resources such as funding, personnel, and equipment. It is a measure of human capital, capturing a military organization's degree of competence and professionalism. Providing sophisticated aircraft, weaponry, or other equipment to a second or third tier military will not increase its effectiveness. A very large army with sophisticated equipment that cannot optimally employ that equipment or execute basic tactical maneuvers well has demonstrated a low level of effectiveness. Similarly, a small army with little or outdated equipment is highly effective if it can plan and execute complex operations well on its own.

Effectiveness is not synonymous with victory; effectiveness, the focus of this study, addresses the conduct of the fighting rather than its outcome. Victory and defeat depend heavily on the relative endowments and effectiveness of the adversary, whereas effectiveness describes the extent to which a military can execute its own functions skillfully and efficiently. An ineffective military can win wars and an effective one can still lose; the German military in both world wars is the obvious example of the latter.

Combat effectiveness is notoriously difficult to measure. In this section, I review metrics put forth in the literature and explain why the alternative qualitative measures I offer best capture meaningful variation on the dependent variable. I then propose an operational definition for this study. Loss exchange ratios, or the ratio of attacker casualties to defender casualties, are the most commonly used measures of military effectiveness. These figures frequently serve as both a definition and measure of effectiveness such that the side with the lower casualties is considered more effective. The fundamental limitation of using loss exchange ratios as a measure of effectiveness is the fact that a low loss exchange ratio can result from a range of circumstances unrelated to battlefield effectiveness. Low casualties can result from marked proficiency, but an army can also sustain very low casualties as a result of surrender, retreat, or complete collapse, as the South Korean experience in 1950 demonstrates. Similarly, high casualties can result from a lack of effectiveness like that displayed by the allies in the First World War when they repeatedly employed foolhardy tactics. On the other hand, highly skilled and motivated units fighting to the death can cause high casualty rates as well, such as the Wehrmacht in the winter of 1944-5. While a low loss-exchange ratio can indicate battlefield
effectiveness in some cases, on its own it functions poorly as an indicator of competence on the battlefield in conventional wars. Furthermore, countries receiving military advising are frequently more concerned with internal stability than external threats. Relying on body counts as a measure of effectiveness in counterinsurgency conflicts is even less appropriate because success lies in securing the population's support rather than destroying the enemy.

In light of these problems, Talmadge adopts a qualitative measure of military effectiveness on which I base my dependent variable. This metric is based on the key functions and activities that military organizations must perform. She identifies three key tasks: unit cohesion, basic tactics, and complex operations. Each of these components is progressively more difficult to attain; proficiency in basic tactics requires good unit cohesion, and proficiency in complex operations requires good unit cohesion and a firm command of basic tactics. Middling militaries can maintain unit cohesion and may exhibit some tactical skill. The worst militaries will experience problems with unit cohesion, the simplest of these functions. I therefore use a host military's "before and after" demonstrated competence levels on these skills to measure improvement. I then link these changes with advisory and host learning practices through process tracing.

Talmadge's metric for evaluating military competence does not include the ability to operate independently, a key determination of success in a military advisory mission. The ability to operate independently is absolutely critical for advisory mission success, but considering independence alone lacks any measure of operational difficulty. It therefore does not offer sufficient granularity for this study. A military that can plan, execute, and sustain independent complex operations is superior to one that can do the same at a basic level, and this dissertation aims to distinguish the two. For example, a military that can perform complex operations independently is more competent than one that can do so with the advisors' guidance.

I therefore propose a new metric of host military effectiveness that integrates both the type and difficulty of the activity the military must perform as well as its ability to do so independent of the advisors' assistance. For each level of military activity, I also evaluate the degree of advisory group assistance to the host military required in combat in order to carry out its operations. I have adapted Talmadge's coding of

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effectiveness to also include counterinsurgency warfare, which she omits. The three tables below detail what is meant by each of the key tasks she identifies: unit cohesion, tactical proficiency, and complex operations.

_Unit Cohesion_ Unit cohesion is the bedrock of military effectiveness; it deals with the individual and small group bonds that enable a unit to endure battle together. Unit cohesion measures how well units stick together and fight when forced with battlefield stresses and privations, whether they desert or retreat in a disorderly manner, and how difficult circumstances must be before a unit falls apart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the rates of surrender and desertion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do soldiers follow orders under fire?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the severity of enemy attacks or the privations of the battlefield environment affect the answers to the above?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 2.4: Measurement of Unit Cohesion_

_Basic Tactics_ Basic tactics address whether military units are proficient in simple skills such as proper weapons handling and utilization of terrain for cover and concealment. Basic tactics represent minimal capabilities necessary for simple operations - those that do not require a high degree of coordination or improvisation among combat arms or larger units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactical Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units demonstrate the ability to handle their weapons properly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are units familiar with their equipment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are soldiers able to use terrain for cover and concealment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit execute an ambush? A static defense? Orderly retreats? A pre-planned attritional offensive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In COIN conflicts, does the military employ indiscriminant violence against civilians and rely heavily on overwhelming firepower?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In COIN conflicts, can the unit perform convoys, regular reconnaissance, raids, as well as cordon and search operations? Can it execute area defense operations to secure the population?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 2.5: Measurement of Basic Tactical Proficiency_

_Complex Operations_ Complex operations address whether units demonstrate the low-level initiative and high level coordination across different parts of the military necessary for more sophisticated operations. Complex operations require the highest degree of competence on all fronts.

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⁶ Talmadge 17
**Complex Operations**

Can the unit conduct combined arms operations? Inter-services operations? Division-sized or larger operations?

Among defensive operations, is the unit able to conduct defense in depth? Fighting withdrawals? Counterattacks?

Among offensive operations, is it able to conduct maneuver operations? Small unit special forces operations?

To what extent does the unit demonstrate a capacity for both low-level initiative and high-level coordination?

Can the unit conduct patrols, search and attack, counter-ambush and counter-sniper operations?

*Figure 2.6: Measurement of Proficiency in Complex Operations*

**Levels of Military Effectiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 0</td>
<td>Ineffective as a fighting force. Lacks cohesion under minimal threats and no tactical or higher competence demonstrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Demonstrates cohesion under ordinary circumstances but demonstrates little tactical proficiency on its own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Mostly cohesive and demonstrates the ability to lead and execute tactical operations independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Cohesive under difficult circumstances and able to conduct complex operations independently while demonstrating a good command of tactics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.7: Measuring Military Effectiveness*

The table above attempts to systematize the above discussion on aspects on military effectiveness. In order to incorporate the importance of the host military’s ability to operate independently from advisors or US combat troops, I stipulate that in order for a unit or host military to reach a given level, that unit or military should generally be able to perform those tasks reasonably well independently of US forces. While each of the three tasks discussed above is progressively more difficult to attain and requires some baseline level of competence in the tasks below it, this does not mean that every independently tactically proficient unit or military will not experience difficulties at the unit cohesion level. Similarly, there are few opportunities to observe host military performance with no advisory or US combat support at all. Still, the rubric above offers a guide to evaluating host military effectiveness, however subjective it may be.

*Measuring Change in Effectiveness* The dependent variable for this study is the change in military effectiveness over a period of time. The above offers an operational definition of military effectiveness, and this section builds on that by developing a measure for change in effectiveness. Each of the three military functions- unit cohesion, basic tactics, and complex operations- grows progressively more difficult for a military organization to execute well, offering a convenient scale for measuring host military improvement. If each of these
represents a level with one level placed before unit cohesion representing either a previously nonexistent military or a completely defunct one, subtracting the host military's final competence level from its original one offers a measure of its improvement. In general, success at the political strategic level is complex and should not be measured by combat effectiveness alone. This study does not directly speak to political goals other than a meaningful improvement in host military effectiveness. The table below presents the scale for host military improvement that this dissertation uses.

Subtracting the host military’s “level” at the end of a given time period from that of the beginning offers a measure of success as described below. A host military that did not functionally exist at the outset of the advisory mission but was self-sufficient by the end would score a “3” on the below scale. One that was both completely ineffectual at both the beginning and the end of the mission would score a “0.” All cases explored in this dissertation involve a host military that the US military raised itself; this simplifies the success scale below since all cases start at "0." Thus, a host military that becomes capable of complex operations has improved by 3 levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8: Measuring Change in Military Effectiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Improvement = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Improvement = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No improvement = 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.9: Dependent Variable Outcomes**

**IV. Explaining Advisory Mission Outcomes**

First, a minimally committed and motivated host military is a prerequisite for any kind of improvement. Without it, advisors are unlikely to make much headway. Motivation does not guarantee
success; this section lays out the factors that drive host military improvement given a relatively low baseline level of commitment.

This dissertation argues that changes in host military effectiveness are driven by an interaction between two independent variables: advisory group and host military institutional structures and processes. Advisory missions are more likely to succeed the more both sides adhere to best practices with regard to institutional structures and processes. The host military’s institutional features are more significant drivers of mission outcomes than those of the advisory groups. This section details the relationship between this study’s independent and dependent variables; specifically, which levels of institutional structures and processes correspond with expected levels of improvement in combat effectiveness.

**Successful Missions** Successful advisory missions are rare. Contrary to policy-makers’ assumptions, those endeavored rarely bear fruit at all, let alone at a low cost. First, learning is difficult, even with a robust institutional mechanism to support it. As John Nagl points out, the difficulty of military change—which occurs each time the military organization learns a new lesson and implements it—is "an extraordinarily challenging undertaking," which applies to an advisory group that must learn and change quickly as well as a host military that must learn to perform a host of tasks differently. Accordingly, both the advisory group and the host military must exhibit best practices with regard to institutional structures and processes in order to reach mission success. In these missions a host military can go from nonexistence to excellence in just 8 years, as occurred in South Korea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Military Inst’l Feature</th>
<th>Important for Complex Operations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training restrictions</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions based on merit</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralized command arrangements</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Information Management</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.10: Requirements for Fully Successful Advisory Missions*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Group Inst’l Feature</th>
<th>Important for Complex Operations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reports cycle and codifying lessons</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior officers make field visits</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenously- led training/school program</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising vs commanding</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational unity</td>
<td>Best practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.10: Requirements for Fully Successful Advisory Missions (continued)

**Moderate and Minimal Improvement in Combat Effectiveness** Cases of middling improvement in which the advisory group builds a military from scratch and successfully trains it to level 1 or level 2 have institutional structures and processes that fall somewhere between best practices and worst practices. The difference between the two categories lies in the degree of deviation from best institutional practices; an advisory mission in which both sides deviate less from best practices is more likely to be independently capable of tactical operations than one in which either side employs more “worst practices.”

*Level 2 (Moderate improvement in combat effectiveness: independently capable of basic tactics)*: Since an interaction between two independent variables drives the dependent variable, two different scenarios could result in moderate improvement (level 2) in which the host military gains a solid command of tactics but cannot consistently implement complex operations independently. One deals with the absolute degree of deviation from best institutional practices, and the other addresses which side performs poorly on these metrics.

First, advisory missions will likely train the host military to independently operate at the basic tactical level (level 2) when neither side exhibits best practices or worst with regard to institutional structures and processes, but neither consistently exhibits severe problems on these dimensions. In other words, both sides employ generally good (but not best) practices on average. The series of tables below offer lay out what constitutes best, average, and worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes. Per the table below, reaching moderate improvement requires that the host military and the advisory mission employ institutional structures and processes either in the “average” or “best practices” categories.

Second, the advisory group could have poor institutional structures and processes that hinder it from ascertaining and meeting the host military’s need and figuring out how to work with host military
counterparts. In this scenario, the host military no limitations from its own institutional structures and processes. The second scenario involves an advisory group with relatively good institutional structures and processes but and a host military that remains limited by poor institutional structures and processes on one or possibly two metrics. This scenario requires a host military with much better institutional structures and processes than a minimal improvement outcome would, but not perfect.

**Level 1 (Minimal improvement in combat effectiveness - independently capable of cohesion):** Advisory missions will produce minimal improvement in host military effectiveness when at least one side exhibits worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes, but both sides to not perform uniformly poorly on the institutional structures and processes identified as important.

**No Improvement** When both militaries exhibit poor institutional structures and processes, host military effectiveness is unlikely to improve at all. In cases like these, the advisory group is unable to devise a program that addresses the host military's needs and delivers the training in a manner that enables the host military to learn. The host military is also unable to make use of the training and adopt it to suit the host's security needs, even if the training is inappropriate, as Egypt did in the early 1970s.

**Summary of the Argument** Poor institutional structures and processes in the host military are the single greatest obstacle to advisory success. At any stage, the presence or absence of those features is the single best predictor of advisory success. The United States can thus determine, with reasonable accuracy, which countries have the potential to improve substantially if US military advisors do their jobs well. If host military institutions employ worst practices with regard to poor institutional structures and processes outlined above, the advisory group has relatively little room to improve host military effectiveness. Examining host military institutional structures and processes therefore establishes an upper bound on potential improvement. Where host militaries have none of these institutional limitations, the advisory program's institutional structures and processes become more important in driving host military improvement.
Just because a host military with good institutional structures and processes can significantly improve its combat effectiveness does not mean that it will. The advisory group plays a necessary role as well, otherwise every committed and institutionally sound host military would fight well on its own. Advisors are necessary because they have specialized knowledge, skills, and talent that the host military does not, and the host needs those things in order to improve. In general, the advisory group is more likely to impact host military effectiveness at the tactical level and below than at the complex operations level and above. This is even more the case as host military politicization becomes worse. This is because political meddling in the host military is far more likely to impede the development of necessary skills for complex operations.

The 2x2 table below best summarizes these hypotheses and their implications for advisory mission success based on the combination of institutional learning attributes of the advisory group and patterns of political intervention in the host military. It is also important to note that despite the simplified representation presented below, this study measures institutional structures and processes on both sides on a continuum rather than as binary values. The table presented below is simplified for illustrative purposes, and the numbers on this chart represent the predicted level of improvement for a given combination of institutional structures and processes. For clarity, the improvement level is determined by subtracting the host military's level at the end of the mission from its initial level. The visual aids below present this study's argument about how learning impacts overall improvement in host military effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Host Military Inst'l Features</th>
<th>Bad Host Military Inst'l Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Advisory Inst'l Features</td>
<td>3 (Success - Complex Ops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Advisory Inst'l Features</td>
<td>2 (Moderate - Basic Tactics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (Minimal - Cohesion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (No Improvement)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.11: Institutional Structures and Processes and Advising Outcomes*
**Hypotheses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success is most likely when the advisory group exhibits all 5 institutional structures and processes and the host military exhibits none of the 4 institutional structures and processes that inhibit organizational learning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The host military will likely exhibit moderate improvement in 1 of 2 scenarios: the advisory group has poor institutional structures and processes but the host military employs best institutional practices, OR both sides employ average or above institutional structures and processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The host military will likely demonstrate minimal improvement when either party demonstrates severe problems with institutional structures and processes (worst practices) but that of the other party is either mediocre or good (average or best practices).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An advisory mission will probably result in no improvement when both the advisory group and host military exhibit worst practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The host military’s institutional structures and processes matter more than those of the advisory group; as the host military approaches best institutional practices, the advisory group can have a greater impact on host military effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.12: Summary of Hypotheses**

V. Alternative Explanations

This dissertation is the first academic study of military advising, and therefore no established alternative explanations exist for this study to counter. This section draws four potential counterarguments from the political science literature writ large and advisors' accounts of their experiences. The first of these alternative explanations is based on the resources and personnel the US sends to the host country. The second alternative explanation addresses cultural and societal factors in the host nation. The third addresses the influence of individual leaders. The fourth hypothesis considers whether the demonstrated improvement in military effectiveness may not have been driven by advising at all.

First, advisory success could vary as a function of the size and depth of involvement of the advisory mission as demonstrated by funding, personnel, and time devoted to the cause. Given the organizational inertia of military bureaucracies, and the need for advisors to build good rapport and working relationships with host military counterparts, making significant changes across a military requires a mission sufficient in duration and broad in scope. Advisors’ accounts suggest that deploying a sufficiently large advisory force avoids spreading advisors so thin that they spend little time advising any given unit and building the necessary connections to do so. While advisors cannot affect change in a short period of time, there appears to be no positive correlation between mission success and duration above a reasonable threshold, money invested, and personnel involved.

Second, advisors’ accounts of their experiences suggest that culture and societal factors influence outcomes of advisory missions, particularly when cultural tendencies are out of step with the requirements of
military effectiveness. For example, traditionalist cultures that value hierarchy and deference to elders poses significant challenges to the development of a competent and meritocratic military organization. Societies with persistent sectarian issues may struggle to build a cohesive force. Rosen’s work about the negative effects that social divisions within a military has on its unit cohesion and combat effectiveness supports this alternative explanation. The potential influence of societal divisions along ethnic or religious lines is particularly relevant to this study because two of the host countries investigated in this dissertation suffer from longstanding friction between different ethnic and religious groups. Without a doubt, the host country's culture and society almost always present advisors and the advisory effort with difficulties ranging from small challenges to truly deep-rooted and possibly insurmountable problems. Still, advisory missions vary considerably in their ability to work around these challenges and improve the host military.

Third, mission outcomes could be driven by individual leaders, both the vision of good leaders and the psychological idiosyncrasies of bad ones. The cases explored here contain both, and in some cases, a leader's odd proclivities or unwillingness to consider facts undermined the mission. Even in such cases, however, leaders come and go, but host military effectiveness most of the time does not change with each change in leadership unless a leader makes noteworthy changes to institutional structures and processes. Leaders generally have tremendous influence over institutional structures and processes which can sometimes include disregarding or dismantling them entirely. Good institutional structures and processes cannot force mission success in every circumstance, but they can and do shape the incentives for leaders, advisors, and host military personnel.

Fourth, the improvement observed during the advisory mission may be the result of concurrent or long term phenomena coming to fruition at the same time. For example, a host nation that initiated an overhaul of its education system a decade or two ago may see an improvement in military effectiveness due to a higher caliber pool of new recruits and leaders. In particular, a focus on science and technical education may yield especially large benefits. Similarly, public health improvements yield hardier soldiers, which can improve combat effectiveness. Advisory missions may also successfully train a host military more rapidly when the host military has a large pool of military aged males with prior combat experience, as recruiting from this
group will yield soldiers with a high degree of latent combat skills that provide a solid foundation for further instruction. In all four cases that follow, the advisory groups turned away recruits with health concerns or those in otherwise poor physical condition. While all factors described here do influence combat effectiveness, none of them appear to explain variations in combat effectiveness in the four cases explored here. In these cases, public health and education were very poor and in some cases declining in the years prior to the mission. Furthermore, educational attainment and public health are unlikely to change dramatically in a short period of time as we see combat effectiveness and institutional structures and processes do.

VI. Research Design

For the purposes of simplicity, data availability, and policy relevance, I use case studies that focus on U.S. military advising. This study will examine case studies using the process tracing method, which examines the sequence of events between the initial conditions and the outcome to isolate causal mechanisms in long, drawn out processes with a high degree of path dependence. Military advisory missions last years, even decades, and involve numerous policy decisions, changing circumstances, and feedback loops.

Case Selection I restrict the selection of case studies to the most encompassing and difficult military advising missions: those in which the U.S. built the host military from scratch. Because these missions demand an enormous commitment from the advisory group, they offer more opportunities to observe combat performance and variation in a number of variables over time. These cases are also rich in data for the same reason. Omitting the more limited cases of advising from my study ameliorates selection bias endemic to this research question; the most difficult cases will require the most resources and time, and may still prove unsuccessful. Cases involving military building are the most difficult to achieve success; studying the performance of advisory groups in building a host military is likely to uncover dynamics that may not be as easily discernible in missions of more limited scope.

In order to pick cases, I began by listing all instances of advisory missions to build a host military from 1945 to the present. I identified 1945 as a starting date for case selection because the US assumed a
dominant power position following World War II, and military advising then became and remains a common feature of US defense policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Cases</th>
<th>US Military Advising: Building Host Militaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korea, 1945</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Vietnam, 1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador, 1981</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan, 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.13: List of Potential Cases

To narrow down the selection, I researched each of these cases and their values on the key variables: improvement in military effectiveness. I chose these case studies based on the amount of variation over time in the independent variable within each mission, policy relevance to current and future advising efforts, and data richness and availability. Similarly, the stated political goal of each advisory mission was to leave behind a fully capable host military. I have selected Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq for case studies. I break each case down into two to four phases; these shifts mirror institutional changes in the advisory group and host military. The unit of analysis for this study is a given phase, or time period, within the overall advisory mission. This allows me to control for factors unique to a particular country that do not easily change over time, like culture.

Each case offers an overview and timeline of the conflict, accounts of both advisory group and host military institutional structures and processes, and the host military's demonstrated level of effectiveness as these factors change over the course of the conflict. Engagements are selected based on significance to the war as well as the opportunity to evaluate host military effectiveness with minimal help from US forces. Finally, each chapter weaves these components together to illustrate the critical role that institutional structures and processes play in military advisory missions.

Data Sources: This study is primarily based on archival sources for the Korea and Vietnam cases and personal interviews and monographs for Iraq and Afghanistan. Archival sources include correspondences, training records, operational reports, and after action reports (AARs) among many other things. Official documents about the Iraq and Afghanistan are rather sparse, so the majority of the primary source data for these cases
will come from interviews with advisors. Those who have directly advised foreign counterparts are most often junior officers, so such individuals comprise the bulk of the interviews. I conducted 42 interviews for this study; 18 focus on the mission to Iraq and 24 on Afghanistan. I also interviewed 5 individuals who served as advisors in both places, amounting to 37 total who served in all four services, although the majority were Army veterans. Some individuals served as an advisor in one country and in a combat role in the other. These individuals also offered general thoughts on the host military in the latter country, corroborating data from advisor interviews, press reports, and secondary sources. For all cases, I complement and corroborate these sources with secondary sources like contemporary news reports, memoirs, historical accounts, and biographies wherever possible.

**Plan of the Dissertation** Chapter 3 explores the relationship between the institutional structures and processes that enable organizational learning in the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) and the Republic of Korea Army's (ROKA) impressive improvement between 1945 and 1953. Korea is often held up as the exemplar of US military advising, and chapter 3 explores how this came to pass by assessing the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable over each phase of the war.

Chapter 4 does the same for the US advisory mission to Vietnam from 1954 to 1973 run by the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) and later the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). This chapter also traces changes in the independent variables and the dependent variables over the course of the conflict. Vietnam also offers a useful basis for comparison to the US success in South Korea. Both are Cold War era conflicts featuring divided countries facing an external aggressor backed by China. In a global sense, the two countries even share quite a few cultural similarities. Yet Korea marks the pinnacle of success for US military advising whereas Vietnam marks its nadir. These chapters illustrate the roles that the institutional structures and processes on each side played in the outcomes.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between US and Afghan institutional structures and processes and the Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF) improvement in military effectiveness. Due to the ongoing
nature of the conflict and current scarcity of primary sources, this chapter does not delve into variations in the independent and depend variables over time.

Chapter 6 approaches the US advisory mission to Iraq from 2003 to the present in much the same way. Similar to the Vietnam and Korea comparison, chapters 5 and 6, the Afghanistan and Iraq chapters offer a comparison of advisory missions in two Muslim majority countries with sectarian troubles that lie at the forefront of the War on Terror. These chapters illustrate differences in mission outcomes driven by differing institutional structures and processes in the advisory group and in the host military.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of the main findings, a discussion of their policy implications, and the way forward for future research.

**Summary of Findings** The empirical evidence marshalled in this study demonstrates the critical role institutional structures and processes play in the host military’s improvement. In particular, all four missions experienced changes to one or both sides’ institutional structures and processes during the mission that coincided with changes in the host military’s combat effectiveness.

In Korea, the advisory group first employed worst institutional practices; it did not solicit reports or utilize information from the field to make major decisions, leaders and even advisors did not make field visits, very little training occurred, and advisors made very little effort to actually advise. As a result, the mission fomented Communist sympathies, struggled to recruit soldiers, and opened itself up to communist infiltration that would later pose major unit cohesion problems. In 1948, this all changed when General William L. Roberts made sweeping institutional changes to the advisory group on all metrics. The ROKA came under Korean control and exhibited relatively good institutional structures and processes, although it continued to struggle with merit-based personnel decisions. During this time the ROKA matured considerably and even succeeded in winning a counterinsurgency war against the Communists. In 1950, the North Korean invasion overwhelmed the ROKA, nearly forcing a collapse. By the end of the war, KMAG significantly augmented and systematized its training regimen- which was previously its only deviation from best institutional practices, and the ROKA removed its only institutional barriers to improvement- politically driven personnel
decisions and a tendency toward centralized command. As a result, the ROKA’s combat effectiveness surged; by 1953 Koreans conducted complex operations on their own, even running their own support functions and calling in air strikes.

In Vietnam, institutional structures and processes on both sides remained almost uniformly poor until around 1970. Advisors wrote reports, but leadership never disseminated information back to them or used reports for key decisions. Leaders never made field visits, developed a structured training program, or encouraged the Vietnamese to learn to do tasks on their own. For their part, South Vietnamese institutions also remained poor. Leaders fragmented command arrangements, used intelligence organizations to surveil officers instead of the enemy, favored political loyalists over combat-proven officers, and resisted training. Unsurprisingly, the ARVN remained completely ineffective during this period. Around 1970, the South Vietnamese became more concerned about the North Vietnamese threat and MACV looked to fast track the ARVN’s progress to enable withdrawal. MACV began implementing a more systematic approach to training devised from advisors’ suggestions in reports. Advisors also moved away from commanding and attempted to guide their counterparts instead. The Vietnamese made incremental progress in promoting competent officers, directing intelligence collection toward the enemy, and agreeing to the advisors’ training program. As a result, the ARVN fought relatively cohesively and even demonstrated some tactical proficiency in the battles of 1972. By 1975, however, the advisors had left and the ARVN reverted to its earlier poor institutional structures and processes and collapsed without even attempting to fight.

The Afghanistan mission also saw worst institutional structures and processes on both sides until about 2010, and consequently no improvement in combat effectiveness. A renewed focus on the advisory mission after 2010 brought many positive changes to the advisory effort’s institutional structures and processes; many advisory teams wrote consistent reports, discussed them with their commanders, and made course corrections as necessary. Field visits became a common occurrence, and the advisors made a slightly better effort to send Afghans to formalized training courses. Advisors also focused on advising the Afghans rather than executing tasks on their behalf. The Afghans’ institutional structures and processes did not change. As a result of improved advising, Afghan combat effectiveness improved a little, but shortcomings
on the Afghan side limited their development. The Afghans went from completely ineffective before 2010 to relatively cohesive with some tactical skill afterward.

Finally, the advisory group in Iraq developed best practices on all metrics by about 2007. Iraqi institutions consistently improved over this period, but they still struggled with delegating command responsibility to junior officers. Between 2008 and 2010, the ISF performed very well; the Iraqis ran operations at the tactical level independently and also executed complex operations with limited support from advisors. Between 2011 and 2014, Iraq’s fortunes turned somewhat; the advisors left and Prime Minister Maliki changed the ISF’s best practices to worst practices. As a result, several units collapsed in 2014 in the face of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’s (ISIS) advance. After Maliki’s departure from office, Iraqi leaders worked to reinstate the ISF’s previously good institutional structures and processes, and the advisory group also implemented best practices, leading to the ISF’s recent success in recapturing territory in Mosul.

The following chapters demonstrate the causal link between host military and advisory group structures and processes and improvement in host combat effectiveness in more detail. These cases illustrate that although a number of factors exert some influence on advisory mission outcomes (e.g. leadership, cultural norms, and political decisions), none drives mission outcomes as directly or to the same extent as both sides’ institutional features.
CHAPTER 3: US MILITARY ADVISING IN KOREA

The US Military's advisory mission in South Korea following World War II through the Korean War marked the pinnacle of its advising success, and resulted in an independently cohesive and fairly competent Republic of Korea Army (ROKA). While ultimately successful, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) experienced a wide range of successes and failures over the course of the mission as the ROKA performed admirably in some instances and very poorly in others. Between 1946 and 1953, KMAG built the ROKA from scratch in a country without an indigenous military tradition into a capable fighting force that Army brass felt contributed significantly to the Korean War. The ROKA performed well in the guerrilla conflict of the late 1940s, nearly collapsed during the Chinese invasion in June 1950, was reorganized in the following years, and grew to be an effective contributor to the Korean War effort before its end in 1953.

What explains the range of KMAG's performance and its ultimate success? The answer lies in variations in KMAG and ROKA's institutional structures and processes that promoted organizational learning.

Summary of the Argument This chapter argues that the advisory mission ultimately succeeded because both KMAG and the ROKA employed best practices with regard to institutional structures and processes by the end of the mission. The advisory group had an excellent reports and feedback cycle in addition to leaders’ regular field visits, which enabled it to solve a number of challenging problems. KMAG also advised rather than commanded, set up a military school and training system intended for Koreans to run, and united the advisory effort in a single organization that did not have direct combat responsibilities. Good institutional structures and processes in the ROKA enabled it to benefit enormously from advising. Although the ROKA struggled with merit-based personnel policies and training restrictions at some points, ultimately the ROKA employed best practices with regards to those too. In addition to a compelling illustration of what it takes for an advisory mission to succeed, the mission to Korea also demonstrates the relatively large impact the advisory group can have on the host military’s development in the absence of institutional problems in the host military.

The chapter proceeds in five parts. The first section provides a background of the origins and basic course of US involvement on the Korean peninsula, splitting the advisory mission into four phases. The
second section provides the data on US advisory group institutional structures and processes and variation in these over time. The third section does the same for Korean military institutional structures and processes. The fourth section matches trends in combat effectiveness with changes in institutional practices, specifically illustrating the impact that both US and host learning practices had on South Korean performance at the unit cohesion, tactical, operational, and strategic levels. The final section addresses alternative explanations for the improvement (or lack thereof) in host military effectiveness.

I. Background: The U.S. in Korea

This section divides the Korean War into phases that correspond to major developments in the conflict and changes in institutional structures and processes. Phase I discuss is the US occupation and the foundations of the Constabulary covering the period from September 1945 to May 1948. The second phase is the transition from Constabulary to Army from May 1948 to June 1950, a period which also saw a relentless civil war. The third phase consists of the North Korean and Chinese invasions and subsequent offensives from June 1950 to May 1951. The fourth and final phase of the Korean War consists of reforming KMAG and the ROKA and their successes in ending the war from 1951 to 1953.

Phase I: Military Government and the Birth of the Constabulary The US involvement on the Korean Peninsula began on 15 August 1945 with the surrender of Japan at the close of World War II. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) officially ruled what is now South Korea from the US 7th Infantry Division's arrival at Inchon on 8 September 1945 through 15 August 1948. In 1946, USAMGIK began recruiting soldiers and developing the Constabulary, which would eventually evolve into the ROKA.

Phase II: From Constabulary to Army Although the advisory effort began in early 1946 the establishment of KMAG’s predecessor, the Provisional Military Advisory Group (PMAG), in August 1948 marked the first formal advisory structure in Korea.
1948 was a watershed year for Korea with internal instability, the arrival of Brig Gen William L. Roberts as PMAG Chief, and democratic elections and the transfer of political authority to a Korean-led government. By March, longstanding and growing civil unrest escalated into civil war. Syngman Rhee was elected the first president of South Korea and was inaugurated on August 15, 1948. Ongoing civil unrest escalated into guerrilla war in March 1948, forcing the DIS and Constabulary advisors to avert their focus from building and training the Korean forces to combat operations. Many private armies sprung up after the liberation from Japanese rule, and the Americans adopted a policy of absorbing these entities into the National Defense Force on the assumption that they could offer a partially trained nucleus for the force, and doing so would offer the Americans means of control over these forces.¹ The Constabulary was not immune to communist influences, a weakness largely due to its early recruitment practices. These developments culminated in the Yosu mutinies in October 1948, which represented the most visible indicator of instability as well as the American failure to learn in the advisory group's early years. By the end of phase II, the ROKA improved tremendously and won its counterinsurgency war. American troops withdrew in 1949.

*Phase III: Invasions and Offensives* On June 25 1950, North Korea invaded the South; the ROKA remained small, ill-equipped, and profoundly unprepared for war. ROKA soldiers either defected en masse to the North or retreated in various degrees of disorder. On 28 June 1950 the North Koreans captured Seoul, one of the first major cities to fall to the DPRK as the ROKA retreated southward. In the midst of the chaos, KMAG changed leadership. The US intervened and troops returned in July. On July 25, 1950, over a month after Roberts' departure, Brigadier General Francis W. Farrell became KMAG chief. By August, the ROKA had retreated to the Pusan perimeter, a defensive line around the southeastern corner of the Korean peninsula. The Battle of Pusan Perimeter, from 4 August to 18 September 1950 was one of the first major engagements of the war and turned the tide in favor of the UN and South Korea. From 10-19 September the US-led forces

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orchestrated the famed amphibious landing at Incheon, which turned back the North Koreans. After the Incheon landing, the Americans and Koreans pushed north to the Chinese border, prompting the Chinese to enter the war. Eventually combat devolved into a stalemate around the 38th parallel. In May 1951, Van Fleet recommended that Brig. Gen. Cornelius E. Ryan be assigned as chief of KMAG.

Phase IV: Reformation and Success The war reached a turning point in the summer of 1951. The last two years of the war saw an overwhelming transformation in KMAG’s training program and Korean battlefield effectiveness. The relative lull in the pace of combat operations allowed KMAG to undertake a much more thorough and systematic program to retrain all Korean units in a constellation of different schools, each with its own focus. As a result, the Korean Army that fought in the summer of 1953 in the war's final battles was an entirely different Army than the one from just a year or two earlier; it enjoyed good leadership, competent soldiers, and a solid combined arms capability that ultimately convinced the Chinese and the North Koreans that they would not be able to reunite the peninsula by force. Korean War scholar Bryan Gibby argues that by July 1953 the Chinese acknowledged that their final offensives had not achieved as much as they had expected, the Korean Army was no longer as weak as they had hoped, and there was little to gain from continued fighting. The ROKA’s enviable transformation played a significant role in driving the communists to armistice talks and finally concluding the war.2 Throughout this final phase of the war, the fronts changed little, but the ROKA improved tremendously mostly as a result of the American training program.

II. US Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes

The advisory effort began poorly, employing worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes across the board. Not a single member of the American Military Government had any experience with Korean culture, traditions, anti-Japanese history, or language.3 The advisory effort lacked

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good institutional structures and processes that would have helped remedy the situation. Decisions that American officials made during their first few years on the Korean peninsula undermined the Constabulary's growth as well as the security conditions in the south.

The arrival of Brigadier General William L. Roberts as KMAG Chief in May 1948 ushered in a new and positive era for both KMAG and ROKA's development. Roberts put into place good institutional structures and processes that would promote organizational learning, although the training and school system remained less systematic and comprehensive than it needed to be. By phase IV, KMAG employed best practices with regard to its institutional structures and processes. The ROKA's performance also matches this pattern.

**Reports** A reports and feedback cycle is critical to mission success because it enables the advisory group to gather pertinent information and make decisions accordingly. A functioning reports cycle must include the following elements: leadership must systematically solicit reports from advisors, codify lessons learned based on those reports, and then relay those lessons and suggestions based on them to the advisors. Leadership must also directly act on advisors' feedback and suggestions about potential changes in policy, training, or other advisory group issues.

The advisory effort lacked a reports and feedback cycle completely in phase I, which combined with USAMGIK's ignorance of the country led to a number of poor decisions that harmed the advisory mission and the Constabulary's development. Arguably the most consequential misstep was General Hodge's heavy reliance on leftover elements of the Japanese imperial government. One of Hodge's first actions was to "retain much of the Japanese colonial government apparatus like administrative officials, police, laws, and taxes."4 Even after General Douglas MacArthur ordered Hodge to expel the Japanese officials, the Military Government tended to rely almost exclusively on Japanese administrators for advice, and the Koreans Hodge sought out and promoted tended to be those with a history of collaboration with the Japanese imperial government. The Americans sought to staff the Korean officer corps with Koreans with previous military

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experience, usually in the IJA, its Manchurian affiliate the Manchuko Army, or the Nationalist Chinese Army. 108 of the first 110 commissioned officers had served in either the IJA or the Manchuko army, and most spoke reasonably good English. While these policy decisions predated the formation of the constabulary by several months, the bad blood they engendered had deleterious effects on the development of the constabulary, leading to recruitment problems and contributing to the Yosu mutinies.

The Officer Training School (OTS) program engendered several problems that would later hamper battlefield effectiveness. First, OTS drew the majority of its candidates from the pool of Koreans who had prior military experience, especially in the Imperial Japanese Army, the Manchuko Army, or the Nationalist Chinese Army. As a result of this and the influence of Japanese administrators, the Korean population regarded the Constabulary and the advisory group by association as highly suspect, and recruitment lagged expectations. Koreans viewed the inclusion of those who assisted their colonial oppressors as an insult to the Korean national identity and memory. In addition to the public relations issue, these veterans posed other problems for the advisory group and the Constabulary's development. The Japanese-trained officers were particularly resistant to learning American military methods and completing the less glamorous aspects of their jobs. In particular, they were extremely harsh in disciplining their men in a manner the American advisors disapproved of, and they had a difficult time unlearning old tactics and learning new ones, so the development of tactical skills also lagged. Finally, the Constabulary’s fairly lax standards for admission and prioritization of military skill above all else, including ideological loyalty, also enabled communist sympathizers to make inroads into the officer corps. Potential officers only needed to be twenty-one years old, have no criminal record, and have the near equivalent of an American high school education. Several of the first ten classes- those which drew candidates from enlisted men and noncommissioned officers-produced officers who were leftists attempting to avoid serving with the National Police and instead joined

6 Chi-op Lee et al., Call Me "Speedy Lee": Memoirs of a Korean War Soldier (Seoul, Korea: WonMin, 2001), 33.
the Constabulary. Many officers from the OTS' earliest classes led the mutinies at Yosu in late 1948.

Advisors who did work in the field with Korean counterparts were aware of these problems, and a formal reports and feedback cycle would have enabled them to convey valuable information to USAMGIK and informed decisions about the Constabulary’s formation. The Constabulary opened itself up as a refuge for communists and sympathizers, and if they had a reports and feedback cycle, they could have benefitted from Korean advice, they may have been able to prevent the Yosu mutiny.

**Phase II** The advisory group implemented best practices with regard to reports in phase II. Upon his arrival in Korea, General Roberts established a feedback cycle wherein he solicited thorough reports from advisors, reviewed them and wrote individual responses, and amended and disseminated new SOPs accordingly. Roberts expected weekly reports on progress as well as reports on a wide variety of issues that impacted KMAG’s mission. He circulated examples of good reports with his commentary attached, spelling out the qualities he appreciated in the reports. The reports were sufficiently detailed such that it indicated that the advisor spent sufficient time with the unit to understand its particular shortcomings and was diligent in his observations and note-taking. In addition to keeping the boss informed, advisors were to use reports as a basis for officer and NCO training to anticipate mistakes that Korean soldiers might make and address them in training before bad habits took hold. Other topics to which he paid particular attention interest included whether Korean officers ignored advisors' advice or diverted military supplies for other purposes, engaged in unauthorized travel, traded on the black market, and performing personal tasks for senior officers. Roberts correctly believed that the continuation of such practices caused ROKA and KMAG to lose money, training

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9 Hausman speech about early days of the Constabulary to US military audience, date unknown p 2

10 Letter from Roberts to all advisors, "Operations Report "3 September 1949, Mowitz Papers.
time, and credibility.\textsuperscript{11} Reading such reports allowed Roberts to address these issues with the Koreans; he spoke to Korean senior officers on numerous occasions about them, as did advisors

More importantly, Roberts made decisions based on these reports and disseminated new SOPs in the form of individual correspondence, publications and memos, and lectures. Roberts utilized advisors' reports as he developed and distributed memoranda to the senior advisors subordinate to him. From these reports, KMAG put together the Advisor's Handbook for advisors in the field to benefit from Roberts' insights from the aggregate reporting.\textsuperscript{12} He also sent individual letters back to his advisors on particular issues raised in their weekly reports, indicating that Roberts not only read these reports but also that the two-way flow of critical information directly impacted the training mission and subsequently effectiveness in combat. In September 1949, Roberts responded with a solution to Major Arno P. Mowitz's description of 21st Division 1st Battalion's shortcomings. Roberts rearranged command assignments in order to clarify an unclear command and operational arrangement that Mowitz reported was hindering the 1st battalion's development, which was in "deplorable condition." In the same letter, Roberts informed Mowitz of guerrilla activity in neighboring areas such that Mowitz and his unit could watch for similar development in their area. Roberts offered contextual information about local trends that Mowitz was unlikely to know absent hearing from those with experience.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, ongoing correspondence between advisors and General Roberts played a critical role in suppressing the Yosu rebellion.\textsuperscript{14}

KMAG also used the reports cycle to cultivate good leadership in the ROKA. In April 1949, Major Mowitz wrote to General Roberts recommending that Colonel Chae Wan Gai be relieved of his command for frequent and extended absences from duty, disinterest in formal inspections of his regiment, and using his staff to plan frequent and elaborate parties. While Mowitz conceded in his letter that while Chae had not


\textsuperscript{12} KMAG Historical Report 1949, p 6-7

\textsuperscript{13} Letter from Roberts to Mowitz 28 September 1949, Mowitz Papers

\textsuperscript{14} Roberts to Hausman 21 October 1948

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committed acts worthy of relief, his sins of omission made him unfit for leadership in an Army that required committed, competent leaders at a critical juncture in South Korea's history. Roberts concurred with Mowitz' assessment and even supported it with Ministry of Defense officials. Building capable and committed leadership in the host military is the linchpin of advisory mission success, and decisions like this one enabled the advisory group to cultivate such a cadre of Korean military leaders. The KMAG Chief depended on reports to identify and cultivate Korean military leadership. Roberts also supported advisors fully in disputes with high ranking Korean government officials and military officers. For example, on 19 April 1949, the senior advisor to the 2nd brigade Major Arno Mowitz recommended that Col. Chae Wan-gai be relieved of command due to the latter's failure to perform his duties, preoccupation with social events, absenteeism, and apparent disinterest in his duties. Roberts supported this recommendation, immediately relaying it to the ROK defense minister. Roberts further commented that he had inspected the Second Brigade the previous summer and "found it in the poorest condition in the army." He continued that Chae "has shown he is not deserving of this or any other command." Col. Chae was indeed replaced, per Mowitz's recommendation. Good personnel decisions require accurate and thorough assessments from the field, which KMAG's reports system provided.

**Phase III** Even after Roberts’ departure, the reports and feedback cycle continued to operate as it had, offering KMAG information critical to determining what the ROKA’s greatest needs were during a time of constant change and how to meet them. General Farrell's own advisor’s handbook built on the earlier version by offering more specific directions and details of combat duties, whereas Roberts' handbook described a more general approach to advising. The new version of the Advisor's Handbook, published in March 1951, enumerated advisors' duties and offered detailed guidance about how to carry them out in a combat

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15 Letter from Roberts to Minister Sihn recommending the relief of Col. Chae, 19 April 1949, Mowitz Papers
16 Major Arno P. Mowitz to Brigadier General William L. Roberts, April 19, 1949, Box 8, Mowitz Papers.
17 Brigadier General William L. Roberts to ROK Defense Minister Shin Ungkyun, April 19, 1949, Box 8, Mowitz Papers.
environment; this version codified operational procedures and included many lessons learned and suggestions based on the Americans' combat experience over the previous year, enabling new advisors to benefit from their predecessors' lessons learned. Like Roberts' "Instruction to Advisors," this document exemplifies a healthy flow of relevant information in both directions; advisors wrote to the KMAG Chief about conditions in the field, and he codified and disseminated the most salient lessons back to them. Most importantly, neither of these documents was rigid or doctrinaire in its suggested approach; Farrell pointed out that advisors should use the document as a reference point for approaches that had been successful in the past as opposed to a step-by-step guide to advising. Farrell focused on the foundational aspects of advising: gaining the Korean soldiers' confidence and respect, understanding the mission and the advisees, situational awareness, and personal engagement with the Korean unit. He emphasized that in order to advise effectively on both administrative and combat matters, advisors had to think as though they were commanding units, even though they did not actually do so. Under new leadership, KMAG’s bottom-up and top-down portions of the feedback cycle continued to function well, enabling the advisory group to address a different set of challenges in phase III.

During phase III KMAG and the ROKA’s greatest challenge lay in aggressively retraining Korean units after the North Korean invasion; advisors’ reports played a critical role in discerning what the ROKA’s critical needs were and how the advisory group could most effectively meet them. The ROKA’s near collapse in the wake of the North Korean invasion and subsequent Chinese offensives indicated that both the advisory group and the Korean forces required major reforms in order to survive. These reforms, implemented by General Ryan, included the expansion of KMAG and ROKA, introduction of a more robust, standardized, and regimented training program, and greater focus on training the Korean officer corps. A thorough review of KMAG’s combat reports and after action reports (AARs) from mid-1950

19 Annex #2, "G-3," 5 and Enclosures 9 and 10, Advisor's Handbook, 1951


21 Advisor's Handbook, October 1949 4-5, 14-15, 30-32
through mid-1951 show that advisors wrote about strengths and weaknesses of the ROKA's combat performance and methods of teaching, which KMAG used to create the Replacement Training Center (RTC). In response to these reports, KMAG Chief General Van Fleet offered very specific guidance to advisors about how and what to train the Koreans based on his assessment of all advisors’ feedback. He asked advisors to make recommendations to their counterparts about minutiae in addition to the usual set of things. This included weapons maintenance, sick call, supervision of supply requests, and ammunition status reports.

The reports and feedback cycle drove the revamped training programs that would ultimately lead to success. The fact that advisors’ observations were rigorously analyzed, used to develop new SOPs, and then disseminated key lessons and new protocols back to the advisor enabled KMAG to tailor its training programs to Korean needs and develop the ROKA more quickly.

Phase IV As in phase III, quickly retraining the Korean Army marked the advisory group’s greatest challenge in the final years of the war, and the reports and feedback cycle provided information and insights that guided the establishment of new training centers and curriculum. In developing curricula for the various military schools that KMAG established in the latter half of 1951, Ryan drew the best teaching methods for Korean soldiers from advisors' reports. Advisors reported that while their advisees struggled to understand thought processes that the Americans attempted to convey, they excelled at replicating physical methods and practices demonstrated to them. As a result, Ryan recommended that all new schools utilize the same training methods. Advisors reports also drove the formation of the Field Training Command (FTC) as they noted deficiencies in the Koreans’ ability to fight as units. The FTC would mitigate this problem by focusing on training Korean units together at multiple levels.

KMAG adjusted the training programs to suit evolving ROKA needs based on reports KMAG's intensive training programs also needed to be balanced with combat needs. In July 1952, reports revealed that

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22 Hausrath, Problems, 28-29; Sawyer, Advisors in Korea 152.

23 C.E. Ryan correspondence with George? 1 October 1951

24 January 1952 FTC Command report pg 5
the ROK 1st Corps sent too many NCOs to training after advisors had determined that the training program had outlived its usefulness, unnecessarily diverting them from combat. KMAG then eliminated those programs and instituted shorter programs tailored to current needs. Ryan points out that "constant liaison between the planning sections and the advisors with ROK units has found to be the only method of reaching common ground in the solution of ROK problems."

**Field Visits** Field visits did not occur in phase I. In phase II, Roberts travelled around the Korean peninsula to visit as many army units as possible to inspect and assess the ROKA's status of training and disposition of forces. He also ordered teams led by a lieutenant colonel under the supervision of KMAG's G-3 to visit each KMAG detachment and its affiliated Korean units to conduct thorough inspections. Roberts committed high level leaders to these inspections, demonstrating his commitment to the cause. Each team drafted detailed reports including each unit's status as well as the advisor's observations and recommendations for improvement. Roberts painstakingly read each report and developed his own set of observations based on overarching trends, and he used this to write a series of policy memoranda and set SOPs for the group. He then codified and disseminated these lessons in the *Advisor's Handbook.*

Each visit included a thorough evaluation of each unit's status that resulted in detailed reports with recommendations. Senior leaders even made unannounced visits. Roberts' visits also ensured that what advisors were doing at the tactical level matched his strategic objectives. For example, unit inspections revealed a dire need for basic training in individual soldiering skills, which urged KMAG to develop a systematic and standardized training program. Even units that displayed a passing ability to operate at the

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25 July 1952 Command Report Combat Units p 2

26 Hausrath, Problems p 21 "Relative Efforts of ROKA and UN units in the Korean War, January 1953"

27 KMAG Historical Report, 1949 p 6-7

28 KMAG Historical Report, 1949, 7; Cumings, Roaring of the Cataract, 383, 388ff. General Roberts reported to the Army G-3 that in his opinion, "each [incident] was brought on by the presence of a small South Korean salient north of the Parallel,"; Roberts to Bolte, August 19, 1949 7-9
platoon or company level exhibited serious deficiencies in individual performance. As a result of information gleaned from these investigations, KMAG implemented a six-month version of the US Army's Mobilization Training Program (MTP) which offered progressive training from the individual through battalion levels for each type of unit in the infantry regiment. KMAG advisors tailored the program to the unit's particular needs; some units focused entirely on individual training for a time others moved on to small unit basic tactics while spending a portion of time reviewing other subjects, and others still repeated certain narrow aspects of their training over and over again. As a result, performance improved considerably, as evidenced by the Army's performance against the guerrillas later that year.

**Phase III** The ROKA began the war in utter disarray; not only was the South Korean response to the North Korean incursion chaotic, the ROKA headquarters had been displaced five times in ten days. The ROKA struggled to gather information on the frontline situation through frequent visits to the front in order to plan counterattacks and move troops; so visits did not occur for most of phase III, but KMAG leaders restarted field visits after the pace of combat operations died down. Visits played a less critical role during this phase than it did in others because many Americans fought side by side with Korean soldiers, so their combat capability was more immediately observable than usual.

**Phase IV** Ryan and Van Fleet regularly visited the FTC to monitor and assess progress. For example, Van Fleet visited the ROK 9th division in September 1951 and observed training in attack and infiltration and infantry fire; he stressed that the Korean soldiers across all echelons would need to internalize basic principles of fire and movement, and each soldier needed to handle his weapon expertly, and officers needed experience

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29 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 70

30 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 70

working with their subordinate elements. KMAG adjusted the training programs according to leaders’ observations.32

**Organizational Unity** Between phases I and II, the advisory effort went from worst practices to best practices on this metric. In phase I no advisory group existed. Most advisors performed administrative roles at headquarters, and proportionally very few advisors of an already small mission worked with Korean units in the field. This changed in phase II with the establishment of PMAG, which oversaw all advising and training and had no other combat or administrative responsibilities.33 The official KMAG history itself acknowledges the importance of this reorganization, which enabled KMAG to "function effectively."34 On 1 July 1949, PMAG shed its provisional status ceased to be "provisional" and became the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG). KMAG maintained this structure from phase II onward. It remained separate from combat commands, so advisors remained under a single organization and bore responsibility for only training and advising rather than running combat operations.

**Training and Military School System** USAMGIK established military schools early in 1946, but the training delivered was less systematic and comprehensive than the budding Korean military required. It is unsurprising, then, that the Constabulary did not improve in phase I. The Officer Training School (OTS) outside Seoul opened on 1 May, 1946 with 88 candidates in its inaugural class, which included those with prior military service who had not previously been inducted into the Constabulary, noncommissioned officers, and quality enlisted men who showed promise. The training itself was laughable, lasting seven weeks in small arms, drill, basic formations, combined American and Japanese tactics and American doctrine. The next three classes remained largely the same, although the second class accepted civilian candidates and these

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32 Entry September 6, 1951 Van Fleet Journal, Van Fleet Papers; July 1952 Command Report Combat Units p 2
33 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 32
34 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 30
classes lasted about three months instead of two. Western military training and indoctrination strives to break down differences between social groups such that soldiers bond with one another, form a collective identity, and can act as one in the privation of the battlefield. The OTS program was too short and superficial to achieve this.

**Phase II** The training system expanded during this period, but it remained staffed by Americans and ad hoc in nature. In August 1948, the advisors established the Korean Military Academy (KMA) and the Constabulary's officer candidate school. The Military Academy's principal deficiency was that it lacked Korean instructors; advisors taught either primarily through nonverbal communication or through interpreters. Only in summer 1949 did the advisors halt the training programs for five weeks to train five instructors with the ROKA's permission. So few instructors could neither serve as a base for institutionalizing lessons and knowledge nor disseminating lessons among hundreds of thousands of soldiers. The KMA's greatest limitation was the reluctance of Korean commanders to commit soldiers for training when they were badly needed for combat. They did assign a few personnel to the school, but only at the American's persistent urging. KMAG developed schools for combat support functions as well, establishing a signal school in July 1948, a combat intelligence school, an engineer school, and an ordnance school around the same time and a quartermaster school in 1949. By the end of 1949, KMAG's G-3 training section was operating 13 different schools, placing major emphasis on the infantry and staff schools. In addition to the Korea-based schools, Korean officers were also studying at service schools in the United States. In 1948 a small number of colonels and lieutenant colonels attended the advanced course at the infantry school at Fort Benning, the artillery school at Fort Sill,


36 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 81

37 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 81-2

38 Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 87
and the Ground Forces School at Fort Riley. This program was enormously successful; Korean officers who
had studied in the United States moved up the ranks very quickly.39

Phase III. KMAG made major strides toward a more systematic and thorough military school system in phase
III, but combat needs limited the growth of the school system until late phase III. Following the invasion,
KMAG's most urgent task was ensuring a ready supply of well-trained replacements; no centralized and
systemic training program existed previously, so commanders trained individual soldiers as well as their units.
On 17 July 1950, KMAG and ROKA established the first Replacement Training Center (RTC) as a means of
providing centralized training in basic soldiering skills to assemble new recruits and replace casualties.40
Between July and September 1950, five RTCs were activated with a total capacity of 3,000 men per day. In
the same timeframe, five more ROKA divisions were authorized, and by the end of 1950, the ROKA
consisted of 10 active divisions. The Korean Army required much more training at all levels than the 10 days
the RTC offered, a solid network of military schools and replacement centers, and high-quality instructors,
and KMAG would expand its training system through the end of the war to meet the need.41 The RTC
initiated tighter screening measures for new recruits. It struggled to recruit enough men, rejecting nearly a
quarter of the first group of recruits as medically unfit for duty and rejected another 10,000 for fitness
reasons. In order to address this problem, the RTC introduced pre-screening before the new recruits arrived
at Cheju-do to ease the stress on limited personnel and resources.42

At the end of phase III, KMAG shifted toward staffing its training programs with Koreans. These
advisors organized committees of Korean officers and offered elementary training in minor tactics,
employment of infantry weapons, squad formations, and rifle instruction. The Korean committees then

39 Sawyer, Advisors in Korea 88

40 Personal notes, First RTC Box 4 Lt Col Daniel Doyle Papers, US Army Military History Institute, US Army Heritage
and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea,
ed. and comp. by the KMAG Public Information Office (Tokyo 1956), 34.

41 Hausman p 14-15, Hausman papers.

42 Weekly report, March 18, 1951, 4
taught the same subjects to their units with close KMAG supervision. In addition, these advisors led sessions in which they provided constructive feedback, planned training courses, and collected ideas and suggestions. The Korean officers held similar sessions with their noncommissioned officers. Mowitz was pleased with his new system and its results because "instruction is not only standardized, but the chances of misrepresentation and incorrect instruction being given to troops is greatly reduced." A key factor in the success of this approach was its enlistment of the Korean officers in training their units. Like graduate teaching assistantships, this arrangement offered officers an opportunity to deepen their own understanding of the course material while also getting to know their men and begin functioning in a leadership role. Developing the ROKA's officer corps and its ability to train units itself would be the only way to build an autonomous and sustainable Korean Army.

**Phase IV** In phase IV, KMAG employed best practices regarding its training program. The establishment of the Korean Army Training Center (KATC) Field Training Command (FTC) enabled KMAG to take the ROKA to the next level. Until the war started, the Koreans made tactical improvements but lacked experience with exercising good leadership or combined arms operations and the operational level of war. The FTC program remedied that limitation. The FTC was standardized and systematic training program that relied on Korean officers for much of the instruction.

In November 1951, KMAG established the KATC. Prior to 1951, there was no robust, systematic training program that began with teaching individual skills such as weapons handling, taught tactics upon mastery of individual skills, followed by combined arms and complex operations training. ROKA divisions were never able to train as a unit KMAG set up the field training centers in each of the four corps to address this critical deficiency. KMAG also established two advanced schools established between December 1951 and January 1952 as well as the Korean Military Academy in order to provide ROKA with a cadre of professional and career leaders, and the Command and General Staff College to produce highly-trained staff

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43 Second Division, Korean Army (undated), 3, Mowitz Papers
officers and senior commanders. KMAG facilitated the American lessons in the ROKA's institutional knowledge by not only establishing a military school system, but also by having Korean officers teach courses whenever possible.

The Field Training Command program was the first since the ROKA’s inception that focused on division-level combined arms operations. Most Korean commanders had never before learned to conduct themselves as division-level officers or coordinate the actions of subordinate units such that operations ran smoothly. Korean staff officers had never before actively planned and coordinated operations, a critical part of successfully executing operations. In the first week of training, the division organized and prepared for training, received placements, and drew new equipment. Advisors worked around the clock with the training division’s staff and Korean instructors to put together schedules, issue orders, and coordinate logistics. The ROKA headquarters distributed an overall training schedule complete with tasks and learning objectives that was signed by the Chief of Staff. Over the next six weeks, the division began by reviewing individual and crew-served weapons handling and basic fighting skills first at the individual level, followed by tactical training at the squad, platoon, and company levels. Unlike previous efforts to train the Korean Army, the FTC program progressed in a very systematic and standardized manner; each unit followed a particular set of tasks as part of their training. Small unit tactics comprised the majority of the training, as tactical problems from the squad to battalion level absorbed about 335 out of 480 training hours—about 70%. Support units including engineer, reconnaissance, and signal also received commensurate training in basic subjects, as KMAG sought to develop the ROKA beyond just its combat units. KMAG also strove to make the training

45 April 1952 Command report p 1 (8202d AU, APO 301) Section I- Background
46 Myers, Wartime Experiences, 136-7; Training Memo 75, 2, Doyle Papers.
47 Headquarters, Korean Army, Training Memorandum 75, August 7, 1951. 1-3, Box 4, Doyle Papers.
49 Training Memo 75, Annex 2, 1, Doyle Papers
50 Training Memo 75, Annexes 3-6, Doyle Papers
realistic, as 30% of all training was conducted at night. The Korean units also learned through exposure to the combined arms techniques employed by their American counterparts. Some divisions had American pilots working alongside them as Forward Air Controllers (FAC), who coordinated directly with pilots, thereby allowing the ROKA to request and direct their own close air support without working through KMAG. Finally, the eighth week consisted of a battalion-level field exercise “in conjunction with a command post exercise for the divisional and regimental staffs.” ROK divisions only returned to the front after successfully completing this program. The FTC made these units fully combat ready in two months, improved combat effectiveness, and bolstered unit cohesion, and cooperation between trainers, advisors, and the Korean soldiers as well as solid learning practices enabled this progress. The enormous effort to retrain and reconstitute the ROKA following the Chinese invasion fundamentally transformed the Korean Army, and American military leadership recognized these great strides. Roberts and Van Fleet regarded the Army as a good investment. Can fleet made sure to impress upon Gen. Lawton when he visited in late 1951 that the funds and equipment provided to the ROKA had been well worth it.

By January 1952, the revamped training program was producing results; the 9th ROK divisions completed its eight-week training course at FTC No 1. The January 1952 command report attributed the division’s enormous increase in battle worthiness to this training; after the 9th division returned to combat, it killed more than 400 enemy soldiers while suffering only one casualty itself. Following this success, KMAG expanded the Field Training Command by opening more training camps to service one division in each of the four corps to receive training simultaneously. Brig. Gen. Ryan expressed satisfaction in the improved combat effectiveness of ROKA troops as a direct result of the Field Training Commands in operation since

51 Training Memo 75, Annex 2, 1, Doyle Papers
52 Harry J. Maihafer, From the Hudson to the Yalu: West Point ’49 in the Korean War (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 244. "Field Training Command" Van Fleet Papers
53 Fifth ROK Division Inspection Report, p 6
54 Entry October 28 1951 Van Fleet Journal, Van Fleet Papers; Collins, War in Peacetime p 316
55 January 1952 FTC Command report pg 3
August 1951. Improvements in the training and school systems resulted in an increase in Korean army strength. For the first time in the ROKA's history, Korean units became fully manned with trained soldiers.

**Advising vs Commanding** In phase I, USMGIK handled all political and military matters directly. In general, and devoted personnel full-time to supply, transportation, communications, and personnel administration as late as 1948.\(^56\) By phase II, this had changed; from 1948 onward, KMAG leaders stressed the importance of giving Korean counterparts responsibility for as many tasks as possible and to only offer guidance when necessary.\(^57\) KMAG historical documents, advisors’ correspondence, and the Korean active role in combat operations reveal that the Koreans drove combat operations and made most decisions. Advisors stood by to influence and guide them along the way.

In phase III, the North Korean invasion threw KMAG and the ROKA into survival mode; while ROKA units gave conventional combat their best effort, they were unprepared and advisors stepped in and assumed command more frequently than normal. Training and advising took a backseat in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. KMAG recognized the importance of transferring combat responsibilities to the Koreans since a poorly-led army is poorly suited to assume progressively more responsibility, and both Van Fleet and Ridgway remained adamant that the ROKA should rely more on Korean officers than KMAG advisors over time.\(^58\) By mid-1951 in phase IV, the pace of combat operations had died down and the RTC and FTC were turning out qualified soldiers and units, and KMAG shifted back to advising rather than exercising any command responsibility at all. KMAG leaders continued to stress the importance of letting the Koreans learn through hands-on experience, and official documents and combat operations indicate that the ROKA took on progressively more command responsibility. KMAG even pushed ROKA officers to start calling in their own artillery and air strikes, which has not occurred in any other conflict I examine.\(^59\)

\(^{56}\) Sawyer, *Advisors in Korea* 54-55

\(^{57}\) *Advisors' Handbook*

\(^{58}\) Ridgway, Korean War 176; Entry January 2, 1952, Van Fleet Journal, Van Fleet papers

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<tr>
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<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
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<td>Suggestions, feedback, or reports sought from advisors in the field</td>
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<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of advisors' feedback to discern key lessons, modify SOPs, and disseminate those SOPs and new knowledge back to advisors in the field</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visits to and investigations of units in the field by senior advisory group leadership</td>
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<td>Best</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishment of a military school system staffed by at least some host military officers so that the new lessons become institutional knowledge</td>
<td>Worst/Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<td>Advisors offered instruction and advice rather than assuming command responsibilities</td>
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<td>Best</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unity of effort</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Best</td>
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*Figure 3.1: Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time*

### III. Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes

The Republic of Korea's good institutional processes and structures concerning command arrangements, training restrictions, political promotions, and the handling of information enabled the tremendous improvement in the Army's combat capabilities. The presidential election in 1948 marked the ROK's establishment as a separate political entity, so this section explores the host military's institutional structures and processes from phase II onward. President Rhee began his policy of political appointments and transfers of officers and units and resisting large unit training exercises. These practices continued into phase III and continued to hinder the ROKA's development. By the mission's final phase Rhee and the ROKA adopted best practices with regard to institutional structures and processes, and the ROKA's performance improved dramatically. Finally, this section assesses Korean military's institutional processes and structures from the perspective of American advisors due to accessibility of sources.

*Training Restrictions* In phase II, impediments to training came primarily in the form of President Rhee's insistence on a very large national military force numbering in the hundreds of thousands based on conscription in which ideological purity and opposition to communism was the top priority. Size and ideological purity came at the expense of training; the influx of new recruits outstripped KMAG’s ability to thoroughly train them, and socializing them with ideological purity came at the expense of military
professionalism. Training progressed slowly and unevenly in 1949 and early 1950, and reports indicate that many Koreans remained poorly trained because the training they did receive was insufficiently thorough.60 Similarly, Rhee’s policy of shuffling around officers also compromised training; battalion and company commanders listlessly performed their duties since advisors never had the opportunity to implement or supervise a coherent training plan.61 As the sovereign Rhee had the final word on such matters, although KMAG and Roberts attempted to influence him through persuasion and selectively withholding funding. Rhee won the battle over ROKA’s future, but his victory came at the price of competence and quality and quantity of training. 62

**Phase III** Training shortfalls stemming from combat requirements persisted, but KMAG had begun a herculean effort to remedy this deficiency by the end of phase III. Critically, Rhee agreed to any training that KMAG recommended. Finally, the Korean Army had never suffered from excessively centralized command arrangements. All told, Korean learning improved from an already positive state.

**Phase IV** Training restrictions were also completely absent in phase IV, as Korean officers eagerly participated in whatever training KMAG suggested. By summer 1952, Van Fleet and the American leadership had grown quite optimistic about the ROKA’s future, and his confidence in its Chief of Staff, General Lee, was a major reason for his optimism. Lee was a professional and collaborated well with KMAG and the Eighth Army; He wholeheartedly subscribed to KMAG’s training program, and his staff helped implement the proposed reforms. KMAG’s experience with General Lee became typical by this point in the war; Paik Sun-yup replaced him as chief of staff and collaborated with KMAG equally well on all training efforts.63

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60 United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, Headquarters, Second Division, Korean Army (undated), 2-3, Box 8, Mowitz Papers.

61 United States Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea, Headquarters, Second Division, Korean Army (undated), 2-3, Box 8, Mowitz Papers.


Promotions Since Rhee's election in August 1948 and the establishment of a separate and independent South Korean state, Rhee involved himself in officer promotions and officer and unit rotations which hindered the ROKA's developments. Promotions were often based on a range of factors other than performance: loyalty to President Rhee, previous association with the Japanese colonial government, pro-American sentiments, and geographical origin. KMAG advisors had two tools at their disposal to counter each of these problems respectively: leverage on US funding and personal influence and relationships.

Rhee had a policy of shuffling through Korean officers through as many positions as possible to prevent officers from bonding too well with their men, lest they unite to challenge Rhee's rule. Those bonds, however, were also necessary for an Army capable of defending the Republic. Such frequent rotations disinclined officers from investing too much in their units since the officer taking his position after him might get the credit instead. Realistically, Rhee's policy did not allow unit commanders to take ownership for their units' progress, and therefore little progress occurred. This practice also disrupted KMAG's program because Korean officers would rotate out before advisors developed a strong working relationship with them. The Korean Army's policy of transferring units and officers frequently with little concern for training was perhaps the greatest limiting factor to the Army's development during this period. Moreover, officers were often put in positions for which they were woefully unqualified, and the frequent rotations precluded them from catching up. Officers most often formed their strongest bonds with their immediate superiors, which may be why Rhee ordered personnel changes at very inopportune times. He distrusted most senior officers, especially those who had served in the Imperial Japanese Army. Unfortunately, this meant that

64 William L. Roberts to Major General Charles L. Bolte, August 19, 1949, 2, Assistant Chief of Staff (G-3), Plans and Operations 091 (Korea), Decimal File 1949-1950, Records of Army Staff, Record Group 319, NARA II.,

65 William L. Roberts to Major General Charles L. Bolte, 19 August 1949, 2, Assistant Chief of Staff (G-3), Plans and Operations 091 (Korea), Decimal File 1949-50, Records of the Army Staff, RG 319, NARA II.

66 Mowitz Papers, Table of Organization and Equipment, p2
Korean commanders often fought hard battles on unfamiliar terrain and subordinates they did not know well made it difficult for commanders to utilize their men most effectively.\textsuperscript{67}

Fortunately, the Americans had devised ways to rein in Rhee's political machinations and mitigate their effects. Hausman had Rhee's confidence and his ear, which he used to limit the impact of Rhee's reshuffling of officers for political purposes. He told Rhee that he understood that as President he must sometimes change his Chief of Staff for political reasons, but the Captain implored Rhee to protect the Vice Chief of Staff from these "rotations." Rhee agreed, and while a two year period advisor saw six Chiefs of staff, he worked with one Vice Chief of Staff who remained in the position for several years. To a limited extent, Hausman achieved his stated goal of protecting the Army from politics and achieving stability and continuity in the staff and commands.\textsuperscript{68} President Rhee himself solicited Hausman's recommendation for General Chae's replacement, with an eye toward improving troop morale. Hausman recommended Chung IL Kwon, who was in the United States at the time. He also requested that Rhee order Gen. Hwang Hien Tchin back to Korea to serve as the ROKA's G-1. Rhee agreed on both counts.\textsuperscript{69}

**Phase III** The previous pattern of non-meritorious personnel decisions changed on 15 July, 1950 when Rhee placed ROKA under General Douglas MacArthur's United Nations Command's operational control. Within a few days, MacArthur had placed this responsibility on Walker as commander of the Eighth Army as well. As a result, the Eighth Army Commander General Walker could make all ROKA personnel decisions, and did so based on merit and previous combat performance. Among KMAG's top priorities was relieving officers reluctant to employ American methods. President Rhee's personal friend and confidant Korean Col. Kim Chong-won, known as "Tiger Kim" for his long track record of brutality, had killed his own officers and men after accusations of insubordination and avoided his combat responsibilities on the front line. That summer

\textsuperscript{67} Park, “Dragon from the Stream” 115

\textsuperscript{68} Hausman Papers p 12

\textsuperscript{69} Hausman Papers p 16
the Americans relieved him after he executed an officer and beat an enlisted soldier with a rifle.\textsuperscript{70} Such behavior was anathema to American military ideals of professionalism, which KMAG was now better able to enforce. While Rhee reassigned Kim to command the martial law regime in Pusan and later the southern military police units in Pyongyang,\textsuperscript{71} the Americans' new command authority ensured that KMAG and the Eighth Army could at least ensure that delinquent officers were kept away from front line combat where talent was most needed. Although Walker could change field command arrangements against the will of Rhee, the ROKA, and KMAG, he worked through these institutions to engender cooperation and stave off power struggles. In practice, Walker virtually always was successful in implementing his desired changes, and Rhee could no longer continue his disruptive practices of frequently shifting ROKA officers around or emphasizing ideology at the expense of skill in promotions.\textsuperscript{72} This shift away from politicization gave ROKA and KMAG the skilled officer corps they needed to turn the Army around in 1951 and 1952.

Phase III saw the removal of the only politically driven inhibitor of host military learning. With the US Eighth Army in charge of personnel actions for all subordinate units—including KMAG and the ROKA, KMAG could begin to develop leadership acumen among the Korean officers.

It bears noting that President Rhee chose to hand over operational control to the US Eighth Army. So long as some kind of indigenous governing body exists in the host nation, the advisory group's success will require either that political intervention in host military institutions remains minimal or that the advisory group has a sufficiently good rapport with or influence on the host nation that its leaders may be willing to relinquish command authority or otherwise change detrimental institutional structures and processes.

\textit{Phase IV} By and large, officer promotion and selection based on factors other than merit did not occur in phase IV, the period in which the ROKA's combat effectiveness reached its height in any absolute sense as

\textsuperscript{70} Millett, \textit{They Came from the North} p 161, 199-200, 286; Cummings, Korean War p 183, 185.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid

\textsuperscript{72} American Embassy (Muccio) Korea to CINCFE (MacArthur), July 15, 1950 and CINCFE to CG EUAK (Walker), July 16 1950, January-April 1952, Box 20 The Korean War- Special File December 1950-May 1952, Ridgway Papers; Eighth Army, Special Problems p 8; Allan R. Millett, \textit{The Korean War}, vol. 1 (Seoul, Korea: Korea Institute of Military History, 1997), 346-7.; Sawyer, Advisors in Korea p 138; Millett \textit{They Came From the North} p195.
well as its most dramatic improvement. In units where worst practices still existed on this dimension in phase IV, combat effectiveness remained poor as well, even as the ROKA as a whole performed brilliantly. The 5th Division's collapse in June 1953 best illustrates how the frequent rotation of officers and units can disrupt unit cohesion and contribute to poor performance, even though it occurred much later in the war and was not driven by the President's fears. In the aftermath of battle, Williams wrote to Taylor that Chung's decision to reassign the 22nd Regiment from the 3rd to the 5th Division stunted its performance and contributed to collapse because it did not integrate well into the new chain of command. Williams explained, "The Korean officer has greater loyalty to his next senior [commander] as contrast to his loyalty to the ROK Army. For example, a regimental commander's loyalty to his division commander. He may not do well if temporarily attached to another division. If a regiment is attached to a division and the division meets a reverse, the attached regiment is held to blame." While this particular reassignment was not a Korean political machination, it demonstrated the huge potential for substandard performance as a result of the "rotations" that Rhee regularly ordered. Fortunately for the advisory mission, such personnel practices remained and the poor combat effectiveness they engendered remained localized to this unit. Variation across units in personnel practices and combat effectiveness illustrates the importance of making personnel decisions based on merit for a successful advisory mission.

**Information Management**: Throughout the advisory mission the ROKA employed best practices with regard to information management. No limitation or restrictions on Korean officers’ communication existed at any point, and ROK intel assets appropriately focused on the enemy threat rather than monitoring ROKA leadership. The ROKA's information management practices remained inadequate through the early phases of the war, but a critical difference between such limitations for the ROKA versus other militaries discussed here is that the ROKA suffered from poor communications infrastructure and lack of resources rather than politics and conflicting agendas as was the case in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. These deficiencies in

73 Maj Gen Samuel T Williams to Lt gen Maxwell D Taylor, June 22 1953, Taylor Papers, SPCOL 089-86, National Defense University Library, Fort McNair, Washington DC.
Korea were much more easily correctable by KMAG as an external force. For example, during the withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter, the ROKA lacked all modes of communications except telephone lines, which no one expected to remain intact.\textsuperscript{74} The ROKA also lacked maps of a reasonable quality, and Korean officers had to consistently solicit maps from the Americans.\textsuperscript{75} Gen. Paik marveled at American record-keeping,

The American Army managed to record a day-by-day chronology of events even during intense combat, and they had printing facilities permanently assigned to the corps level. Their printing presses literally accompanied them into the combat zone, and American commanders periodically printed and distributed various documents to their men in the field. I’m afraid I must contrast this with the ROK Army, where our records are sparse and where we must rely on the memory of participants for descriptions of many facets of the Korean War. This leaves us in a position where we have little evidence to refute charges that we exaggerated a victory or concealed a defeat.\textsuperscript{76} Paik’s comment underscores the fact that the ROKA lacked a means of codifying and institutionalizing the lessons learned—a problem that the military school system that KMAG established beginning in 1951 went a long way to solve.

\textbf{Command Arrangements} The ROKA 1st Division exhibited a fairly decentralized command structure throughout the advisory mission, so over-centralized command did not impede the Korean Army’s development at any point. In early July during the withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter, Paik conceded that most of the time commanders found themselves approving a subordinate commander’s orders rather than instructing him in what orders he should give.\textsuperscript{77} The Koreans employed a similarly decentralized command structure for the duration of the war, so company and field grade officers had ample opportunity to develop their skills in combat.

\textsuperscript{75} Paik \textit{From Pusan to Panmunjom} 50
\textsuperscript{76} Paik \textit{From Pusan to Panmunjom} 76-77
\textsuperscript{77} Paik \textit{From Pusan to Panmunjom} 31
Host Military Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the host military develop competent leadership by promoting and firing officers based on merit and performance rather than political loyalty?</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average/Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military restrict training exercises?</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military centralize command arrangements, leaving junior officers little to no autonomy in the field?</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is critical information held hostage for power instead of being freely shared both horizontally and vertically?</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
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Figure 3.2: Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time

IV. Military Effectiveness

The ROKA underwent a dramatic transformation, from a completely incapable force at its founding in 1946 to a modern, effective military by July 1953. By the end of the war, the Koreans not only planned and executed complex maneuver operations in a stressful combat environment independently, but they also assumed primary responsibility for support functions like supply and intelligence. Similar to trends in institutional structures and processes, ROKA combat effectiveness varied considerably in the intervening years. By the end of phase II, the ROKA had become proficient at low intensity combat, ending the ongoing guerrilla conflict by spring 1950. The Americans did not support expanding the ROKA's mission to include national defense until the invasion, so naturally the ROKA's effectiveness dropped precipitously in phase III. The advisory group’s sound institutional structures and processes enabled it to pinpoint areas for ROKA improvement, develop a training regimen to meet those needs, and guide the ROKA's development into a modern conventional military in phase IV. For their part, good institutional structures and processes in the ROKA enabled such a dramatic improvement.

Phase I Recruitment of the security force's first officers and men progressed at a snail's pace in 1946; poor policies enacted during the occupation complicated this task. Hasty decision-making that ignored the political and social dynamics peculiar to the Korean peninsula set up the advisory group and their Korean counterparts for growing pains phase II.

The Korean experience illustrates the link between poor US military institutional structures and processes and the failure to develop a cohesive organization. The advisory mission and Constabulary faced a
profound lack of interest in the mission among potential recruits. The Korean population perceived the resemblance between the Constabulary and the Japanese imperial police; they felt that one colonial power had supplanted the other and were disinclined to believe that they would one day exercise full sovereignty. Recruitment thus remained lethargic at best throughout 1946, as each regiment took about a year to be "fully organized," and many noted that potential recruits (and actual recruits) displayed utter disinterest in the project.78 By April 1946, about seven regiments had been formed, albeit woefully under strength; the Constabulary numbered little over a thousand men, which meant each regiment was at less than 10% of full strength.79 Regiments vary in size across armies, but each regiment typically has 2,000 to 5,000 troops.

In a country with poor public health and no indigenous military tradition, the Constabulary had few obvious pools of potential recruits. USAMGIK erred on the side of seeking out those with prior military experience and those who passed a very low bar of physical qualifications. The latter condition entailed recruiting, training, and arming many leftists and socialists whose ideological convictions diverged significantly from that of the American occupiers as well as the eventual South Korean state. Especially after the Americans disbanded the private armies and militias, many of these men with radical political beliefs found a home in the ranks of the Constabulary. As a result, leftists and other ideologically incompatible individuals had infiltrated many Constabulary units and two classes of officer candidates.80 This is perhaps the single largest factor in the Constabulary's poor unit cohesion that would later produce the mutinies of the Yosu rebellion. US training at the time failed to and indoctrinate new recruits as soldiers. There is no evidence of a significant internal debate about the major decisions made during this phase, such as whether to be more selective of potential recruits or select on a different set of characteristics. The advisory group could have developed a more cohesive Constabulary if it had actively sought information about Korean society and


79 Sawyer Advisors in Korea 17

80 Park "Dragon from the Stream" p 25; G-2 Periodic Report no 191 (Seventh Division, and no. 640 (USAFIK) Korean National Defense, XXIV Corps, G-2 Historical Section RG 554, NARA II.
perceptions through advisor reports, which would have conveyed information about Koreans advocating for better screening measures to USAMGIK leadership, who could have adjusted policy accordingly.

The Constabulary demonstrated a lack of proficiency in the basic tactics of counterinsurgency operations, particularly with regard to the excessive use of firepower against civilians. Guerrillas affiliated with the South Korean Labor Party (SKLP) sought to disrupt the 1948 elections. On 3 April 1948 they conspired with elements of the Constabulary's 9th Regiment to attack voter registration stations, police officers, infrastructure like bridges, and the residences of rightist families. 81 The guerrillas achieved their goal; in Cheju-do, the province where the 9th Regiment was stationed, voter turnout was 65% compared to 92% in other provinces. 82 The Constabulary sent troops from Pusan to assist the loyal elements of the 9th Regiment in taking control of the island's lines of communication and securing its population centers, utilizing excessive violence against civilians, which generated even more sympathy for the SKLP. 83 The Constabulary took a literal scorched earth approach to defeating the guerrillas, burning hundreds of allegedly Communist leaning villages, indiscriminately raping and torturing the locals, and eventually killing 20% of the some communities’ populations. 84 The Constabulary committed the cardinal sin of counterinsurgency campaigns, indiscriminant violence that will make winning the trust and help of the population very difficult. Counterinsurgency campaigns are won with intelligence, which requires the locals to hand over that information. The Constabulary's unprofessional actions made Korean villagers very uninterested in providing intelligence that would have allowed them to isolate the guerrillas and end the rebellion.


82 G-2 Periodic Intelligence Report 809, March-April 1948

83 G-2 Periodic Intelligence Report 803-808, 809, March-April 1948

84 G-2 Periodic Intelligence Report 803-808, 809, March-April 1948
Unit Cohesion: Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?  
No, subversive elements in Constabulary posed huge problems

Tactics: Weapons handling, refrain from indiscriminant violence, simple internal stability operations including regular reconnaissance, raids, cordon and search?  
Generally poor command of weapons handling, excessive and indiscriminant violence, no command of basic tactics

Complex Operations: Search and attack, counter-ambush operations, patrols, low level initiative and high level coordination?  
Not attempted

**Phase II** Ongoing civil unrest escalated into a guerrilla war which the Constabulary was poorly positioned to win. Roberts' arrival and the massive overhaul of the advisory group and its learning processes rejuvenated the advisory mission, enabling it to turn the ROKA around within two years and win the guerrilla war. By the end of phase II the ROKA had made great strides in weapons handling, restraint, and basic counterinsurgency tactics. Excellent advisory group institutional structures and processes and relatively few institutional obstacles to host military learning enabled a huge improvement in the ROKA's military effectiveness during this period.

The ROKA's counterinsurgency campaigns got off to a rocky start in the early days of phase II, but by mid-1950, the Koreans not only mastered counterinsurgency tactics, they also put down the rebellion. At first, however, unit cohesion disintegrated in the Yosu rebellion.

*The Yosu Mutinies* In October, PMAG advisors reported that the 9th Regiment was both unwilling and unable to deal with the guerrilla problem. In response, KMAG deployed a battalion from the 14th Regiment at Yosu to Cheju-do. The night before deployment, a group of about 40 Communist sympathizers led by disloyal NCOs killed the 14th's loyal officers, took control of Yosu and called for a nation-wide rebellion. The DPRK actually controlled the 14th regiment and ordered it to begin the revolt that started the rebellion. The movement grew rapidly to include civilians, other nearby towns, and other disloyal Constabulary members. The guerrillas and the rebellion offered a foothold in the South. The Americans' recruitment practices were

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85 Hausman Papers 13
largely to blame for the ease with which the communists infiltrated the ROK army, and PMAG intelligence reported that at least 1,000 Korean soldiers participated.\(^{86}\)

General Song Ho-sung, the Constabulary Chief, worked with Captain Hausman, who advised him about whom to assign to the operation and when to initiate it.\(^{87}\) The Yosu operation began on 20 October, and within a couple of days, the loyal Constabulary forces had forced the rebels out of Sunchon, a town affected by the uprisings. The Constabulary then attempted simultaneous attacks against Kwangyang, Yosu, and Posong even though the advisors advised against it. By 24 October the Constabulary isolated rebels in three different areas and broke them down one at a time. Poor planning and a lack of coordination between units allowed many rebels to escape.\(^{88}\) Adequate weaponry also posed a challenge for the American and South Korean forces. The Constabulary and the rebels fought hard until 28 October, when the rebels scattered into the Chiri mountains, where the Constabulary would fight its next counterinsurgency campaign months later. The Constabulary won at Yosu, but their casualty rate was around 25%. In the future, the Korean Army would learn to fight difficult battles with far fewer casualties.\(^{89}\) For the time being, however, the Constabulary’s performance at Yosu represented a nontrivial improvement.

With a great deal of American help and supplies, the Constabulary performed adequately at Yosu. It struggled more than it should have to put down a fairly small rebellion, largely due to issues with discipline, tactical proficiency at all levels, command and control, and inter-unit communication and coordination.\(^{90}\) The Koreans also displayed a propensity for the excessive employment of firepower; a KMAG advisor opined, "Many [civilians] died from the recon troops advised... I think [we] concluded that our people, not fully

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\(^{86}\) James H. Hausman, interview by Allan Millett, Austin Texas, March 21 1995, ROK Army Folder, Box 24, Hausman Archive; Minor L. Kelso to Allan Millett, 12 October 1995, Folder L84 Millett File, Box 7, Hausman Archive; Korean Institute of Military History, Korean War vol 1 p 33; G-2 PR 967 and 968, August-October 1948;

\(^{87}\) James H. Hausman, "The Yosu Rebellion," undated Chejudo/Sunchon Folder, Box 25, Hausman Archive.

\(^{88}\) G-2 PIR971, August-October 1948.


\(^{90}\) Hausman interview; Kelso to Millett, 9 January 1996; "Revolt in Korea," p 57; "Two Towns Held By Korea Rebels p 12
trained, tended to spray buildings with machine gun fire and needless casualties resulted." Advisors also noted that Constabularymen struggled to operate their weapons properly. That the Constabulary no longer perpetrated atrocities like it did on Cheju island was a step in the right direction, but indiscriminant fire driven by a lack of skill and tactical training would not fare much better eliciting intelligence from locals.

The ROKA's Second Counterinsurgency Campaign: Guerrilla activity continued in Cheju-do and escalated in the Chiri Mountains in both South Cholla and South Kyongsang provinces as well as around Taegu in the North Kyongsang province. After the mutinies at Yosu, KMAG and the Constabulary emphasized rooting out subversive elements within its ranks at the urging of advisors’ reports. Between January and March 1949, the Korean G-2, KMAG advisors, and the US 971st Counterintelligence Corps detachment arrested 74 officers and 174 enlisted for treason among other crimes; by the end of the year they had arrested nearly 5,000 officers. As a result the Army became more ideologically unified and cohesive, which laid the ground for further improvements.

In August and September 1949, Pyongyang directed the rebels to launch a huge offensive in Cholla and Kyongsang. The ROKA had finally begun taking advisors' suggestions to heart and improving their tactical proficiency. The 16th Regiment commander had large groups of his men search the area without any preparation or intelligence about the enemy's location or plans. His advisor suggested that he dispatch smaller units to patrol aggressively and collect intelligence on enemy positions, movements, and supply caches. Only after the reconnaissance element returned with critical intelligence- much of it provided by the local population- should he direct his men to lie in wait to ambush the guerrillas. The regimental commander did as the advisor suggested, producing immediate results- several guerrillas were killed or captured, along with their

91 Shackleton to Millett, 11 April 1997; Millett, Their War for Korea p 160
92 Shackleton to Millett, 11 April 1997; Millett, Their War for Korea p 160
weapons and some supplies. Without the institutional structures and processes that enabled advisors to build counterpart relationships and win their trust, the ROKA's newfound success in its civil war would not have been possible.

The ROKA's combat performance followed this upward trajectory until the guerrilla war was won in April 1950. It had learned to develop an intelligence network ahead of time and plan accordingly, which entailed a substantial drop in indiscriminate violence against civilians. This shift in the ROKA's approach to counterinsurgency exposed the rebels and made them relatively easy to eliminate. The ROKA had killed or captured 5,621 rebel soldiers and 1,066 of their weapons. The North Koreans then deployed two battalions into the South to aid the guerrillas in hopes of reversing the ROKA's recent gains. One of these battalions encountered the ROK 8th Division, which was able to reduce the attacking force down to 70 men and then pursued the remainder, killing or capturing them all. The second battalion attempted to pass through the ROK 6th Division's area of responsibility. The 6th made a decent attempt at a "hammer and anvil" to trap the invaders, and they were fairly successful. The ROKA's casualty rate had dropped admirably as well; the ROKA killed 480 and captured 104 while only losing 255, most of whom were only wounded. The Koreans' ability to inflict many casualties while sustaining far fewer is a testament to its improved tactical skill.

**Conclusion:** In Roberts' correspondence with the Pentagon, he indicated that the Koreans' marksmanship had improved so much that they were second to only the U.S. Army in this skill. In the Constabulary's formative stages, a greater American appreciation of the Koreans' insight into the political situation could have helped avoid some of the most profound problems the Constabulary faced prior to the communist invasion.

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94 KMAG Historical Report, 1949 p 9-10; Report of Inspection, TAEBAEK SAN p 2, Mowitz Papers.


96 Summary of Operations, Korean Army p 3; Korean Institute of Military History, Korean War vol 1 p 54.
**Unit Cohesion:** Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?

Steadily improved after the Yosu uprising, fairly good by 1950.

**Tactics:** Weapons handling, refrain from indiscriminant violence, simple internal stability operations including regular reconnaissance, raids, cordon and search?

Indiscriminant violence initially a large problem but declined over time, weapons handling improved over phase II, as did reconnaissance, raids, patrols, etc.

**Complex Operations:** Search and attack, counter-ambush operations, patrols, low level initiative and high level coordination?

Learned to execute patrols, search and attack, but initiative and coordination was middling. No capacity to do these things independently.

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**Phase III** The ROKA struggled to stay in the fight in the wake of the North Korean and later Chinese offensives and only managed to do so because of the US entry into the war. To the ROKA's credit, it did maintain some cohesion under very trying circumstances.

The North Koreans achieved complete surprise, and their infantry advance rarely encountered a ROKA unit prepared to mount any defense at all. The KPA threw the ROKA into utter confusion and chaos. The ROKA's forward divisions (the 1st, 6th, 7th and 8th) on the Ongjin peninsula awoke to a North Korean artillery barrage on 25 June 1950 before KPA forces poured over the 38th parallel. The 7th Division defended two roads that led to Seoul less than fifteen miles from the capital, and when the KPA attacked its 1st Regiment. The Regimental commander began marching northward to engage the attackers while two KMAG advisors led an artillery battery forward as well. These movements were completely uncoordinated and impromptu; the regiment reacted to the situation with no forethought of how it would run the engagement when it occurred. Unsurprisingly, the North Korean tanks completely overran the ROKA's infantry units and destroyed the howitzer artillery battery after a short-lived exchange of fire. The North Koreans inflicted heavy casualties and forced the Division's collapse, thereby opening up a direct path to Seoul.97 The 7th Division displayed a minimal level of effectiveness in this engagement; it failed to mount a nontrivial resistance to the KPA advance and the Division collapsed after sustaining many casualties; 98

The invasion severely damaged the ROKA; the infrastructure that had been built in the years leading up to the war, including supply and maintenance depots, training facilities, and bureaucracy was either

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97 Cummings, *The Korean War: A History* p 9;

98 Millett, *They Came from the North* p 95; Cummings, *The Korean War: A History* p 9; Lowry, *Korean Idyll* p 60, 65-7, 72
destroyed, occupied by the enemy, or disrupted to the point of uselessness. The ROKA also lost a crippling number of soldiers; In June 1950, the ROKA consisted of 95,000 men in 8 divisions, but only a lean 5 divisions were left with 45,000 men by August.\(^9\) The ROKA's near collapse indicated that it was not yet ready to fight a conventional war against a formidable enemy, which prompted serious efforts to rebuild and reorganize both KMAG, which was not well suited for wartime, and the ROKA.

**The Chinese Invasion:** The US and South Korean force approached China's border with North Korea in October 1950, prompting China to enter the conflict. By the end of November 1950, both the US Eighth Army and its affiliated Korean units were forced into full retreat southward. On the Western end of the front, the ROK 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, comprised of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Divisions put up very little resistance to the Chinese attack, eventually just fleeing the scene. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps collapse endangered the Eighth Army, whose eastern flank the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps was intended to defend.\(^{10}\) The ROK 3<sup>rd</sup> and Capital Divisions on the eastern end of the front fared better, but between 25 and 27 November, the ROK 7<sup>th</sup> Division completely fell apart under Chinese pressure such that no semblance of organization remained. Soldiers fled the battlefield without orders, many left their weapons and equipment behind, and made no attempt to reestablish order or a chain of command.\(^{11}\) The Chinese invasion broke the momentum of the South Korean and American advance through North Korea and turned the tide of the war. Two army groups consisting of 30 divisions, and 300,000 experienced soldiers. As is fairly common in a hot pursuit, the UN, 8<sup>th</sup> Army and X Corps were moving on a very wide front with too wide of a gap between the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's right flank nearly Huichon and X Corps' left flank near (Hagu-Ri). This made a withdrawal to more defensible lines the only viable course of action for the UN forces.\(^{12}\)

\(^9\) Eighth Army, Special Problems p 9.

\(^{10}\) Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War* vol 1 p 893

\(^{11}\) Maj Gen Frank Lowe, Report to the President, Tab 11, "Report of Incident, 7th ROK Division," p2. Papers of Harry S Truman, President's Secretary Files, Harry S Truman Library, Independence MO

\(^{12}\) Hausman Papers p17-18
The Chinese Spring Offensive. The South Korean forces again fared very poorly against the Chinese, whose favored tactics were brief artillery bombardment, infantry assault at night, and an uncompromising breakthrough and exploitation. The Chinese approach entailed penetrating the line at multiple points, cutting the ROK lines of communication between Omachi and Hyon-ri, and threatening ROK forces with encirclement. They enjoyed great success in this approach as it aligned well with the ROKA’s weaknesses; the latter could not handle the pace of the Chinese infiltration and maneuver. ROK units exerted a domino effect on each other; a unit would collapse, spill over into a neighboring unit’s line of retreat disrupting that unit’s retreats, and so on, which devolved into disorganized rout southward. Soldiers abandoned their weapons and officers removed their rank insignia. This pandemonium continued until a new line formed nearly forty miles south. Even units that remained relatively cohesive proved ineffectual in combat, offering little resistance to the Chinese advance.

As an example of the ROKA’s impotence, Major General Yu Jae-hung, ROK III Corps Commander, ordered the 9th and the 3rd Divisions to attack the Chinese position and break through the line at Omachi on 17 May. Only one Chinese infantry battalion defended Omachi, but the attack failed spectacularly anyway. General Yu and his staff launched the initial attack but apparently did not plan any follow-on counterattack.

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105 According to the Chinese sources quoted in Korean Institute of Military History, Korean War vol 2 p 679
They did not attempt to exercise personal leadership, provide fire support or coordinate and direct the attack itself. Yu himself returned to III Corps headquarters after delegating leadership of the operation to the 3rd Division commander, thinking that the two artillery battalions would force the Chinese out. It did not. The Korean troops were not nearly aggressive enough and froze at early indications of Chinese resistance, causing the ROK 3rd Division commander (acting as the Corps commander) to call off the operation instead of attempting to break through the Chinese line. A mere twelve hours later, the ROK III Corps executed a disorderly retreat in the face of small Chinese units. The fact that the entire corps foundered in the face of light resistance on advantageous terrain did not bode well for the capabilities of other ROKA units. An official history says it best:

There were no commanding officers to control the situation nor was it controllable for those who escaped enemy pursuit and assembled in total disorder in the Pangdæ-san area were unable to identify their own assigned units...[ the ROK 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th divisions] were paralyzed due to [their] inability to command and control, and were penetrated on the main line of resistance, thus unable to exercise their combat capabilities. In capable of overcoming the enemy’s night infiltration attacks, [and] overwhelmed by the enemy’s superiority in manpower, and unable to dislodge the enemy and recapture Omach’i, the ROK III corps finally [was] encircled by the enemy.

The RTC offered some reason for optimism. The KPA made multiple attempts to capture Taegu, but the RTC propped up the waning ROK Army performance as it retreated southward. In the battle for the Pusan perimeter, the RTC is churned out replacement to the division holding the northern part of the line. Even though the RTC lacked time to fully train replacements in individual soldiering skills, the additional capability made a notable difference in the course of the war. The RTC helped hold the perimeter and defend against attacks on Taegu, Yongssang, and Pohang. As Gibby put it, "a break at any point on this line would have spelled disaster for Walker's command and doomed MacArthur's grandiose and risky assault plan against Incheon."
**Unit Cohesion:** Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?

Uneven, but most units fled the battlefield without mounting a meaningful resistance at some point during this phase. Generally poor performance with some bright spots.

**Tactics:** Orderly retreats, pre-planned simple operations, weapons handling, use of terrain?

Some instances of units inflicting many casualties while taking few, indicating good use of cover and concealment and weapons handling, but phase III largely characterized by disorderly retreats and ineffective tactics.

**Complex Operations:** Combined arms proficiency, counter attacks?

Isolated attempts combined arms, but generally poor.

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Figure 3.6: Korean Military Effectiveness in Phase III

**Conclusion:** KMAG and the Korean leadership recognized the need for both a larger army with a larger advisory presence and better training in the wake of the North Korean invasion. The Communist Spring Offensive in April and May conclusively demonstrated that simply adding soldiers and equipment to the ROKA’s divisional structure was not going to solve basic structural problems, such as poor fire support, transportation, and senior commanders. Extremely high casualty rates created an urgent need for immediate replacements; as a result, KMAG developed a more systematic program and raised Replacement Training Centers (RTC) with the ROKA's approval. Advisors' observations of KMAG's weaknesses in these operations informed their designs of the entire military school system that they reinvigorated and expanded in Phase IV.

**Phase IV** By 1953, ROKA forces shouldered most of the combat burden; 12 Korean infantry divisions held 59% of the front lines, the Koreans sent out 61% of combat patrols and were responsible for 80% of contacts with the enemy, in contrast to their earlier disastrous performance. Furthermore, the Chinese and North Korean forces finally found a worthy opponent in the South Koreans and devoted correspondingly more attention to the ROKA and less to the American troops. This shift demonstrates that the Chinese and North Koreans considered ROKA targets valuable ones relative to American targets; ROKA targets received 86% of enemy onslaughts and 69% of enemy artillery fire. ROKA forces withstood these attacks quite well, suffering about 60% of the UN coalition's casualties but inflicting nearly that percentage of enemy killed, captured, or dead, according to the Eighth Army's intelligence estimate. The ROKA's performance in 1953 offers a stark contrast to its combat capabilities just three years earlier; while the Korean Army nearly
collapsed under the pressure of the communist invasions, they fought them to a standstill along with the Americans, doing most of the work themselves.\footnote{110 Hausrath, Problems p 28 "Relative Efforts of ROKA and UN units in the Korean War, January 1953"}

\textit{Operation RATKILLER} The Korean Army launched Operation RATKILLER with Paik Sun-yup at the helm in November 1951 to eliminate guerilla groups in areas under United Nations control with a focus on the Chiri-san area. After the anti-guerrilla campaigns in 1949-50, the communist sympathizers retreated into the mountainous areas but continued to stage attacks that "embarrassed and harassed" the Army. The Army therefore established Task Force Paik which coordinated logistics, air support, intelligence and auxiliary forces; the Capital and 8\textsuperscript{th} Divisions as well as the ROK Air Force (ROKAF) participated in this operation in collaboration with the police force. ROKA forces called in air strikes from the ROKAF, which bombed the guerrillas and dropped leaflets promising humane treatment to those who surrendered as part of a psychological warfare campaign. After the bombings, ground forces ran search and destroy operations against remaining enemy forces. KMAG reports indicate that Korean units utilized advanced blocking and envelopment tactics in order to kill or capture the guerrillas. The results were spectacular; 9,770 guerrilla casualties, another nearly 10,000 captured, and 3,132 individual and crew-served weapons were captured.\footnote{111 KMAG Command Report, January 1952, G-3 Narrative p1-3; Paik, Pusan to Panmunjom p 185-6; Korean Institute of Military History, Korean War vol 3, 311-9}

RATKILLER demonstrated the ROKA's proficiency in planning and executing complex dynamic operations and the coordination of intelligence, logistics, air support, and engineers and two army divisions. The Task Force's success further augmented the US military leadership's trust in Paik as a commanding officer.

By mid-1952, the Korean Army hardly resembled the ROKA from just a year before. The school system undoubtedly played a role in this transformation. By mid-1952, many more soldiers had graduated from rigorous leadership training and specialty schools, and individual soldier training had also come a long way. By that time, many Korean officers had completed training and were ready to assume leadership positions in ROKA' s schools and in combat units. When the first two division to graduate the FTC (the 3rd
and 9th) returned to the line in October 1951, Van Fleet wrote to Ryan that these divisions made a "splendid impression on the Corps Commanders."\textsuperscript{112} Months later in July 1952 Van Fleet expressed pleasure at the advisory group's success; one of our biggest military advances here in Korea has been the improvement of the ROK Army. We now have 10 well equipped and well-trained divisions capable of standing confidently alongside other UN units.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{Battle of White Horse Mountain: 6-15 October 1952} This battle marked a critical moment for the Korean Army; On Hill 395, two divisions of the Chinese 38th Army attacked the ROK 9th Division, which up to that point had been among the poorer performing divisions in the ROKA. In this battle, however, the division fought cohesively, retreating and counterattacking in an organized and coherent fashion, and utilized their growing artillery power well in combined arms operations. Korean leadership was unexpectedly strong and its performance in par with that of a modern military.

On 6 October the Chinese infantry then initiated the attack with some tank units in support. After absorbing the barrages and four assaults by two Chinese battalions, the Koreans regrouped and counterattacked, eventually forcing the Chinese to withdraw with an estimated 1500 casualties in comparison to the Koreans' 300 killed or wounded that day.\textsuperscript{114} The next afternoon the Chinese attacked again with four battalions. While they captured the crest of the hill, two battalions from the 28th Regiment recaptured it in a nighttime counterassault and held off continuing Chinese infantry and artillery attacks for the next two days while inflicting high casualties.

The Chinese expected their conquest of the hill to come relatively easily, and the fact that it did not made a strong statement in favor of the Koreans and in embarrassment of the Chinese. The Koreans were remarkably cohesive despite a challenging battle with high casualty rates. Approximately 15% of company

\textsuperscript{112} Van Fleet to Ryan, October 23, 1951, Correspondence- Alphabetical, Ryan-Ryle, Box 71/50 Van Fleet Papers.

\textsuperscript{113} Van Fleet to Henry I. Hodes, July 29, 1952, Correspondence- Alphabetical, Box 69/28, Van Fleet Papers.

grade officers were killed or wounded in just ten days, and the division as a whole lost 3,000.\textsuperscript{115} The 9\textsuperscript{th} Division also demonstrated tactical acumen; their excellent fire discipline (the system for communicating and coordinating fire, usually artillery) and "troop control" helped them stave off continuous Communist attacks while carefully utilizing ammunition carefully and managing reserves. The Division simultaneously integrated over 3,700 replacements who also demonstrated tactical proficiency and meshed well with the existing men, a testament to the RTC's impact. In the pre-RTC days, replacements were poorly trained-or barely trained at all. By October 1952, they were equivalent to 9\textsuperscript{th} Division soldiers as evidenced by the consistently high performance in this battle. The ROKA not only maintained its cohesion under difficult circumstances, it maintained its focus and organization to launch multiple counterattacks that eventually won the battle. The Division's staff officers, who had previously been a weak point for the ROKA, performed equally well in maintaining the administrative and logistical functions necessary for operational maneuver. Van Fleet and Jenkins were impressed with the 9\textsuperscript{th} Division's performance, including its leadership, tactical, and operations skill. The Division commander and his staff managed a complex, fluid, and stressful battle resulting in over 10,000 enemy casualties, more than three times the casualties that the Koreans sustained.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{The Summer Offensives} In the second phase, the Communist forces brought to bear three armies (the Sixtieth, Sixty Seventh, and the Sixty-Eighth in reserve) against the ROK II Corps. Korean units at all levels demonstrated much improved tactical prowess, as the June US X Corps artillery summary indicated that ROK divisions performed exceptionally well in requesting defensive artillery fire support.\textsuperscript{117} One company in the 6\textsuperscript{th} Division's sector successfully defended Hill 424 from a two-company strong Chinese attack. The fight lasted about three hours until the Chinese withdrew under a shower of artillery fire. The Koreans captured significant of Chinese weaponry and equipment and inflicted 110 casualties, although 68 of the 78 Koreans

\textsuperscript{115} XI Corps AAR Hill 395, p29-30; KMAG Command Report October 1952, Ninth Division p 2.

\textsuperscript{116} IX Corps AAR Hill 395 p 22; Hermes, Truce Tent p 306

\textsuperscript{117} X Corps Artillery Command Report June 1953
were wounded. Between 10 and 17 June, the 20th Division fought to defend the area around Hill 1090, which ultimately succeeded after changing hands many times. The ROK 1st Battalion 61st Regiment defended nearby hills against two Chinese regiments for three days before the Chinese eventually captured it. The next week on the morning of 18 June the Koreans counterattacked. Ultimately the Chinese withdrew, and the Koreans held their ground. These engagements not only demonstrated the ROKA’s cohesion and skill in small unit tactics but also the Korean forces’ ability to serve a larger strategic objective. The 20th Division confidently defended the eastern flank and matched each Chinese attack in kind, even mounting a successful counterattack to the front with one regiment. The US X Corps commander Lt. Gen. Issac D. White was happy with the 20th Division’s performance.

Unit Cohesion: Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?
Tactics: Orderly retreats, pre-planned simple operations, weapons handling, use of terrain?
Complex Operations: Combined arms proficiency, counter attacks?

Excellent, even in very challenging battles
Excellent, engagements proceeded in an orderly fashion, inflicted proportionally high casualties
Excellent command of maneuver warfare by 1953

Figure 3.7: Korean Military Effectiveness in Phase IV

V. Conclusion

The ROKA’s development and quick turnaround (especially in phase IV) was nothing short of spectacular. Specifically, the institutional structures and processes in both KMAG and the ROKA drove this success story.

In phase I, the advisory effort employed worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes, and the Constabulary had not yet become a separate entity from USAMGIK. As expected, the Constabulary did not meaningfully improve during this period (effectiveness and improvement level =0). Both sides saw dramatic institutional transformations in phase II. KMAG employed best practices across all institutional elements except training, and the ROK and its arm came into their own. Still, the ROKA

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118 KMAG Combat Operations Report May 1953, p 9
119 Eighth Army, combat in the Eastern Sector June 1-18, 1953, part III p 4-5, 8-9
suffered from mild problems with political intervention in personnel assignments and restrictions on training. Since institutional structures and processes were on average were good on both sides (not best practices, but no severe problems either), the ROKA experienced moderate improvement in combat effectiveness (level 2). The only deviation from this pattern is the ROKA’s performance in phase III; institutional structures and processes did not decline, but the ROKA collapsed due to the Communist invasions rather than any major institutional deficiency on either side (level = 0). Good institutional structures and processes cannot overcome all challenges; the ROKA had not trained for a high intensity conventional war, whereas its adversaries had done so diligently, overwhelming the South Koreans in spite of their progress. Even so, an improvement in host military and advisory group institutional structures and processes to best practices drove the ROKA’s dramatic improvement in phase IV. The ROKA became independently proficient at complex operations (level 3). The tables below summarize this study’s argument as applied to the US military advisory mission to Korea.

The reforms that would follow in 1951 and 1952 arose from KMAG and ROKA’s observations through reports and field visits. The revamped military school system served as a means by which the US military could help the Korean forces capture the lessons the advisors imparted to them in the Korean institutional memory. Koreans continued to instruct at these schools after receiving schooling from the Americans. By the last year of the war, the advisory mission had born fruit. That feat would have been impossible without advisors’ observations and suggestions, including Korean officers in training their men as school faculty and having senior leaders regularly visit training facilities.

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Figure 3.8: Summary of Korean and US Institutional Structures and Processes, Part 1

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The KMAG experience also illustrates that advisory mission success required nothing exceptional of advisors. KMAG advisors were in no way recruited from the cream of the crop of the US Military. Most KMAG advisors were reservists or otherwise individuals who were not “stars” of the Army. Moreover, advisory duty in Korea was an unpopular assignment which few wanted, and those with better options passed it up. Thus, the quality of recruited advisors matters less than the structures and processes in their institution that incentivizes them to make particular choices. Of course, an advisory group will likely not go wrong recruiting the highest caliber personnel, but this is virtually unheard of in all advisory missions, including the Korean case which marks the pinnacle of US military advising success.

Alternative Explanations This chapter addresses two alternative arguments for the mission’s success. The first addresses the influence of individual leaders on both sides. The second addresses the influence of Korean culture on the mission outcome.

First, the presence of good leadership on both sides could have driven the advisory mission’s success. On the whole, the advisory group did benefit from having capable and dedicated leaders, and it is hard to argue that good leadership is not at all important for mission success. not all of KMAG’s leaders were excellent. After Roberts’ departure in May 1950, Colonel William H. Sterling Wright became interim KMAG Chief for a few months until General Farrell arrived. Wright knew he was a placeholder and took little interest in the mission as other KMAG Chiefs did. Still, the advisory effort functioned more or less as it had been due
to the strength of institutional structures and processes that provided continuity in spite of a leadership change. This argument also overlooks the fact that President Rhee’s relatively poor leadership over was not an excellent leader with regard to the advisory mission. Although his interests and those of the ROKA and advisory group overlapped to a certain extent, both KMAG advisors and occasionally ROKA officers had to consistently manage Rhee such that his policies and actions did not interfere with the ROKA’s development. KMAG accomplished this through persuasion as well as assuming operational command of the ROKA from 1950 onward.

Second, South Korea’s ethnically homogenous society could have enabled mission success, since building relationships based on trust within the military enables unit cohesion and better cooperation. Many commentators point to ethnic tensions in Iraq and Afghanistan as a major cause for those militaries’ lack of development. Leaving aside for a moment that the Iraqi Army actually fared quite well, his argument suggests that an ethnically homogenous host nation like South Korea should have a much easier time building combat effectiveness. Korea experienced internal problems with Communists and sympathizers similar to strife that some would expect to occur between different ethnic groups. The Communists backed by North Korea waged an insurgency until 1950, infiltrated the ROKA, and created severe problems with unit cohesion. Internal security problems and insider threats within the military can occur in the absence of ethnic tensions, and with the help of a good feedback cycle, advisors can collect the information necessary to build rapport and enlist the help of loyal Korean soldiers and ascertain the best way forward, which is exactly what they did.

In a similar vein, Korea has many similar cultural features to the other cases in this dissertation that some have argued preclude success. Most notably, these include a traditional society that values elders and superiors, discouraging individual initiative especially from young or junior personnel, knowingly continuing with a harmful or otherwise bad course of action to avoid losing face, the importance of personal and family connections to which corruption has been attributed, and the society’s small community nature (tribal or clan-oriented). Some advisory groups like KMAG could overcome or work with these cultural features to ensure that they did not undermine the host military’s combat effectiveness. Institutional structures and processes
that promote the flow of such useful information between advisors and advisory group leaders made all the difference.

**Conclusion** The Korea mission achieved what many currently believe impossible; the mission built a foreign military from scratch that within 7 years became independently capable at all levels. Moreover, South Korea did not enjoy any particular advantages that predisposed it to this success. It was a remote and austere environment with housing a society divided based on ideology, largely illiterate and uneducated, a foreign and traditionalist culture, and lacking an indigenous military tradition under an occupation of questionable legitimacy The Korea mission demonstrates that the right institutional structures and processes can enable mission success (or at least tremendous progress) within a few years, even in an unremarkable country.
CHAPTER 4: US MILITARY ADVISING IN VIETNAM

The Vietnam War epitomizes failure for US defense policy, and the same is true for the advisory mission. Despite receiving nearly 20 years of generous aid and training, the South Vietnamese demonstrated almost no improvement in their combat capabilities. The ultimate test came when the US withdrew from the country in 1973, and in less than two years, Saigon fell to the Communists. This chapter explores why an advisory mission that was a high national security priority for the United States and to which it devoted a wealth of resources and personnel failed to meaningfully improve the combat capabilities of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

Summary of the Argument This chapter argues that the advisory mission to Vietnam failed because both the advisory group and host military employed worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes. As this chapter demonstrates, both the advisory group and the ARVN fared poorly on institutional structures and processes that promote organizational learning. The advisory group generally failed to leverage feedback from advisors and Vietnamese counterparts, conduct field visits, remain in an advisory role, and establish a Vietnamese-led military school system. For their part, the Vietnamese promoted based on political loyalty, meddled in command arrangements, restricted training, and failed to share relevant operational information. Both sides independently made nominal improvements on these metrics in Phase 3, but these changes were too little too late. The Americans had been advising the Vietnamese for almost 20 years, and public opinion had turned against the war for lack of progress, pushing the United States to withdraw from Vietnam and leave behind an incompetent Vietnamese military.

I. Background: The US in Vietnam

This section divides the Vietnam War into four phases: the advisory mission's early years from 1950 through Kennedy's inauguration in 1961. Phase two covers both Kennedy's and Johnson's escalations of the war between 1961 and 1968. Phase three covers the Vietnamization of the conflict from 1968 through 1972. Finally, phase four covers the American exit from Vietnam from 1972 through 1975.
The United States' military commitment in Vietnam began in 1950 by supplying materiel to the French Expeditionary Corps, which was fighting a losing campaign against the independence-minded and Communist Viet Minh. The French established Vietnam as a sovereign state only the year before to counter the Viet Minh threat. In late 1950 the US established the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to oversee the aid it provided to France. In the early years, the American military commitment remained material; only after Dien Bien Phu in 1954 would advisors arrive in the country.

The Vietnamese National Army (VNA), formed under French auspices in 1949 and numbering 41,500, would later become the core of the American-led ARVN.\(^1\) Despite the French efforts, a stalemate persisted for several years thereafter until the battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. The fateful French surrender to the Viet Minh catalyzed the country's partition along the 17th parallel at the Geneva conference.\(^2\)

**Phase I** The Geneva Accords transformed the US commitment to Vietnam into larger mission focused on organization and training. The first advisors arrived at their military region headquarters in early 1955 with a mission to "assist and advice, on strictly technical aspects, Vietnamese military commanders to whom they were assigned, in order to rapidly and effectively rebuild the Vietnamese Armed Forces on a new basis."\(^3\) The insistence on "strictly technical aspects" set the tone and direction for the US Army advisory effort which was to remain technically-oriented throughout its existence.

By the late 1950s, the communist insurgency had established a firm foothold in the South, targeting government officials and middle class civilians for intimidation, abduction, and assassination. In addition to Hanoi's support, the insurgency found support from many South Vietnamese civilians who had a robust list of grievances toward Diem's government. By 1959, Hanoi sought to capitalize on the insurgency's building momentum and began heavily infiltrating units to South Vietnam. On 20 December 1960, Hanoi established

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3 Memorandum no 1891/TTM/MG, 10 April 1955, signed by Major General Le Van Ty, Chief of the General Staff. Quoted in Vien 3.
the National Liberation Front (NLF) to consolidate movements seeking to foment insurgency and overthrow Diem's government and eventually absorb South Vietnam.4

**Phase II** During his first year in office, President Kennedy increased the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) presence from just over 600 to 1905 personnel and introduced the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in February 1962.5

From its inception, the Republic of Vietnam and its military by extension saw constant political instability. Diem forced Bao Dai out of power in 1954, consolidated his rule over the next year, and ruled South Vietnam until his assassination in November 1963. Diem's assassination deepened political instability and declining governmental legitimacy, which spun out of control over the next two years. General ? Van Minh became president after the assassination, but he too was ousted in a coup three months later by General Nguyen Khan. Khan survived a coup attempt in September 1964 but was overthrown by Air Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky in February 1965. At this point, Nguyen Van Thieu became Vietnam's nominal head of state. The Ky-Thieu arrangement injected much needed stability into Vietnamese politics after a tumultuous couple of years.

1963 proved to be a watershed year in the Vietnam War. The year began with the ill-fated battle of Ap Bac on 2 January, and by 2 November a cadre of ARVN officers had assassinated President Diem.6 By 1964, the United States sent more than 23,000 military advisors to South Vietnam, but the persistent political instability in part contributed to the United States' decision to escalate the war, since they came to believe that keeping US forces in a purely advisory role would not be enough to turn the tide of the war.7 By the end of

4 Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience*, 423-424
5 Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience* p 475
1965, the United States deployed 184,000 soldiers including both advisors and four combat divisions. The US also escalated the advisory mission to build the air force (RVNAF) to over 600,000 by 1967.8

**Phase III** When President Nixon took office in 1969 he instituted "Vietnamization," a policy that aimed to enable the withdrawal of US forces from Southeast Asia by refocusing on training the South Vietnamese military. The US military would focus on the advising mission and eventually transfer responsibility for combat operations to the ARVN. Nixon also initiated troop withdrawals beginning that year. As a result, Nixon brought a renewed focus on MACV's ongoing efforts to train the Vietnamese, prompting institutional changes within MACV and coinciding with similar changes in the ARVN that enabled the Vietnamese military to make modest improvements in its combat effectiveness. Anti-war sentiment also escalated during this period, fueled in part by developments like the My Lai massacre, and the leaking of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Ultimately waning American public support for the war prompted the US military's withdrawal from the country with the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973.

**Phase IV** The US withdrawal on March 29, 1973 marks the beginning of Phase IV. From that day forward, the ARVN would fight entirely on its own without US combat troops, support, or advisors. Since the ARVN fought the war's final battles alone, its performance offers a good test of how much - or how little - the ARVN learned in nearly 20 years of advising. In 1975, the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive, culminating in the fall of Saigon and with it the South Vietnamese regime on April 30, 1975, little more than 2 years after the US military's departure.

**II. US Advisory Group Institutional Processes and Structures**

The institutional problems that later proved to be major deficiencies of the advisory effort in Vietnam were already taking shape in phase I. On the whole, MACV employed worst practices over the course of the mission, only briefly improving on some counts in phase III. Vietnamization resulted in institutional processes that enabled MACV to better discern the ARVN's needs and convince Vietnamese

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8 Clarke, *Advice and Support* 13, 109, 213
commanders to adopt their suggestions. Subsequent changes in the MACV, although limited, enabled small but still noteworthy ARVN improvement between 1969 and 1973.

Reports The advisory group began collecting regular reports from advisors from the mission’s inception, but did not utilize the information collected for establishing SOPs and making other policy decisions. This led to a chasm between the advisors and the MAAG leadership’s understanding of the war and the ARVN’s development that was never rectified. Even in early 1959, the disconnect between advisors’ feedback and senior leadership's understanding of the conflict was quite apparent. The Draper Committee, which was the President's Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program) "questioned the basic premise of the American advisory effort: that fighting insurgents was a "lesser included capability" of fighting a conventional war."9 The committee wrote that "tailoring a military force to the task of countering external aggression- i.e. countering another military force- entails some sacrifice of capabilities to counter internal aggression. The latter requires widespread deployment, rather than concentration. It requires small, mobile, lightly equipped units of the ranger or commando type. It requires different weapons, command systems, communications, logistics."10 Both Vietnamese officers and American advisors expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the lessons that MAAG was teaching. The Pentagon Papers reveal that advisors ascertained the nature of the conflict- that it was a battle for hearts and minds of the local population rather than one for control of territory.11 Vietnamese officers similarly found the MAAG’s training lessons and methods too conventional and poorly suited for the South Vietnamese security needs.12 When the South Vietnamese General Staff expressed concern over this move, instead favoring smaller units that would be

9 Pentagon Papers, vol II p 435
10 Pentagon Papers, vol II p 435
11 Pentagon Papers vol II 409
12 Gen Cao Van Vien et al., Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser, 73
useful in an irregular conflict, General Williams virtually ignored his Vietnamese counterparts.\textsuperscript{13} MAAG leadership apparently did not get the memo. In April the deputy chief of the American military mission in Vietnam General Samuel L. Meyers testified in front of the Senate foreign relations committee that they had "gradually nibbled [the guerrillas] away until they ceased to be a major menace to the government."\textsuperscript{14} The US Military attempted to build a conventional army to defend against a Communist invasion and failed to adjust its approach when advisors’ reports and Vietnamese reactions suggested it should.

The MAAG’s disregard for feedback meant that it could not correct behaviors and attitudes that alienated their Vietnamese counterparts and undermined the advisory mission. Cultural hubris is an example of such an attitude. It prevented MACV and its advisors from listening to suggestions from their Vietnamese counterparts. The cultural need to "save face," particularly important in most East Asian cultures, put a premium on the importance of building a relationship of trust with the Vietnamese commanders. Advisors frequently felt that offering constructive criticism was virtually impossible since their counterparts would often refuse to act on their advice not because they believed it was incorrect, but to prove that they were still in charge. Similarly, receiving suggestions from an American officer of the same rank had an emasculating effect on the Vietnamese officers which compounded the problem. It is not enough that a handful of advisors here and there learn to work well with their counterparts; the advisory group must circulate that knowledge and codify it in its SOPs so that all advisors can benefit.

The advisory group faced other challenges that scrutinizing advisors’ reports could have helped it address. The MAAG and later MACV employed many young or otherwise green advisors lacking combat experience, and as a result limited their advice to things like weapons handling and eschewed tactical and combat training. Because of their inexperience, the Vietnamese rarely took them seriously. This compounded the problems that the advisory group experienced establishing legitimacy. Since the Vietnamese tended to see the Americans’ approach to fighting as too "academic" and many and felt that they better understood how to

\textsuperscript{13} Lt Gen Samuel Williams, "MAAG-TERM Activities Nov55-Nov56," Military History Institute, November 1956, p 5-7, Carlisle Barracks PA; Gen Cao Van Vien et al, the US advisor, Indochina Monographs (Washington DC, Center for Military History 1980) p 27, 158; Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p 417

\textsuperscript{14} Hilsman To Move a Nation 419
fight this kind of war, they generally felt that there was no need to learn American tactics.\textsuperscript{15} The advisory group did nothing to address Vietnamese concerns that lessons did not match Vietnam’s security needs. MAAG and later MACV’s choice to ignore the Vietnamese concerns contrasts with KMAG’s insistence that advisors listen to their counterparts and find ways to convince them of the advisors’ abilities. KMAG also provided direction on how an advisor could achieve this based on what other advisors had found helpful in their own experiences. The advisory group's indifference to advisors and counterparts' feedback rendered it completely unable to surmount a challenge critical to the advisory mission's success.

The MAAG should have put more weight on the advisors' reports and ARVN officers input in the early stages of US involvement. That early, critical change would have helped put the advisory effort and the Vietnam War on a winning track as the war and the US involvement in it escalated. Instead, the advisory leadership did a poor job of learning about the host military's security needs as well as how to successfully impart their knowledge.

\textit{Phase II} The quality of the reports and feedback cycle changed little in phase II. Although MACV collected regular reports from advisors in the field, leadership was not willing to let them challenge assumptions about the war or ARVN's progress. MACV leadership also did not respond to these reports either individually or by reviewing the reports and amending the SOPs; the bottom-up portion of the cycle existed but did not function well, and the top-down portion remained entirely absent.

During the escalation years, MACV developed a robust system for collecting and analyzing data about the ARVN's development. This included a monthly briefing on measurements of progress toward the ARVN's development and pacification goals to MACV and quarterly for the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), a series of similar reports for the RVNAF, and the degree of government control in Vietnam's hamlets. All told, the MACV generated nearly 400 types of reports on a recurring basis in addition to fielding constant requests from the National Military Command Center and the White House, usually in

response to news headlines or unfavorable developments.\textsuperscript{16} In spite of the voracious demand and never ending generation of reports detailing progress, the copious data did not lead to improvements in the advisory program in part because they collected little information about matters pertaining to the advisory mission rather than the combat mission. An overly complex reporting system presented another challenge, generating far more reports than the MACV Chief could reasonably read and analyze probably contributed to MACV's ineffectiveness. Furthermore, the reporting system was subject to constant modifications, as American leadership both in Saigon and Washington strove to resolve inconsistencies in reports and simplify metrics of progress. In fact, in late 1967, President Johnson appointed an interagency working group to review the data's appropriateness for measuring progress in Vietnam. It concluded that the information being collected at the time was ill suited to measure progress and recommended the creation of another task force to develop "new ways of measuring progress." General Creighton Abrams and Admiral Sharp were on board with these suggestions, indicating that MACV was working on "develop[ing] management utility devices, concentrating on correlating program progress/effectiveness indicators against burden parameters to assist in program planning, control, and feedback for replanning."\textsuperscript{17} Despite MACV's constant tinkering with these reports, its leaders never allowed the content of these reports to direct their constant improvement plans in a different direction. MACV used the number of Viet Cong killed as its main indicator of the war's progress. The absence of high level discussion about what the reports were intended to shed light on - the progress of the advisory mission - in a many pages of archives provides yet another indicator that MACV made an extremely poor use of the reports collected for ascertaining advisory mission progress. Contemporary

\textsuperscript{16} ARPA Project AGILE, "MACV Information Handling," apps. A and B, lists and summarizes the major MACV reports; Mesgs, Westmoreland to Sharp 25 September 1965; Westmoreland MAC 1362 to Sharp 17 February 1966, Westmoreland Msg Files; Westmoreland History Briefings 8 March 1966, tab D, Westmoreland History File 4 (30 Jan=13 Mar 1966, CMH; Westmoreland History Notes, 1-20 May 67, tab A, Westmoreland Hist File 17 (1-31 May 67), CMH. MACV Command History 1967, p 19103, 622-5. Ltr, Col FF Parry, USMC to EO Parry 30 May 66, Parry Family Papers MHI.

\textsuperscript{17} first Quote is more Msg Wheeler JBS 9573-67 to Sharp and Westmoreland 8 Nov 67; second is from Msg Abrams MAC 11159 to Wheeler and Sharp 21 Nov 67. Both in Westmoreland Msg Files 1-30 Nov 67, CMH; Msgs Wheeler CJCS 0547-67 to Westmoreland and Sharp 20 Jan 67; Westmoreland MAC 0753 to Wheeler 23 Jan 67, Sharp to Wheeler 12 Feb 67; Sharp to Wheeler 29 Nov 67; All in Westmoreland Msg Files. Ltr Abrams Gen Johnson 23 Dec 67, Westmoreland Sig File Dec 67.
observers and Vietnam War scholars alike have taken note of the paucity of systemic analysis despite the overwhelming volume of reports and attention paid to metrics;

“the leaders in Vietnam were not studying “theoretical” questions of this kind.” They were extremely busy with the day-to-day operating problems imposed by the massive American build-up, the ubiquity and effectiveness of the VC/NVA attacks, and the condition of the South Vietnamese allies. In the beginning, staving off defeat was such a clear purpose that there seemed to be no need for a searching evaluation of long-range objectives. Unfortunately, this pattern was to persist.”

It is peculiar that the American leadership invested so much energy in evaluating the system for collecting reports, but rarely if ever the content of those reports. If they had, the advisory mission and the war by extension could have ended much differently.

MACV strongly disincentivized advisors from offering less than glowing reports on their units' performance. MACV expected advisors' reports to express optimism about the ARVN's prospects for improvement and winning the war. Reporting anything but good progress reflected on the advisor's performance rather than an appraisal of progress that should identify problems to be remedied. As a result, MACV considered advisors who reported more than minor problems underperforming soldiers and would give them poor efficiency reports. Failing to tell MACV leaders what they wanted to hear would jeopardize an advisor's career, which led many advisors to tell their superiors what they wanted to hear rather than offering a genuine assessment of ARVN progress.

In spite of the risk to their careers, many advisors did all they could to influence the Army's approach to the war; the fact that so many senior advisors, especially colonels who could have soon expected to become generals, jeopardized their career prospects to make their criticisms heard lends gravity to their claims. For example, advisor to III Corps Colonel Wilbur Wilson, advisor to III and IV Corps Colonel Daniel B Porter, adviser to the 7th Division Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, advisor to 21st Division Lieutenant Colonel Fred Ladd, and advisor to the 21st Division Lieutenant Colonel Rowland H Renwanz had submitted

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18 Pentagon Papers IV.B.3, p 73 quoted in Komer 73

strongly worded, negative reports concerning the conduct of the war. Lt Col John Paul Vann, advisor to the ARVN 7th Division, was among this effort's most outspoken advisors. He wrote in his reports that his unit rarely conducted operations or training exercises. For the most part, it did nothing. Vann reported that on the rare occasion when the 7th Division conducted operations, they were more like "walks in the sun" or "safari operations," since the ARVN knew that there were no enemy soldiers in their operational areas. In June 1963 when Vann returned to the United States, he found that his report had been shelved without much consideration. Not one to be easily discouraged, Vann sought other ways to make his case. Unlike most others, Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army General Barksdale Hamlett remained receptive to differing views on progress, going so far as to bring Vann in to brief the JCS. According to Hamlett, "Vann had a lot to say about what was going on inside Vietnam that was completely counter to the reports we were receiving through JCS channels [from MACV]; and they were so different that I wanted him to brief the Chiefs." General Taylor reluctantly agreed to the meeting and received an advance copy of the brief. Instead, Taylor cancelled the brief at the last minute, reportedly to meet with a General who concurred with the prevailing view. The provided briefing materials, however, offered a candid account of the ground truth that MACV and the US Military lacked.

Many other officers came forward with reports like Vann's. Colonel Daniel B. Porter wrote that "in many operations against areas of hamlets are considered to be hard-corps[sic] insurgents strongholds, all possibility of surprise is lost by prolonged air strikes and artillery bombardments prior to the landing or movement of troops in the area. The innocent women, children and old people bear the brunt of

20 The RVN was divided into four corps sectors. I Corps ran from the DMZ to just north of the Central Highlands; II corps consisted primarily of the Highlands region; III corps the area north and west of Saigon, and IV corps, the Mekong Delta, southwest of the capital. Krepinevich p 80

21 Vann, "Senior Advisor's Final Report," 4

22 Interview with Gen William C. Westmoreland by Maj Paul L. Miles, 6 March 1971, CMH 5.

23 Interview with Gen. Barksdale Hamlett, Officer Debrief, by Col Jack Ridgeway and Lt Col Paul Walter, 1 I March 1976

24 Interview with Gen. Barksdale Hamlett, Officer Debrief, by Col Jack Ridgeway and Lt Col Paul Walter, 1 I March 1976
bombardments." He added that the Porter also noticed that "commanders of regular ARVN units rarely if ever conduct night operations. In fact, only on rare occasions will commanders attempt to contain VC which may have been 'bottled up' after nightfall." Of course MACV leadership should not have assumed that these reports were correct, especially since they also received other reports from advisors who conformed to expectations and incentives to report only good things. MACV's deficiency lies in its complete disinterest in further investigating the situation to ascertain the ground truth and how to improve the ARVN's combat effectiveness. General Harkins grew irate at these reports and ordered them collected, "sanitized" and discarded. MACV did not take advisors' reports seriously or use them to refine SOPs for advisors. Functionally the reports served no purpose other than occasionally affirming MACV's position. An advisory group's system for handling reports is important because it directs the advisory group in learning how to influence its Vietnamese counterparts.

Ignoring advisors and Vietnamese officers' feedback led to poor working relationships between the Americans and Vietnamese, fundamentally limiting the influence advisors could have on the Vietnamese troops. For example, Captain Donald S. Cunningham, who served as advisor to the 2nd battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment of the 5th ARVN Division in 1963 through 1964, complained on multiple occasions that his Vietnamese counterparts would not listen to his suggestions without a thoroughly detailed explanation for his position. His counterpart rarely acted upon his advice. Cunningham's interviews also reveal a degree of contempt and lack of respect for his Vietnamese counterparts that surely hindered his ability to gain their trust and work effectively as an advisor. He mentions that he never met a Vietnamese officer that he regarded as competent and appeared to resent the fact that the Vietnamese were more inclined to respect formal rank


28 Captain Donald S. Cunningham, interviewed by Dr. John G. Westover, Post-Combat Interview Project, May 5, 1964.
rather than perceived skill and tended to resist American guidance. His account reveals a high degree of American hubris, disinterest in learning about aspects of Vietnamese culture that would have helped him put his observations into context (such as the importance of elders, authority, and seniority) to forge a better working relationship. Instead, he "lost respect" for the Vietnamese and his counterparts specifically when he observed something out of step with the American way of doing things. Both regular communication with advisory group leadership about potential solutions to the problems that Cunningham encountered as well as leadership that promoted cultural awareness rather than American exceptionalism would have enabled many more advisors to avoid these traps that forestalled Cunningham's effectiveness as an advisor. Cunningham criticized the Vietnamese whenever they did something that he perceived as inferior to the American military and made little effort to understand the Vietnamese or help correct the behavior he criticized.

Major William H. Miller, adviser to the 32nd Regiment, also reveals an extremely poor relationship between the advisors and their Vietnamese counterparts. He complains about the language gap, stating that the Vietnamese were able to completely bypass the advisors with their war planning because they spoke in Vietnamese in order to exclude the advisors. The Vietnamese were even able to keep major plans, like the 1964 coup, under wraps. He attributes this problem to the fact that the advisors spoke very little, if any, Vietnamese. Two observations are worth noting. First, finding enough American advisors who speak the local language for any potential country that they could work in is nearly impossible. Second, the problem lies not in the fact that the Vietnamese had the ability to bypass their advisors, but rather in the fact that they wanted to do so. A system of reporting in which the advisory group's senior leadership read and compiled observations like Captain Cunningham's and wrote back to advisors suggesting modifications could have enabled all advisors to benefit from Cunningham's observation about the need to explain suggestions in great detail to the Vietnamese counterparts. Instead, most advisors never learned on their own how to build better relationships with their counterparts and struggled through issues like those Major Miller describes.

29 Captain Donald S. Cunningham, interviewed by Dr. John G. Westover, Post-Combat Interview Project, May 5, 1964.
30 Captain Donald S. Cunningham, interviewed by Dr. John G. Westover, Post-Combat Interview Project, May 5, 1964.
31 Major William H. Miller, interviewed by Dr. John G. Westover, Post-Combat Interview Project, April 23, 1964.
A number of Vietnamese civilian and military leaders criticized the advisors and their system. In particular, that Americans should have meaningfully engaged with Vietnamese input if they insisted on having American advisors at every level. One Vietnamese officer commented about a senior US advisor, "He was overbearing. He did not understand the situation very well...He did not go to the root of the problem. And he thought he understood everything." Advisors need to get to know their counterparts so that they can learn more about the country, the ARVN, and how and what to advise the Vietnamese. Some Vietnamese officers indicated that the advisors with whom they worked were too quick to judge and generally disinterested in getting to know the Vietnamese soldiers they worked with. Advisors judged the Vietnamese based on whether he spoke decent English and drank and cavorted with them. The advisors valued these men highly and others less. Behaviors like these make impossible building the rapport and mutual respect necessary for the Vietnamese officers to trust the advisor's judgment, follow his suggestions, and work together on other tasks like differentiating the competent from inadequate officers. Whereas General Roberts emphasized for KMAG the need to get to know one's counterpart and win his respect in addition to providing direction on how to accomplish this, MACV leadership virtually ignored the quality of relationships between advisor and counterpart and the need to improve them.

Phase III Vietnamization prompted reevaluation of the advisory effort and slight improvements to the reports and feedback cycle. Nixon’s Defense Secretary Melvin Laird ordered the service secretaries to scrutinize the advisory program and find ways to improve the advisory effort. He wanted to reduce the number of advisors in country and assign only the most qualified advisors. The Army’s review found many deficiencies and opportunities for reform. As in 1965, advisor selectees received little preparation for advisory duty. Outgoing advisors attended six weeks of training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which advisors almost universally


agreed as worthless and “didn’t teach you to be an advisor in any capacity.” MACV experienced many impediments to the sweeping reforms necessary to create meaningful change in advisory success, but the advisory program did improve on a number of counts after 1969. MACV leadership began consulting advisors to better understand the problems they encountered.

In response to a White House request for more detailed information, MACV sent a survey to its advisors seeking details about their observations of Vietnamese combat effectiveness overall, how frequently the Vietnamese engaged in genuine small unit and night operations, quality of leadership, desertion rates, and the officer selection and promotion systems. These surveys also asked for specific recommendations on the ARVN’s military leadership, organization, and training, and explicitly requested dissenting opinions where they existed. In stark contrast to the advisors’ organized effort in 1963, these surveys resulted in one of the first realistic assessments of the war’s progress and the ARVN’s development. The final report that General Abrams submitted to Nixon discussed significant South Vietnamese military limitations, including that the presence of American combat troops stifled Vietnamese initiative, and that without US troops present the ARVN was unlikely to hold its territory. Even so, the report emphasized progress and did not offer a full or entirely candid discussion of the ARVN’s limitations. For example, General Walter Kerwin, Senior Advisor to III corps responded that III Corps probably would not be able to contain the communist threat in its AOR and that it would require continued US air and artillery support, and that these units would continue to struggle because its soldiers did not know the terrain and were alienated from the population. His assessment was replaced by a more optimistic one in a final version of the report. More importantly, MACV did not reevaluate the metrics it used to gauge success, even though the advisors’ feedback raised many additional factors to consider. While MACV’s receptiveness to feedback improved, it still tended toward omitting and ignoring critical viewpoints.

35 HQ, CONARC, “Study of the USA Institute of Military Assistance, Ft Bragg, NC,” circa 1970, Newton Papers, Military History Institute; Interview with Major Lawrence D. Sylvan, CO, 45th Military History Detachment, with Capt Gil Trevino, Senior Advisor 32d Ranger Bn (44th Special Tactical Zone) 26 September, 1969, VNIT 494, HRB, Center for Military History.

36 Advice and Support p 345

37 Msg, Kerwin (III CTZ) HOA 252 to Corcoran, Chief of Staff, MACV, 251545 Jan 69, MICRO 1/379; Spector Advice and Support p 342-3
Advisors’ reports did convince MACV leadership to some extent that the Vietnamese were not ready to assume combat responsibilities, and their new awareness of this problem informed changes in the training programs that the next section discusses in more detail. During this phase MACV leadership actively solicited input from advisors and then read and codified the advisors’ reports, which it had not previously done. MACV even appeared slightly more open to alternative perspectives during this phase. These all constitute positive steps, however small. A review of archival sources did not reveal significant specific changes to the advisory program as a result of consultation with advisors, as the report described above was primarily used to inform potential plans for withdrawal. MACV’s use of the reports for planning purposes constitutes an improvement over previous years, but the top-down part of the cycle remained absent.

Training and Military School System

The MAAG started the advisory mission out on the right foot with the establishment of a military school system to teach and institutionalize the advisors’ lessons within the ARVN. The MAAG saw many similarities between Vietnam and the recent and successful advisory mission in South Korea and aimed to repeat key elements of its success, including the establishment of a military school system. The MAAG oversaw a conscription program beginning on 1 August 1957 which called up males aged 18 to 45 for eighteen months. The trainees went to a 32 week training program which culminated in advanced unit training and field maneuvers at the regimental level followed by 52 weeks of training within each Corps area, which advisors developed by adjusting US Army training to suit Vietnamese needs. As part of these training programs, the US translated field manuals, thus far following the path that KMAG took in Korea. Also like KMAG, the MAAG launched a school system to teach all major military functions and established six training centers including a replacement camp for training conscripts with an annual capacity of 24,000 or 8,000 at any given time. The MAAG was initially on the right track as it sought to establish a

38 Spector, Advice and Support p 341-4; Msg Abrams to Johnson, sub: Situation in Vietnam, MICRO 1/0104, RG 334, WNRC


40 Collins, Training and Development p 14
comprehensive school system for Vietnamese officers and troops. By 1959, eighteen schools and training centers were operational, training about 20,000 Vietnamese soldiers a year. The MAAG also established an English language school and training courses in more advanced subjects like leadership and communications. The MAAG also sent select Vietnamese officers to the United States for training.\footnote{Collins, \textit{Training and Development} p 15}

The ARVN’s growing ranks in the late 1950s through 1960 necessitated the establishment of many new units and training for those units. As the above military school system indicates, the MAAG aided the ARVN by proposing and establishing training programs, specific courses of instruction, offering ad hoc advice at training centers, and deploying mobile training teams that provided assistance on a number of support functions. Contrary to the Vietnam War’s popular narrative, by June 1960 the MAAG had implemented a full-scale counterinsurgency training program in the ARVN, and by the end of the year 1200 ARVN leaders had received training in counterinsurgency tactics and operations.\footnote{Collins p 35} Despite the beginnings of a robust training system, the advisory mission faced significant training challenges. As insurgent activity rose in the late 1950s, combat needs straining the training programs, and a program that actually trained 24,000 Vietnamese every year became an aspirational plan. Inadequate training continued to stifle the development of all South Vietnamese units, as newly drafted men were haphazardly thrown together in units and expected to learn on the job. High desertion rates resulted in a constant churn of personnel requiring training that stressed the advisory group’s program.\footnote{Collins p 35} Balancing combat and training needs poses a constant challenge for advisory groups, and the MAAG had positioned itself relatively well on the training dimension. Its ultimate failure lies in its inability to continue on the path on which it started in the 1950s.

\textit{Phase II} 1964 saw a large shift in new recruit training; the South Vietnamese government decided to increase the Army's authorized strength, requiring the recruitment and training of an additional 40,000 men. The additional capacity necessitated that the training program be cut from 12 to 9 weeks, already down from 32 weeks a few years earlier. Unfortunately, the downward trend in training time continued and was not isolated
to the new recruits. By May of that year, only four battalions—down from eight a few months earlier—were in the midst of a month-long cycle of unit training. By September battalion training had all but ceased.\textsuperscript{44} Operational demands contributed to the drop in training; this is a common problem that virtually all advisory missions face, including KMAG. Unlike the mission in Korea, however, a number of other challenges, both self-inflicted and circumstantial, compounded the problem. These challenges include the shifting emphasis away from advising and toward the combat mission, the need to build up the force, and poor institutional practices that impeded learning. Unlike in Korea, MACV never made any critical decisions aimed at getting the school and training system back on track. In fact, field reports pointed to inadequate training and insufficient numbers of junior officers as a main cause of ARVN combat ineffectiveness at the time, but MACV largely ignored them.\textsuperscript{45}

In 1966 MACV proposed a refresher training course lasting six weeks for all infantry battalions, but only a few battalions received the training because in most cases the South Vietnamese province chiefs refused to give up forces under their jurisdiction for training. South Vietnamese commanders were also disinterested in training and did their best to avoid it.\textsuperscript{46} This demonstrates that MACV did attempt to put together a locally oriented training program, but part of their difficulty in doing so lie in its inability to win the confidence of the South Vietnamese officers and getting them to follow suggestions.

\textit{Phase III} Pressure to divest from Vietnam drove the United States to shift its attention back to the advisory mission and training program. Although a military school system existed, the large-scale arrival of American combat troops in the 1960s relegated schooling to an afterthought. As previously demonstrated, little actual training or productive activity occurred at the schools. In 1970, American advisors expressed frustration that the ARVN gave "lip service to practical training," which had a ripple effect down the chain and produced apathy among the troops.\textsuperscript{47} Several generals commented that the training centers were "a sort of elegant exile

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{44}] Collins, \textit{Training and Development} p 35
\item[\textsuperscript{45}] Collins, \textit{Training and Development} p 45
\item[\textsuperscript{46}] Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support} p 161
\item[\textsuperscript{47}] Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support}, p 378
\end{footnotes}
for unwanted commanders, often of limited competence,"\textsuperscript{48} and Westmoreland himself echoed this sentiment, observing that the academy was a dumping ground for inept officers."\textsuperscript{49} Despite the advisors’ best efforts, only 4\% of “maneuver” battalions trained for over a month, 15\% trained for ten days or fewer, and 66\% had not trained at all. Even those that attended training did not take it seriously, as South Vietnamese officers consider training more a respite from their typical duties than an opportunity to develop combat skills.\textsuperscript{50} Vietnamization prompted MACV to institute significant changes.

In Phase III, MACV initiated an effort to train new units to compensate for the heavy losses sustained in the preceding years. While the absolute number of advisors was declining per the withdrawal plan, MACV focused on providing better quality advising by selecting officers with previous direct combat experience in Vietnam. Unfortunately, however, advisory tour lengths grew shorter, and these advisors were even less keen to push their suggestions on their counterparts than the advisors who came before them.\textsuperscript{51} By 1970, the US had established 33 training centers, up from just one training center in 1956. The establishment of training centers reflected the American advisors' emphasis on training the Vietnamese from the junior enlisted through general officers. In addition to the training centers in Vietnam, the advisory mission sent Vietnamese officers to the United States for training.\textsuperscript{52} In 1970 the US 1st Cavalry Division completed 24 hours of weapons training for 281 South Vietnamese soldiers, amounting to 6,744 personnel-hours, and MACV trained 47,000 ARVN troops over the course of that year.\textsuperscript{53} Although MACV's reports almost certainly overstate the ARVN's capabilities, the ARVN reportedly demonstrated an improvement in basic tactics in the campaigns that followed.

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Hosmer et al., The Fall of South Vietnam, p 58
\textsuperscript{49} Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support} p 161
\textsuperscript{50} Collins, \textit{Training and Development}, ch5
\textsuperscript{51} Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support} p 450
\textsuperscript{52} Collins, \textit{Training and Development}, ch 5.
\textsuperscript{53} USMACV, "Command History 1970," 2:VII-42; ORLL, 1st Cavalry Div, July 1970, tab G-2, in HRB at the Center for Military History; Clarke p444
One of MACV’s primary limitations was that it never pushed for a predominantly Vietnamese-led training program and military schools, and they never pushed the Vietnamese commanders at these schools to take their training mission seriously. Indigenously led military school systems are important because they enable the host military to develop teaching skills and enshrine the advisors’ lessons in the host military’s institutional memory. Without the Vietnamese continuing to teach those lessons to new recruits and other junior personnel, the lessons and skills the advisory group teaches are unlikely to live on after the advisor group leaves. The MACV’s increase in training also focused on integrating new equipment into the ARVN rather than trying to better impart a more comprehensive skill set. MACV’s renewed efforts to improve the ARVN’s training were a bit scattered and hasty, so even though the advisory group improved during these years, it still left a lot to be desired. The crux of its improvement lay in the fact that at least the US military expressed more than passing interest in training.

Field Visits In phase I few advisors, much less MAAG leadership, made field visits. In phase II, senior leaders rarely made field visits; for example, MACV commander General Harkins never visited the battlefield.54 As a result, senior advisors and MACV leadership had a poor grasp of the "ground truth" of South Vietnamese progress. Even when leaders did visit, the Army and the advisory group by extension was so resistant to new ideas or data that any information or insights gathered on these visits were rendered inconsequential. In January 1963, twelve army generals were stationed in Vietnam; of those, only one visited Ap Bac; those who had made field visits held markedly different views on the battle’s outcome and what it meant for the advisory effort. 55 For example, In April 1962, Generals Rosson and Yarborogh visited Vietnam, and their field visits offered a very different perspective than the one espoused by the Pentagon. While the Pentagon spoke of North Vietnam's impending demise, Rosson's field visit uncovered an "almost universal skepticism on the part of both US and South Vietnamese Personnel that the VC could be defeated

54 Vien The US Advisor p 75

expeditiously." When Rosson returned to the Pentagon, he wrote a report detailing major differences of opinion between advisors in the field and MACV staff, but Army staff ignored the report. Field advisors had painted a very bleak picture for Rosson, and their discontent with the direction MACV and Army staff continued to pursue despite advisors' reports would continue to grow. While Generals Rosson and Yarborough spoke with advisors, their visit was aimed at evaluating the US Special Forces operations rather than the ARVN's development. MACV leadership did not visit units in the field to evaluate the advisory program specifically. Phase III saw a decline in field visits as the US prepared for withdrawal. Overall, field visits rarely occurred, but when they did, the US military and the advisory group's unwillingness to entertain the idea that the advisory mission was not working rendered any reports of field visits useless.

**Advising vs. Commanding** At first, the advisors’ relatively sparse presence in Vietnam virtually ensured that they remained in an advisory role, which General Vien observed it enabled the Vietnamese officers to learn their various tasks through performing them. Most advisors stayed in Saigon performing administrative duties, but advisors in the field were collocated with the ARVN units they advised, and for an intents and purposes functioned as part of that unit. An understrength advisory group is a common problem in a mission’s early stages, but advisory groups have addressed this problem in different ways. The MAAG prioritized administrative functions and placed most advisors in the Capital where they were ill-positioned to influence the ARVN’s development. When faced with the same problem, KMAG dispersed advisors to units across the country and ordered an individual advisor to travel long distances to reach the different units he oversaw. The MAAG’s focus on advising would later deteriorate with the deployment of additional advisors and combat troops, and its disinterest in field visits made ascertaining the “ground truth” more challenging.

58 Vien *The US Advisor* p 75  
59 Vien *The US Advisor* p 20
Phase II Even before the arrival of large numbers of American combat troops in 1965, advisors had taken on a wider range of responsibilities than just training and advising. Three years earlier they began assuming control of coordinating combat air support. Doing so lent the Americans more direct control of Vietnamese planning and operations, but also offered the Vietnamese fewer opportunities to learn and develop their own skills. Taking on increasing command responsibility rather than guiding the Vietnamese officers in doing so posed a major difficulty for the advisory mission's success.

In early 1965, Westmoreland observed that the advisory mission had morphed from training the Vietnamese, to offering tactical advice, and then to simply providing combat support. The advisors' duties now included coordinating artillery and air support and handling other supporting functions like logistics and intelligence. He even directed his staff to research more effective ways for the advisors to carry out their support role. Westmoreland's response to this observation was to redesignate advisory detachments at the battalion and regimental level as combat support teams and reassigned the remaining field advisors to staff positions alongside the Vietnamese. Even though Westmoreland at various points said all the right things about the importance of eschewing command in favor of solely providing advisory support, his actions suggested otherwise. While he did not formally direct advisors to command their Vietnamese counterparts, his combat support teams were designated to perform duties that the Vietnamese really needed to be learning to do on their own. Since American "advisors" retained responsibility for coordinating with other services and calling in air and artillery strikes, it's no wonder that the Vietnamese struggled with these tasks later in the war when the Americans were no longer around to do it for them.

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60 Clarke, *Advise and Support* 59

61 Vien, *The US Advisor* p 46-76; Memo, MACV meeting 100830 March 1965: Advisors in the Support Role, History file 14-28, Westmoreland Papers, HRB, Center for Military History; Clarke p 60
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Figure 4.1: Total Field Advisory Strength in 1965

Phase III Dwindling numbers of US combat troops and advisors during this phase forced the Vietnamese to take on more planning and operational responsibility. As RVNAF improvement and modernization progressed, MACV redefined the functions of its advisers with the South Vietnamese forces and gradually reduced their numbers. In 1969, the command converted its tactical advisory teams with South Vietnamese divisions, regiments, and battalions to combat assistance teams. Reflecting an established fact of life, the name change denoted that the teams' mission was no longer offering advice - which South Vietnamese commanders did not need - but instead providing "combat support coordination" and liaison with US forces. During 1971, General Abrams, believing that "we Americans can take a Vietnamese unit only so far," began withdrawing the combat assistance teams first from battalions and then from regiments. MACV in the same period reduced its advisory contingent at RVNAF schools and training centers by not replacing men as they ended their tours.

The advisors and American combat troops inadvertently encouraged in the Vietnamese an apathetic and passive disposition; although Vietnamese institutional structures and processes are likely the root cause, advisors did not try to persuade their counterparts to change harmful institutional features or take more responsibility for operations. Advisors’ proclivity to complete tasks with which their counterparts struggled stunted the ARVN’s growth; the Vietnamese soldiers learned to wait until an advisor completed his task for him rather than learning to do it himself. The US combat mission compounded this problem. The South Vietnamese military and political leadership remained reluctant to take action, instead relying on American airstrikes and choosing to believe that the Americans would return long after they had withdrawn. Colonel

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62 USMACV, "Command History, 1965" p 74-90, 274-5, HRB, CHM (Quoted in Advice and Support the Final years p 56)

Do Ngoc Nhan, who served on the JGS in the last stretch of the war opined, "the US got involved in the war and assumed the leadership both politically and militarily," and another JGS colonel went so far as to say that the ARVN's problem was that it was not an independent entity and could therefore no longer function after the Americans left.64 This reveals a critical deficiency of the advisory mission: advisors often crossed the line from advising to commanding and doing tasks for their Vietnamese counterparts instead of offering them the opportunity to learn. Vietnamese officers were slow to take initiative because they (correctly) assumed that the Americans would take care of the problem, and US advisors grew frustrated with their counterparts' inaction and incompetence and felt pressure to act.

Interviews with South Vietnamese senior officers indicate that the Vietnamese continued to believe up until the fall of Saigon that the United States would intervene if the situation grew dire. The same sentiment that impeded ARVN soldiers from learning and practicing combat skills while advisors were still present likely contributed to their unwillingness to try very hard in the final battles; they assumed that the American troops would return to save them from defeat.65 MACV established this expectation over the course of many years, and the Vietnamese clung to it even after withdrawal. Several officers claimed that the US would not have expended so many of its own resources and lives for the Vietnam War if they were willing to ultimately abandon it.66 Accordingly, it appears that limiting the US' combat role would have pushed the Vietnamese to commit to learning the necessary combat skills to support themselves. Some Vietnamese general officers interviewed after the war confirmed that the Vietnamese officers simply took orders from their American counterparts. Nixon's private commitment to a strong response to a communist ceasefire violation and continued military and economic aid played a role in allowing Thieu to value political considerations more when making personnel decisions. Even in 1975, the year that the United States


65 Hosmer et al, The Fall of South Vietnam p13

66 Hosmer et al, The Fall of South Vietnam p 13
withdrew from Vietnam, Thieu believed that the US would guarantee South Vietnam's territorial integrity and therefore did not feel the need to aggressively promote high performers or relieve incompetent ones. 67

As part of the same survey, Vietnamese officers also opined that Vietnamization had come too abruptly and far too late; MACV superimposed it on an ARVN that was not prepared for the additional responsibility. These respondents believed that the transfer of responsibility should have occurred much earlier with a much more robust effort to develop the South Vietnamese military and civilian institutions so that they would eventually become able to operate on their own. They believed that the Americans exerted so much influence in Vietnam that this was impossible, and then "abandoned" Vietnam in a hurry. Virtually all respondents emphasized the importance of poor relationships between the Vietnamese and their advisors, citing misunderstandings, misperceptions, and the tendency to engage in counterproductive practices. 68 These surveys reveal the deep and lasting impact the Americans' proclivity to command rather than advise and teach had on the ARVN's development. The MACV left behind a Vietnamese military that learned little from its advisors as a result. Taking a more hands-off approach to the advisory mission would have enabled MACV to have begun 'Vietnamizing' combat operations years earlier, such that "Vietnamization" would not have been a policy change so much as the natural progression of an advisory program.

**Organizational Unity** The advisory group also suffered from a critical flaw in its institutional structure. After the arrival of American combat troops, both MACV and the services themselves split command and administrative responsibility for the advisors. The arrival of combat troops en masse had a profound impact on the advisory group and its ability to influence South Vietnamese training, and by extension, the course of the war. Westmoreland began to establish US corps level headquarters and put the local advisory teams under their command where they had previously been subordinate to MACV. Westmoreland effectively made the advisory teams part of the local US-tactical chain of command, cutting their direct link with MACV.

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68 Hosmer et al, *The Fall of South Vietnam* viii
headquarters. For example, the Navy and Air Force retained operational control over their advisors, but Army advisors were subordinate to the III MAF and I and II Field Force commanders, who were the senior advisers to the Vietnamese corps commanders. Those operating in IV Corps area of responsibility (AOR)-free from major US combat units-remained under MACV’s command. Without an institutional structure common to all advisors, the advisory group and other bodies overseeing its advisors would face an uphill battle in devising a system to solicit advisors’ experiences and suggestions, review them, and make changes to the advisors’ SOPs and disseminate the new SOPs without a central body to run the advisory mission. For this reason alone, the fact that MACV and other US forces in the country did not adapt well to the changing requirements of the conflict or relay the correct lessons to their Vietnamese counterparts is hardly surprising. Even if MACV had solicited, responded to, and acted based on advisors’ reports, the effective fracturing of the advisory group would have diminished the advisors’ ability to affect MACV’s directives on how to train and advise the Vietnamese. Moreover, advisors would not have been as beholden to MACV directives when most advisors reported directly to the US combat units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Group Indicators</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions, feedback, or reports sought from advisors in the field</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of advisors’ feedback to discern key lessons, modify SOPs, and disseminate those SOPs and new knowledge back to advisors in the field</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst/Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to and investigations of units in the field by senior advisory group leadership</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst/Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of a military school system staffed by at least some host military officers so that the new lessons become institutional knowledge</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors offered instruction and advice rather than assuming command responsibilities</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst/Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Unity</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time

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68 Advice and Support p 56-7

III. Vietnamese Institutional Processes and Structures

South Vietnam remained the archetypal politicized military throughout the war. The South Vietnamese military lacked institutional structures that would promote the development and retention of new skills, virtually ensuring that what the American advisors taught would not stick. Specifically, it centralized command arrangements, imposed training restrictions, promoted officers based on loyalty rather than merit, and thwarted a healthy exchange of information to a crippling degree. As a result, the ARVN failed to take advantage of the opportunity that US advising offered.

The South Vietnamese institutional processes that impeded the learning process did improve somewhat in the early 1970s when the North Vietnamese conventional threat became so grave that South Vietnamese leaders could no longer ignore it. Similarly, the South Vietnamese realized that the days of robust US assistance were probably limited. This temporarily and partially dissuaded Thieu from continuing his coup-proofing measures. During this period, Thieu shifted toward a more merit-based approach to promoting and relieving officers and relaxed his restrictions on extensive large-unit training.

**Command Arrangements** Since South Vietnam’s inception, Diem and presidents that followed centralized and fractured the command arrangements for giving and receiving orders. Diem first established a chain of command from his presidential palace to battlefield commanders, making command arrangements that served his personal interests at the expense of combat performance.\(^{71}\) He also often bypassed the field commands, General Staff, and the Department of National Defense and sent orders from a van in the garden of the presidential palace to combat regiments.\(^{72}\) This practice was designed to make sure that large units could not conspire against his regime and limit operations likely to cause high casualties, which Diem viewed as a motivating factor in the 1960 coup attempt against him.\(^{73}\) As a result, ARVN officers never learned to be proactive and take action without explicit detailed directions from above, a pattern which was evident from


\(^{72}\) Collins, *Training and Development*, 10-11, 90

the early days of the advisory mission. Unfortunately, the passive attitude that permeated the officer corps far outlasted Diem's rule; few Vietnamese officers were willing to act without receiving very detailed orders.\footnote{Allan E. Goodman, An Institutional Profile of the South Vietnamese Officer Corps (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1970), 14; Collins, Training and Development p 75}

\textit{Phase II} Diem and later Thieu established overlapping chains of command to limit senior officers’ ability to mount coups against them. Unfortunately, in so doing they also constrained the military’s ability to perform combat operations effectively. A US Army study indicated that with "conflicting, duplicating chains of command and communication and... various major agencies... installed in widely separate areas so as to hamper coordination, rapid staff action, and decision-making," the ARVN’s command structure appeared to be configured to maximize constraints on commanders' ability to lead their units well in combat.\footnote{United States Military Command and General Staff College, Staff Study on Army Aspects of Military Assistance, quoted in Spector, Advice and Support p 279.}

Vietnamese commanders sometimes also received orders from civilian authorities. Under Diem, a Can Lao party official put in place by Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Can, often sent orders to units in the field, even though these units were officially under the military's command.\footnote{Spector, Advice and Support, p 347, 279-280.} Even in the absence of the Can Lao's influence, a Vietnamese battalion commander could expect to receive orders from his regimental or division commander as well as the commander in charge of the larger region. Conflicting orders usually compelled Vietnamese commanders not to respond at all.\footnote{Spector, Advice and Support, p 347, 279-280.}

Such a high degree of political interference would curtail the ARVN’s combat effectiveness regardless of the organization’s combat skill, making Vietnam a poor candidate to substantially benefit from advising.

Throughout the war, Diem and Thieu made a habit of frequently rotating officers through a series of assignments, which prevented commanders from bonding with their soldiers and establishing trust and loyalty among them. This undercut South Vietnamese military effectiveness by making it virtually impossible for
even the best commander to gain the full trust and loyalty of his troops.\textsuperscript{78} Junior officers received new supervisors every month or two, which also undercut any attempts at longer term planning or development.\textsuperscript{79} Diem and Thieu also used a separate chain of command for South Vietnam’s elite forces including the Airborne, Marines, and Rangers. Diem also established a chain of command directly between himself and the Civil Guard through the Ministry of the Interior circumventing the Joint General staff through the Ministry of Defense. Fractured command arrangements such as these also made communication and coordination between units difficult in battle. Diem and Thieu’s frequent shuffling of officers to different assignments effectively forestalled any loyalty that may build over time between commander and subordinate. While this probably went a long way to insulate the Presidents from coup attempts, it also minimized combat effectiveness by ensuring that commanders never achieved the full support of their troops.\textsuperscript{80} Every month or two, a junior officer could expect to have a new supervisor; the trust necessary for combat never developed, and commanders could not realistically hold their subordinates accountable for long-term tasks.\textsuperscript{81}

\textit{Phase III} The Tet Offensive reportedly incited the South Vietnamese government to focus more on the military’s development, as officials realized that reaching their security goals would require a much greater effort. This prompted changes in institutional processes that led to the combat performance improvements described below, including an increased willingness among commanders to delegate responsibilities to their subordinates.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{Phase IV} In the final battles, the South Vietnamese centralized command to the extent that even Corps commanders did not have full decision making authority on the battlefield. Instead, Thieu told the corps

\textsuperscript{78} Collins, \textit{Training and Development} p 32

\textsuperscript{79} Cantwell, Thomas R. “The Army of South Vietnam: A Military and Political History” (PhD diss, Ohio State University, 2007),” p 102

\textsuperscript{80} Collins, \textit{Training and Development} p 32

\textsuperscript{81} Cantwell, "The Army of South Vietnam," p 102

commanders what he wanted them to do and exactly how they should do it, leaving them little if any room to leverage their own military expertise. Moreover, Thieu's orders were frequently confusing or infeasible. He rarely changed his mind at his generals' urging. His return to centralized command in Phase IV would have limited the ARVN's performance even if MACV managed to turn it into a highly effective fighting force, because Thieu's ill-advised orders exacerbated the ARVN's challenges and prompted a crisis of confidence at all ranks resulting in a breakdown in unit cohesion.

President Thieu issued conflicting, militarily unwise, and sometimes impossible to execute orders that even his most competent commanders could not make sense of. Thieu appeared to waffle back and forth on key decisions like whether to withdraw from the DMZ all the way to Da Nang between March 13 and 19. After giving General Truong the initial order, an alarmed Truong attempted to talk the President out of it because the ARVN had established good defensive positions around Hue and the heavy flow of refugees limited I Corps movements and precluded a withdrawal anyway. Truong reportedly felt that even at that point he could defend Hue for quite some time. After the meeting, Truong received word privately that Thieu did want a withdrawal.\textsuperscript{83} Even more confusing instructions followed. On 20 March 1975, the JGS gave Truong orders that he believed instructed him to withdraw from Hue, whereas the JGS members commented after the war that they intended the orders to give Truong permission to withdraw from the area when he felt it was appropriate since Saigon had limited ability to support I Corps at the northern end of the country.\textsuperscript{84} This was not an isolated incident, as the II Corps Commander General Phu experienced something similar. Again, even the best trained Vietnamese military could fail spectacularly under these circumstances. In situations like these, even though these commanders had absorbed the knowledge of how to fight a conventional war, they were unable to use it because of political intervention.

\textbf{Training Restrictions} Since its inception in 1954, the ARVN's training patterns remained relatively limited and it resisted the MAAG’s pushes toward realistic and rigorous training, rendering the advisory group’s

\textsuperscript{83} Hosmer et al, \textit{The Fall of South Vietnam} p 107

\textsuperscript{84} Lam Quang Thi, The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001) Ch 14; Hosmer et al, \textit{The Fall of South Vietnam} p 108
efforts moot. The magnitude of the problems would become more evident in phase 2 with the expansion of the advisory and combat missions.

**Phase II** South Vietnamese political resistance to rigorous and realistic training virtually ensured that the Advisors' training would not have a significant impact on combat effectiveness even if advisors imparted the correct lesson and got counterparts to heed advice. The ARVN never had the opportunity to practice those skills on a large enough scale or in realistic enough circumstances to improve its combat capability. While MACV prescribed a six week refresher training program for all infantry battalions, "Only a few battalions actually received the training and the instruction for those that did was marginal. Unit commanders at all levels showed little interest in the program... Commanders simply were not interested in training and found excuses to avoid it." More than a decade into the war, "no 'proficiency in training' evaluations had been enforced, which meant that in most cases a new recruit 'graduated' from basic combat training based solely on the fact that he had been 'present for duty' during this five week period." ARVN soldiers rarely received practical instruction on most topics and almost never had the opportunity to engage in realistic simulations of combined arms operations. A senior US officer later reflected, "Headway in this area was generally extremely slow."

ARVN officers used the forces under their command to perform security or administrative functions in their provinces instead of allowing them to train for combat, which underpinned the South Vietnamese training problems. Diem's chief of staff, General Cao Van Vien, commented that "a province chief had to be an able administrator also. He had to supervise a large bureaucracy, prepare and execute a provincial budget, regulate trade and commerce, and protect national reset forth for security and development, and this required his involvement in countless programs and projects whose implementation needed his constant

85 Clarke, *Advice and Support* p 161
86 Cantwell, "The Army of South Vietnam," 177-178
87 Quoted in Hosmer et al., *The Fall of South Vietnam* p 58
88 Collins, *Training and Development*, p 123
89 Collins, *Training and Development* p 126
supervision and guidance. No matter how devoted he was, he simply could not perform all his duties effectively. The South Vietnamese also resisted MAAG and later MACV’s efforts to develop elite airborne, armor, and marine units that would receive more thorough training in order to serve as a more mobile strike corps to complement the corps formations at fixed locations across the country. The South Vietnamese political leadership limited the ARVN’s potential by using its units for non-military purposes instead of sending them to MACV-run training.

Political interference also negated MACV’s training efforts as Diem and later Thieu repurposed the elite units as a means to protect themselves from a potential army-led coup. Following the failed 1962 coup, Diem put a newly formed unit just outside Saigon with the 7th and 21st Divisions. As a Saigon-based unit, it participated in parades and other ceremonial activities but performed little training; the US supplied this unit with the best equipment, including armored personnel carriers (APCs), but the Vietnamese trained with the APCs sparingly. The advisory mission suffered from another common problem: the host military refusing to act on advisors' advice. Despite advisors' recommendations to the contrary, Diem reallocated a company from each infantry division and redesignated it a Ranger battalion without ordering any specialized training until 1961, and Diem handled the airborne battalion similarly. Thus despite the advisors' efforts to build elite units, Diem and later Thieu's manipulation of the armed forces for their own personal ends negated the little positive impact that the ill-advised advisory mission could have had.

*Phase III* The ARVN revamped and placed fewer restrictions on its training regimen in phase III. General Truong, now the I Corps Commander, devised a plan to retake Quang Tri City, beginning with an ambitious refitting and retraining program. I Corps had suffered a tremendous loss of materiel and life such that some units had to be rebuild from scratch, while many more had lost half their men. Each unit conducted a 2-week

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90 Vien, *Leadership* p157


92 Cantwell, "The Army of South Vietnam," p 41 and 125

93 Collins, *Training and Development*, p 10-11, 90

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training program, usually at the battalion level, for which all officers and NCOs were present. The training covered marksmanship, the handling of individual and crew-served weapons, reconnaissance, the use of anti-tank weapons, and other tactical lessons. Initial training, especially for certain weapons, was conducted by American advisors, but training continued under the auspices of ARVN instructors at the Hoa Cam training center in Da Nang. General Truong believed that “the refitting and retraining process produced excellent results,” and the 3rd Division’s rapid return to the combat scene was regarded as phenomenal by both Vietnamese and US military authorities. The Division also received a new commander, Brigadier General Nguyen Duy Hihn, an able commander who was the only brigadier to earn promotion to Major General that year. By 1973, the Joint General Staff rated the 3rd Infantry Division as one of the top ARVN divisions, and competent commanders buoyed morale.  

The 3rd Division’s experience in 1972 illustrates that host military units with certain institutional structures and processes can best benefit from advising.

Phase IV: Training mostly ground to a halt due to mounting combat demands, but Vietnamese combat performance in the war's final days reveal how the ARVN limited its own progress by restricting training throughout the advisory mission. The ARVN's resistance to extensive and realistic training despite MACV’s efforts, meant that the ARVN did not learn successfully. Still, even if MACV and the ARVN had done everything else right but put personal political needs over the dictates of the security situation, the outcome would have likely been the same. This underscores the importance of US military and political leaders choosing wisely which countries’ militaries to train. While one would expect many other diplomatic and geopolitical concerns to dwarf the administrative concerns of a potential advisory group in the decision to provide military training, the point remains that the blood and money the US devotes to another military like the ARVN is likely an investment with negative returns.

Promotions from the beginning the ARVN selected officers based on political utility rather than on merit alone. Most promotions for field grade officers were either based on time in grade or factors other than rank,

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experience, or tenure of service. Promotions falling into the latter category, the "special" promotions, most likely occurred based on political favor. Firing incompetent officers is equally important as hiring good ones, but neither Diem nor Thieu relieved incompetent commanders.

According to an internal Pentagon report in October 1969, "the RVNAF commanders in the field appear to be least favored in terms of promotion." Merit mattered little in the RVNAF's idiosyncratic promotion patterns, a deficiency which MACV had been pressuring the South Vietnamese to remedy. Even after the establishment of a formal promotion process, fewer than 2% of officers promoted in 1968 were promoted because of competent battlefield performance. Another Pentagon report stated that the "Vietnamese simply will not promote on the basis of battlefield performance." A report from January 1969 expressed a similar sentiment; "service in battle is clearly not the path to success in the ARVN. The fact that US advisors were highly incentivized to rate their units as more effective than they actually were made promoting competent officers even more difficult because it obscured distinctions between over and underperforming commanders. Even so, the problem posed by a minimally functioning personnel evaluation system remained a largely Vietnamese one. Even when a consensus formed around a commander's ineptitude, he often would not be relieved. For example, although the Directory general agreed with American advisors evaluations of the 5th, 18th, and 25th division commanders as "flatly incompetent," these men retained their positions because they provided key political support to Thieu and his government.

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95 Clarke, Advice and Support, 219-220


98 RVNAF Leadership, June 1968, 151

99 Clarke, Advice and Support, 219-220

Two years later these commanders were finally relieved and replaced by only marginally more competent officers, which was a common occurrence.\textsuperscript{101}

**Phase III** The ARVN shifted toward promoting more officers based on merit. As a result, the 3rd Division and others improved tremendously and were able to hold the line and recapture Quang Tri. Thieu also deviated from his typical behavior in the 1972 Easter Offensive when he removed two of the most lacking corps commanders in the thick of battle. In 1973 he "[swept] out many incompetent commanders, replacing them with combat-hardened, US-trained leaders."\textsuperscript{102} Despite the improvements, politically motivated decision-making continued to hamper combat effectiveness, albeit to a lesser degree than before. A Pentagon report from 1970 commented that "while the Vietnamese have a better promotion system [than prior years] on paper, it has changed little in the way it operates."\textsuperscript{103} Lt Gen Arthur S. Collins Jr commented that "the basic problem is their officer personnel system….we can’t expect to do anything substantive [unless that changes.]"\textsuperscript{104} Notably, both the US Department of Defense and the CIA assessed that phase III improvements in equipment and combat effectiveness would not offset persistent problems with poor leadership and unmotivated troops. They argued that the officer corps required a complete overhaul that would remove favoritism and political considerations as a criterion for officer selection and promotions, end corruption, and remove the Army from the political process. Both agencies believed that these critical

\textsuperscript{101} Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support}, 245. In 1969, the commanders of the 5th and 18th divisions were removed, although their replacements were of questionable ability. Also unfortunate: the original commanders of these divisions were reassigned to training commands. "RVNAF Leadership," February 1970, section from Systems Analysis Vol 6, 7.; Clarke, \textit{Advice and Support}, 514. Also see chaps 14 and 20.

\textsuperscript{102} George J. Veith, \textit{Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75}, (Encounter Books: New York) p 5, 52

\textsuperscript{103} Clarke \textit{Advice and Support}, 245. In 1969, the commanders of the 5th and 18th divisions were removed, although their replacements were of questionable ability. Also unfortunate: the original commanders of these divisions were reassigned to training commands. "RVNAF Leadership," February 1970, section from Systems Analysis View, vol 6, 7.

\textsuperscript{104} Memo, Duquemin to Collins, 25 June 1970, sub: Conference on Vietnamization and Pacification. SEAB, Center for Military History.
limitations in the South Vietnamese military would forestall mission success no matter what the advisory group did. They were right.

Phase IV Thieu also reverted to his earlier practice of making command assignments based on political loyalty. Motivated by his personal political interests, Thieu's failure to consider a top commander's input on orders that he considered infeasible had two major detrimental effects on the ARVN's combat capability. First, the military may pursue tactically and strategically unsound courses of action, in which case even well trained, capable militaries may falter. Second, officers and their men are likely to have morale problems if they doubt their superiors' abilities or that their commanders have their and the mission's interests at heart. Low morale and a lack of commitment can plague units equally regardless of fighting skill. A hallmark of poor institutional practices with regard to command arrangements is frequently rotating officers and installing commanders with a pattern of poor combat performance. In 1974 and 1975, the South Vietnamese and ARVN did both. General Nguyen Van Toan, who "had turned the command {II Corps} into a petty fiefdom, parceling out provincial posts and other assignments on the basis of various personal gratuities…Toan’s style of command {left behind} an inept staff with almost no feeling for the troops took command of III Corps in December 1974 despite his earlier poor performance. In fact, he was relieved due to corruption, but was simply assigned another command post at the same level. While Toan himself earned a reputation as a brilliant commander in the 1972 offensive, his corrupt behavior degraded the combat abilities of his unit by doling out assignments and perks in exchange for loyalty. Since Toan remained staunchly loyal to President Thieu, he retained a prominent position in the ARVN. Unfortunately, the ARVN was not otherwise a capable fighting force, so promotion and command issues compounded existing problems.

105 Responses to NSSM 1; US Congress, House, Congressional Record, 92d Cong, 2nd sess. 10 May 1972 vol 118 pt 13 p16750-16836; Advice and Support p 345


**Information Management** South Vietnam’s political leaders operated a huge intelligence apparatus that surveilled its own officer corps and communications between officers rather than seeking to discover the North’s secrets and battle plans. Moreover, the South operated six primary intelligence collection services and a few other secondary ones.\textsuperscript{108} During Diem’s rule, the president installed his brother as the head a political party that bolstered Diem’s rule through secret networks who called themselves the Can Lao. The Can Lao exerted a huge influence on politics, installing party members within the Ministry of Defense so that they could provide another stream of information about officers and any potential nefarious plots. The party also played a critical role in selecting pro-Diem officers as division and corps commanders, and they would then serve as another stream of information back to Diem about what his senior officers were up to; “cells or committees of the Can Lao existed at all echelons of the army, frequently without the knowledge of the unit commanders.”\textsuperscript{109} Many senior commanders tried to avoid planning real operations with their staffs entirely due to the omnipresence of the Can Lao. Another problem with Diem’s information management system was that it incentivized people at all levels, both military and civilian, to tell the President what he wanted to hear, which was frequently at odds with the reality on the ground. This precluded Diem from being able to make sound decisions about the war effort. Diem continued to believe that the ARVN was succeeding in combat even as the communist insurgents grew between 1959-1960.\textsuperscript{110} It also precluded the ARVN from improving its combat effectiveness through advising since poor information management processes can cripple a military organization regardless of the skill of its soldiers.

South Vietnam’s information management processes focused on internal threats to the regime rather than true security threats posed by North Vietnam, both limiting the ARVN’s combat effectiveness and forestalling any attempts to improve it. The Can Lao was dissolved on 1 November 1963 after Diem’s assassination, but Thieu replicated many of Diem’s information management practices. Both the Central Intelligence Office and the Military Security Service supposedly collected intelligence on the North

\textsuperscript{108} Spector, *Advice and Support*, 316

\textsuperscript{109} Spector, *Advice and Support*, 279, 342-344

\textsuperscript{110} Spector, *Advice and Support*, 279, 342-344
Vietnamese, but in reality they reported directly to Premier Ky with information about South Vietnamese officers and political leaders. Thieu also took measures to impede communication between commanders and discouraged them from meeting. One general commented, “he was all the time afraid of a government by the generals…he had in mind that if all these people got together to talk about the military situation, they would also discuss the political situation and make a coup.” Unfortunately, commanders who cannot gather to discuss the military situation cannot coordinate operations to address the situation effectively, and as long as the South Vietnamese kept this up, American advisors could not overcome it. As a result of Theiu’s policies, commanders usually did not know what their compatriots were doing in adjacent or nearby areas, and they could not coordinate unit movements at all.

**Phase III** As the external, conventional threat grew more salient, the ARVN began to focus its intelligence assets on the North Vietnamese military and allowed commanders more latitude to do what was necessary to defend South Vietnam.113

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Military Indicators</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military develop competent leadership by promoting and firing officers based on merit and performance rather than political loyalty?</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military restrict training exercises?</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military centralize command arrangements, leaving junior officers little to no autonomy in the field?</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst/Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is critical information held hostage for power instead of being freely shared both horizontally and vertically?</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Worst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.3: Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time**

**IV. Military Effectiveness**

Although the early years saw little combat, the US Army’s official history of the conflict holds that the MAAG in its early years enjoyed relative success in developing the South Vietnamese Army's capabilities.

111 Clarke, Advice and Support, p 31

112 Hosmer et Al, The Fall of South Vietnam, p 23

By 1959, the MAAG had grown the ARVN from a "ragtag collection of disparate units" which it inherited from the French into seven infantry divisions including four separate armor battalions, an airborne brigade, a marine group, and a helicopter squadron. The ARVN's strength on paper continued to grow over this period.

The ARVN’s combat performance reveals deficiencies foreshadowed by institutional problems in both the advisory group and the Vietnamese military. ARVN soldiers’ challenges wielding their weapons suggested a lack of rudimentary training, and their passive nature reflects the advisors’ tendency to perform officers’ tasks for them rather than simply advising. The ARVN’s combat effectiveness marginally improved in phase III with similarly small changes in both sides’ institutional structures and processes, but those improvements gave way to complete collapse in phase IV.

**Phase II** During phase II, the ARVN demonstrated relatively minimal military effectiveness. They never successfully performed complex operations, struggled with basic tactics and operating weapons, and experienced problems with unit cohesion.

*The Battle of Ap Bac* The battle of Ap Bac allows a careful examination of South Vietnam's combat effectiveness before large scale US support or involvement in combat operations demonstrating major weaknesses in unit cohesion and tactical proficiency.

The ARVN experienced persistent problems with unit cohesion; units displayed "a complete lack of discipline in battle ... permit[ting] commanders at all levels, and even...soldiers, to refuse to obey any orders they personally [found] distasteful." South Vietnamese officers more senior than battalion commanders

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were not even present on the battlefield. In addition, Task Force B soldiers "were observed by US Advisory personnel to abandon many of their weapons while covering at the bottom of a ditch. The District Chief took no action even though he was present at the time." As the battle progressed, basic elements of unit cohesion fell apart as well. According to one advisor, a gunner nearby "ducked down and was blindly firing his machine gun, mostly in the air." Other drivers backed up, sometimes wounding their own soldiers or abandoning them.

Basic tactical proficiency was also conspicuously lacking, as was willingness to take advisors' suggestions to improve tactical performance. For example, one of the Task Force A advisors wrote that he "attempted to get the TF Commander to maneuver through the tree line to the right, using it for cover and concealment. He informed me that the Sector Chief had ordered him to occupy a blocking position at this location. If the TF had moved, it would have forced the VC into the same position that we were in earlier. The TF Commander either could not or would not get permission to make the move...some soldiers cowered behind the paddie [sic] dyke and would not return fire, others held weapons above the dyke and fired without aiming."

Both Task Force A and B struggled with complex operations, as coordination with artillery faltered. Task Force A's artillery support was inaccurate and insufficient, and Task Force B deemed a forward observer unnecessary, which meant that it had no one to pinpoint the enemy's location and tell it where to fire, rendering artillery support entirely useless. Similarly, an M113 company commanded by Captain Ba also demonstrated poor tactical and combined arms coordination typical of the South Vietnamese.

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122 Bloch "Field Advisor Narrative," p 2; Macslarrow, "Field Advisor Analysis" p2; Letter to Macslarrow to Tho p 1-2
While crossing a canal during its advance, the 4/2 failed to adequately mass its armored personnel carriers (APCs), so the PLAF easily picked them off individually. They also failed to coordinate with the dismounted infantry advance, leaving soldiers vulnerable to enemy fire without adequate suppressive fire provided by the APCs.

The divergent opinions of field advisors and MACV leadership about the ARVN’s performance highlights deficiencies in MACV’s reports cycle and field visits. Both the advisory group and the South Vietnamese military lacked institutional structures and processes that would have enabled them to correct the problem. In particular, they would have enabled the advisory group’s leadership to see the ARVN’s performance at Ap Bac for what it was, "a clear demonstration of the advisory system's limitations." Instead, MACV's leadership saw what it wanted to see: "a victory- we took the objective," according to MACV commander General Paul D. Harkins, without the benefit of field advisors reports, which would have led thoughtful leaders to consider it "a miserable damn performance" and a "failure," as advisor to the 7th Division John Paul Vann.124

**Hue, 1968** The Battle of Hue took place as part of the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive and offers the opportunity to examine the ARVN's battlefield performance after several years of intense US advising but with minimal US involvement in combat operations. The ARVN experienced limited improvement in its 1st Infantry Division, which became known as the highest performing unit in the South Vietnamese Army. At Hue, the 1st displayed good cohesion, tactical proficiency, and some skill in complex operations. Talmadge makes the case that the differing military organizational practices drives differences in military effectiveness: specifically, hiring and promoting the most competent officers, training rigorously, decentralizing command, and sharing information where necessary. These are also the institutional structures and processes that I point out as drivers of whether or not the South Vietnamese military can absorb and utilize the lessons from

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123 Toczek *The Battle of Ap Bac*, p 84

124 Toczek *The Battle of Ap Bac*, p 119
American advising, an entirely separate issue from whether the advisory group can teach the right lessons in a manner that the Vietnamese would receive well.

The ARVN 1st Infantry Division's performance at Hue demonstrates the importance of the host military's structure that support or inhibit organizational learning. The 1st Division was formed in 1955 and from its inception onward received American advising. At that point in the Division's history it was entirely new, lacking soldiering skill and leadership. By 1968, two factors enabled it to become the ARVN's best performing unit. The first of these factors is the fact that the organizational structure and processes within this division differed greatly from those elsewhere in the ARVN. Competent Vietnamese leaders controlled the unit's training, information management, command arrangements, and promotions rather than senior political leaders with little understanding of military matters. The absence of these barriers to organizational learning helped the Division benefit enormously from the advising it received. It was both better able to perform well on its own and better able to make use of the advisors' teachings. The second factor was the advisory program's training that enabled the Vietnamese, at least in this unit, learn new things. Talmadge points out that Truong began the battle with proportionally very few of his troops inside the citadel and drew them in from multiple other locations in a coordinated and organized fashion. This demonstrates the Division's competence in complex operations—something that no other South Vietnamese unit achieved at any point during the war.

Again at Hue, ARVN units (save for the 1st Division) struggled with basic tactics and unit cohesion. Despite the advisors' efforts, Vann wrote of the "almost complete lack of night patrolling and "night raids and ambushes by friendly forces." As a result of ARVN inaction, Vann contended that the Viet Cong effectively controlled the countryside. South Vietnamese reluctance to act on suggestions was driven at least in part by commanders' unwillingness to instruct troops to close with the enemy. They instead preferred to

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125 Talmadge p 94
126 Lt Col John Paul Vann, JCS Briefing, "Observation of the Senior Advisor to the South Vietnamese Seventh Infantry Division," 8 July 1963, 3-4.
rely on air strikes and artillery.\textsuperscript{127} Refusal to conduct operations also suggests that the ARVN also experienced problems with unit cohesion. Advisors also struggled to get their Vietnamese counterparts to follow suggestions. This suggests that a critical element in the relationship between advisor and counterpart was missing such that the advisor could not successfully persuade his counterpart to act on suggestions to improve performance.

**Phase III** This section looks that the 1972 battles of An Loc and Operation Lam Son 72 in greater detail because minimal US involvement in the ground campaign offers a good opportunity to measure the ARVN’s progress. These battles demonstrate an improvement in combat effectiveness from earlier years, consistent with incremental improvements in both sides’ institutional structures and processes.

*The Battle of An Loc (April 13-July 20 1972)* The NVA targeted the town of An Loc in order to afford it easy access to Saigon. Elements of the ARVN 5\textsuperscript{th} Division, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ranger Group and Task Force 52 numbered about 7500 men fought the battle augmented by US Air Power. Their task was to defend the city of An Loc in the southern part of the country in III Corps AOR.\textsuperscript{128} On April 13 the North Vietnamese Army initiated an artillery barrage and an infantry-armor advance. The South Vietnamese lacked experience against tanks, but they quickly adapted to the needs of the battle. The 5\textsuperscript{th} Division Commander, General Le Van Hung, ordered each battalion to cobble together an anti-tank team, and they quickly did so. This way, when the North Vietnamese tanks ran ahead of their infantry troops (which they unfailingly did because they too were inexperienced with tank operations) the anti-tank teams easily picked them off piecemeal, since without infantry to defend them, the North Vietnamese tanks offered easy targets.\textsuperscript{129} A couple of days later, the NVA attacked the city again in the same manner- an artillery barrage followed by an armor-infantry assault. The

\textsuperscript{127}Lt Col John Paul Vann, JCS Briefing, "Observation of the Senior Advisor to the South Vietnamese Seventh Infantry Division," 8 July 1963, 3-4.


ARVN repelled the attack in much the same way. Afterward, the NVA continued its artillery fire and used its anti-aircraft weapons to prevent aerial resupply to the city. The US Air Force then airlifted supplies to the forces under siege. The RVNAF attempted to do so but suffered so many losses that the mission was called off.130 The Senior Advisor to the 5th Division, Colonel Miller, "The Division [was] tired and worn out; supplies minimal, casualties continue to mount, medical supplies are low; wounded a major problem, mass burials for military and civilians, morale at a low ebb."131 Around 25% of the ARVN troops were wounded by the end of the second attack, but they continued to man their defenses.132 On May 9 the NVA launched a third assault, but by the end of the month relentless US air strikes broke the siege, and ARVN forces began to retake the surrounding territory.133

The battle ended in a decisive victory for South Vietnam and marked the height of the ARVN’s combat effectiveness. Without any ground support from US combat troops, the ARVN rebuffed repeated attacks under siege and sustained artillery fire, ultimately resulting in the incapacitation of the attacking high-performing North Vietnamese units and prevented the NVA from directly threatening Saigon.134 Moreover, in one of the tensest battles of the war, the ARVN demonstrated commendable cohesion and tactical ability, even when it had to adjust to changing circumstances. First, the ARVN demonstrated remarkable unit cohesion throughout the battle. The 5th Division faced continuous bombardment and siege, yet still mounted an effective defense. The ARVN did not even let high casualties and refugees that flooded the city’s major roads and obstructed operations comprise their unit cohesion.135 Both earlier in the war and in its final battles, ARVN soldiers and even commanders fled the battlefield and joined the throng of refugees fleeing the area


133 Willbanks "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" p 27

134 Willbanks "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" p 60

135 Willbanks, "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" 41-42
under less challenging circumstances. The situation while under siege became so desperate that ARVN soldiers even fought each other for provisions, advisors noted. While examples like these seem to indicate a lack of cohesion, the most notable development was the fact that in the face of such privation, the ARVN still manned its defenses and took advantage of US air support. Second, the 5th Division demonstrated proficiency with basic tactics. Despite the ARVN’s lack of familiarity with tank warfare and antitank weapons they learned quickly and stopped multiple advances in their tracks. This is a far cry from previous failed attempts to use these weapons. Finally, while the ARVN performed admirably on the previously enumerated metrics, it did not demonstrate competence in complex operations. ARVN commanders lacked experience drawing up battle plans, so advisors shouldered that burden. Advisors also coordinated the air strikes and did not offer Vietnamese commanders the opportunity to learn.

US Air power played a pivotal role in this battle, and the ARVN could not have won without it. In addition to the ARVN’s dependence on US air strikes, the battle illustrated its continuing challenges with support functions like logistics. Still, the ARVN demonstrates marked improvement in combat performance in the battle. The problems the ARVN previously experienced—notably a lack of discipline and refusing to follow orders, firing weapons without aiming, fleeing the battlefield, or the tendency toward inaction—were conspicuously absent.

Operation Lam Son 72 In June 1972, I Corps launched Operation Lam Son 72 to recapture Quang Tri. After I Corps’ comprehensive retraining and refitting program, these units returned to the battlefield with an aggressive spirit, buoyed by confidence in their leadership. While limitations remained, the ARVN’s performance had dramatically improved since the Phase II battles. For example, the NVA attempted again to take Hue in March, but the 1st Division launched a successful counterattack, even airlifting forces into place and coordinating infantry movements with US airstrikes and ARVN artillery bombardment to repel

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136 Willbanks, "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" 45
137 Willbanks, "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" 29
138 Willbanks "Thiet Giap! The Battle of An Loc, April 1972" 32-3
the NVA.\textsuperscript{139} Here the ARVN demonstrated a nascent capability to execute combined arms operations, while of course also demonstrating good unit cohesion and a moderate level of tactical proficiency. Coordination with air and artillery strikes also improved in I Corps when General Truong required a forward observer to call in strikes.\textsuperscript{140} Air and artillery alone are virtually blind, so without a forward observer who can see the enemy's position and communicate that information back to artillery and air units, strikes are unlikely to hit enemy forces and are therefore limited in their effectiveness. The use of a forward observer also enabled the ARVN to fully benefit from US air strikes and better positioned it to potentially do so itself one day. The ARVN also captured territory for a short time, fighting off a proportionally much larger enemy force; although they eventually ceded this swath of land back to the North Vietnamese, the ARVN demonstrated the ability to fight cohesively even when its units were far outnumbered and then execute an orderly retreat.\textsuperscript{141}

The 3\textsuperscript{rd} Division was most experienced in the area and was expected to perform best in combat, although it was just organized as a unit in October of the preceding year. On 30 March, the North Vietnamese invaded across the DMZ, which caught the forward elements of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Division by surprise; ARVN defenses in the area were geared toward countering infiltration and local attacks, and they lacked the prepared positions in depth necessary to repel an attack of that size. After the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Division had reorganized its defenses, General Truong considered them well-organized, and the Division inflicted heavy casualties, repelled numerous NVA attempts to cross the river, and used anti-tank weapons well against NVA tanks.\textsuperscript{142} As the battle wore on, ARVN units missed many opportunities to counterattack.

Again, the ARVN 1\textsuperscript{st} Division proved to be a bright spot both in the South Vietnamese military and for the advisory group. Its institutional structure and processes favored organizational learning, so the 1\textsuperscript{st} Division benefitted from the advisors’ training much more than the ARVN writ large. As with most units, it was formed at the outset of the US advisory mission in 1955 and enjoyed its most noteworthy successes from

\textsuperscript{139}Dale Andrade, \textit{America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 Easter Offensive} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 2001) p 151

\textsuperscript{140} General Quang Truong Ngo, \textit{The Easter Offensive of 1972, Indochina Monographs}, January 1979. P 70

\textsuperscript{141} Adrade, \textit{America's Last Vietnam Battle} p 152-3

\textsuperscript{142} General Quang Truong Ngo, \textit{The Easter Offensive of 1972, Indochina Monographs}, January 1979. P 26
1968 through 1973, when the war took on a conventional character. The 1st Division illustrates the relative importance of the host military’s institutions in advising effectiveness. MACV still had many of the same problems, (i.e. a poor working relationship with Vietnamese counterparts and regular reports that went largely ignored) yet the 1st Division’s sound institutional processes regarding leadership, command arrangements, training, and information handling enabled it to thrive.

It bears noting that the factors that enabled the 1st Division’s success were probably not repeatable across the entire army. Talmadge argues that the Division’s area of responsibility near the North Vietnamese border and distance from Saigon enabled good institutional processes because the Division was not a threat to Diem’s regime from so far away. Therefore it remains critical to advisory mission success that the US selects missions with minimal political meddling. By March 1972, most US forces previously stationed in MR-1 (Military Region 1, encompassing the northern part of the country), had been redeployed elsewhere, leaving the ground campaign entirely in ARVN hands with the exception of air support. The Easter Offensives are therefore a good reflection of the ARVN’s combat effectiveness, which had improved nominally since the battles in Phase II.143

**Conclusion** While the ARVN’s performance remained uneven, Phase III saw mild improvements in combat effectiveness. The policy prompted MACV to make changes that moderately improved the advisory program. The additional weight given to advisors’ reports, the refocusing on the training programs and military school system, and the withdrawal of combat troops pushed MACV toward greater advisory effectiveness. MACV’s changes in its institutional structures and processes coincided with institutional changes in the ARVN, including an uptick in promoting officers based on merit, realistic training exercises, and less centralization in command. The ARVN did fight marginally more effectively in this phase than it had previously. Unfortunately, the absolute magnitude of changes both within MACV and the ARVN remained small, and consequently the improvement in Vietnamese combat effectiveness did as well.

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US firepower continued to play a critical role in the ARVN's successes, to be sure. I do not intend to argue that that efforts to guide the ARVN toward becoming a formidable fighting force capable of independent operations was going well objectively. Instead, the developments on both the advisory group and ARVN sides produced a marked improvement in the latter's combat effectiveness. By this point, however, the advisory group and the Vietnam War effort was rapidly dwindling in popularity, and soon the United States would completely lose the will to press on in Vietnam. If both the ARVN and MACV had adopted the outlined institutional practices and processes early in the conflict, it is likely that the South Vietnamese would have grown and developed by 1972 to a point where it no longer depended so heavily on American firepower, logistics, and command support.

**Phase IV** After the United States withdrew from Vietnam, the ARVN failed on every level of combat effectiveness, disintegrating into chaos. Units failed to maintain basic cohesion as even commanders fled the battlefield without attempting to lead their troops in an organized manner, which even without the ARVN's other deficiencies would have precluded good tactical and operational performance. Notably, the ARVN did not merely "lose" these battles; for the most part, very little fighting occurred between the two armies. Instead, even minor challenges prompted soldiers to flee the battlefield and join the throngs of refugees around them. The fact that the ARVN self-destructed under relatively little North Vietnamese pressure is damning. As noted earlier chapters, unit cohesion is the most basic foundation for combat effectiveness. Very cohesive militaries can withstand extremely difficult circumstances before falling apart, for example, sustaining a very high casualty rate, being hugely outnumbered, or extreme privations. The ARVN in 1975 faced none of that. It simply fell apart, demonstrating no effectiveness at all.

**Fall of Hue and Danang (Late March 1975)** The I Corps battles began with inadequate preparation; ARVN units in all four corps arranged themselves in a single line of defense rather than defense in depth. All available troops were positioned at the front line, and the ARVN did not plan for a second defensive line, reserve force, or delay or withdrawal plans. This reveals that the South Vietnamese military planners did not realize
that without depth to absorb the shock of an initial assault or contingent evacuation plans, a single defensive line is unlikely to hold off a sustained attack. At least the planning if not the execution of a defense in depth is tactically straightforward, yet after nearly twenty years in American instruction in primarily conventional tactics, the Vietnamese military leadership arranged their units in a manner that virtually guaranteed the loss of territory. The Communist forces quickly and easily overran the town. The 1st Division initially performed marginally better than other units, as it successfully executed a defense in depth near Hue in March 1975 and imposed significant losses on the North Vietnamese 324th Division. At Hue, the ARVN began to crumble as the North Vietnamese forces pushed the ARVN units north of the city toward the city and threatened to envelop them. The I Corps Chief of Staff stated that "everything was out of control" and that commanders reported that they "could not control their troops, that the troops deserted, that they did not have enough supplies and that they could not control the situation. They reported that they had to abandon Hue." The 1st Division commander made only a cursory attempt at an organized retreat from Hue. Instead, he told his men, "It now is... every man for himself. Anyone may go down to the seashore, just walk along it to Danang and the VN Navy will pick up anyone who gets sick or tired of walking on the sand. The rally point: south of the Hai Van Pass. Good luck to you all and see you in Danang. Keep quiet while withdrawing, no radio will be turned on." Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Navy did not actually carry out its mission, and even if it had, the ARVN's command over the withdrawing troops was tenuous and admittedly by General Truong undisciplined. Perhaps even more concerning, some units subordinate to I Corps did not receive withdrawal orders at all. One Colonel grew concerned when he received no communication with his superiors one morning, and when he arrived at the Province Chief's headquarters, no one was there. A regimental commander for the 1st Division told him, "Oh, there are no more leaders now. You are the commander of

146 Hosmer et al, The Fall of South Vietnam p 109
147 Hosmer et al, The Fall of South Vietnam p 109
This was fairly characteristic of ARVN withdrawals in the final battles off the war, and in many cases, relatively few soldiers successfully evacuated the battlefield.

In some cases, the senior commander was the first to flee the battlefield. Many soldiers in the 1st Division drowned while waiting for the Navy to pick them up, representing a failure of combined arms coordination even at the most basic level. Less than half of the troops that fled Hue made it to Danang, and those that did "then dispersed in an effort to find their dependents and were no longer of any fighting value." Thus, even the previously high performing 1st Division disintegrated relatively easily.

Amid the ARVN’s disintegration in March 1975, Thieu ordered the esteemed General Truong and his Airborne Division return to Saigon because Truong’s popularity was rising and Thieu viewed him as a political threat. A few days later, Truong received orders to five up most of I Corps except Da Nang and the surrounding areas. In other words, the ARVN would give up much of I and II Corps, withdrawing to fight from the coasts and the areas around Saigon. This amounted to not even attempting to defend large swaths of the country from communist rule. Moving a division-sized force away from the front lines of a potential Communist conquest of the country made little strategic or tactical sense, but on top of this move’s negative consequences for the military situation, it sent a dangerous message to the population. This announcement instigated an enormous flight of refugees from the north to the southern part of the country, and this would not be the first time that refugee flows complicated the ARVN’s military operations and decisions. The general state of panic and chaos that it engendered among the civilian population also spread to the ARVN’s ranks and contributed to the poor morale compounded its poor performance in the last days of the war. The ARVN’s fortunes seemed to be fading fast even before this decision, and Thieu effectively piled on several more challenges. All of the factors mentioned above played a role in the ARVN and South Vietnam’s eventual collapse, and all are independent from the country’s combat capability. The fallout from

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148 Hosmer et al, *The Fall of South Vietnam* p 109


150 Hosmer et al, *The Fall of South Vietnam* p 87; Veith, *Black April* p 280

151 Hosmer et al, *The Fall of South Vietnam* p 89
Thieu’s decisions offers an extreme example of how the host military’s institutional deficiencies- in this case Thieu’s tampering and abuse of the command structure would have forestalled advisory success even if the ARVN had actually learned to fight well. The final battles leading up to the fall of Saigon followed this pattern as well- the ARVN exhibited minimal combat effectiveness and fled the battlefield.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Cohesion</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the rates of surrender and desertion?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do soldiers follow orders under fire?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the severity of enemy attacks or the privations of the battlefield environment affect the answers to the above?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but less</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4: ARVN Unit Cohesion Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactical Proficiency</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units demonstrate the ability to handle their weapons properly?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are units familiar with their equipment?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are soldiers able to use terrain for cover and concealment?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Growing ability</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit execute an ambush? A static defense? Orderly retreats? A pre-planned attritional offensive?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In COIN conflicts, does the military employ indiscriminate violence against civilians and rely heavily on overwhelming firepower?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In COIN conflicts, can the unit perform convoys, regular reconnaissance, raids, as well as cordon and search operations? Can it execute area defense operations to secure the population?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5: ARVN Basic Tactical Proficiency Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex Operations</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit conduct combined arms operations?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-services operations? Division-sized or larger operations?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among defensive operations, is the unit able to conduct defense in depth? Fighting withdrawals? Counterattacks?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among offensive operations, is it able to conduct maneuver operations? Small unit special forces operations?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the unit demonstrate a capacity for both low-level initiative and high-level coordination?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit conduct patrols, search and attack, counter-ambush and counter-sniper operations?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.6: ARVN Proficiency in Complex Operations Over Time
Conclusion

Without US combat support, the ARVN and South Vietnam crumbled after only two years, finally falling to Hanoi after a series of North Vietnamese offensives in 1975. The goal of the advisory missions explored in this dissertation is to prepare the host military to achieve its security objectives alone, since American combat support cannot last forever. The fact that the ARVN was hardly any better in 1973-1975 than it was in the 1950s suggests mission failure. By 1975, the ARVN had received 20 years of training, and the ARVN's performance in the final battles reveals poor institutional structures and processes on both sides that prevented both MACV from adapting to the Vietnamese culture and security needs and the ARVN from internalizing the lessons.

VII. Conclusion

For most of the war, both the advisory group and the ARVN exhibited worst practices regarding institutional structures and processes, so the latter’s abysmal performance is hardly surprising. A brief improvement in both host military and US advisory group institutional structures and processes produced an equally brief and incremental improvement in combat effectiveness, even in spite of the US’s dwindling funding and personnel.

Although many similarities exist between the advisory missions in Korea and Vietnam, the institutional structures and processes in the advisory groups and host militaries explain why KMAG succeeded and MACV failed. While we commonly think of Vietnam and Korea as entirely different wars, both were Cold War conflicts in divided countries and adversaries backed by Communist China, which supported insurgencies in both countries. Despite a disproportionate focus in the literature of the failure to adapt to counterinsurgency in Vietnam, both conflicts included counterinsurgency and conventional warfare, to include a Communist invasion. Both missions faced political pressure from a lack of public support.” The differences lie with the respective institutions.

One major difference between the advisory missions in Korea and Vietnam was the influence the US mission exerted on the host military to change its institutional processes. In Korea, the KMAG chief lobbied the Koreans hard to promote a competent commander, relieve a lazy one, and the like. While MACV made the effort to some extent, (mostly by making aid contingent on reforms) it fell woefully short in attempting to
influence the ARVN to make institutional changes, especially during the escalation years. Vietnamization marked one such attempt, and it generally had the intended effect.\textsuperscript{152} The ROKA at various points struggled with some of the same detrimental institutional practices that the ARVN did, including the propensity to promote politically loyal officers, centralize command, withhold information and direct intelligence resources internally, and restrict training. Two critical differences differentiate the ROKA and the ARVN. First, the Koreans were far less set in their ways regarding these inimical institutional processes, and the advisors were frequently able to counsel ROKA officers away from such moves. Second, early in the conventional war KMAG obtained operational control of the ROKA. The advisory group thus curtailed a lot of the political meddling in the military, but still delegated decision-making responsibilities to Koreans wherever possible. The ARVN was not willing and the MACV not able to alter the former’s poor institutional processes and political meddling, and as a result the South Vietnamese military did not make good use of American advising.

\textit{Alternative Explanations} This section addresses two main alternative explanations for the ARVN’s combat performance and failure to significantly improve. The first of these addresses the Americans’ failure to identify the war’s asymmetric nature and teach counterinsurgency tactics. The second highlights the importance of individual leaders on mission outcomes.

Individual actions of leaders and the various psychological phenomena that drive them could also have caused the mission to fail. One of MACV’s greatest limitations was its poor use of the reports and feedback cycle. MACV leadership either did not read reports or chose to disregard reports that ran contrary to their own assumptions. Similarly, General Harkins outright refused to make field visits, saying that he was “not that kind of general.” These behaviors and such blatant confirmation bias suggest that individual leaders’ psychology played a role in the mission’s failure. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine any institutional structure or process that would stop a leader from doing these things. This demonstrates that good institutional structures and processes cannot cure all problems and make every mission a success. However, institutions

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Pentagon Papers} IV.C.7(a) p 149-155 quoted in Komer p 30
can limit the options available to leaders and shape the incentives surrounding their decisions. If the MAAG and later MACV had established routine field visits, leaders like General Harkins would have a harder time refusing to do them than if no such process existed. Similarly, if the top-down portion of the feedback cycle existed and leaders were expected to respond to reports, leaders would face pressure to at least read the reports in order to craft a response. As a result, such a process would create pressure on the leader to reevaluate his or her standing assessment. Thus, institutional structures and processes can limit the effects of poor leadership rather than allowing those ill effects to run rampant. Finally, based on the cases examined in this study, apparently non-rational behaviors among leaders as occurred in Vietnam appear uncommon; the Vietnam mission in phases I and II offer the only such example.

Finally, many scholarly inquiries into MACV and the Vietnam War emphasize the US military’s failure to adjust to the needs of a counterinsurgency war as the primary cause of the United States’ failure in Vietnam. By extension, one could argue that the advisory mission failed because MACV schooled the ARVN in conventional rather than counterinsurgency warfare. MACV’s inability to identify the war’s asymmetric nature hindered the ARVN’s development, but constitutes only one of three major factors in an advisory mission’s success, all of which can be traced back to the institutional structures and processes of both the advisory group and the host military. This dissertation argues that institutional structures and processes are critical to success because they either support or inhibit organization learning, and the advisory group and host military must learn different things to make the advisory mission successful. First, the advisory group must correctly discern the host nation’s security needs and teach accordingly. The literature focuses on MACV’s many errors here. Second, the advisory group must figure out how to work with its counterparts such that they heed the advisors’ suggestions. MACV’s performance in this area was similarly abysmal. Finally, the host military must not have institutional processes that inhibit its ability to learn the necessary skills. In Vietnam, all three of these things were inadequate. Simply identifying the type of war the host nation must fight and teaching the relevant tactics and operations will not alone produce a successful advisory mission. Afghanistan presents such an example that a later chapter will further explore. The US military's
inability to learn during the Vietnam War carried over to the advisory mission, and the ARVN's inability to learn further compounded the mission's problems.

If the driving inadequacy of MACV's advisory program was that it taught the ARVN conventional tactics and operations, then the ARVN's performance should have dramatically improved when the war turned conventional. That did not happen. Even if MACV had taught counterinsurgency tactics during the war’s early years when appropriate, both MACV and the ARVN’s poor institutional structures and processes to support organizational learning would not have yielded MACV advisors the knowledge and ability to convince the Vietnamese of the merits of their suggestions, nor would it have addressed the ARVN’s inability to make use of advice. In summary, fighting and advising the ARVN to fight a counterinsurgency war when appropriate certainly contributed to mission failure, but the mission would likely have failed anyway even if MACV had adjusted to a counterinsurgency war.

The MAAG built the ARVN in its own image, mirroring its own structure. The MAAG sought to build a conventional force that could deter and defend against a North Vietnamese invasion. An internal rebellion seemed to be the furthest thing from American commanders' minds at the time although it would eventually precipitate the regime's end. What mattered more than the ARVN’s conventional orientation was both the ARVN and the MAAG's (and later MACV's) inability to adapt to changing circumstances, which can be traced directly back to institutional processes and structures in both that inhibited rather than enabled organizational learning. As a case in point, KMAG in South Korea also built the ROKA as a conventional force in the image of the US Army. The Koreans with American guidance also fought and eventually won a counterinsurgency war, which remains dwarfed in our collective memory and the historical record by the major battles of the Korean War. While in an ideal scenario, American advisors would build a force tailored to the exact requirements of the host nation's security needs. That rarely happens. American advisors without exception teach others to do what they do the way they do it. And yet some advisory missions still succeed. The Americans' failure to adapt both the advisory mission and its own combat operations contributed to the failure. Structuring ARVN as a conventional force with an eye toward the Communists to the north for the most part did not.
**Conclusion** The comparison between advisory missions in South Vietnam and South Korea illuminate which factors are simply challenges for advisory missions and which make the difference between a successful advisory mission and a failed one. Standard challenges include lack of language skills, cultural and political awareness, and not attracting top talent. Every advisory mission encounters these challenges, but some overcome them and other do not. The institutional structures and processes on each side and how well they support organizational learning makes all the difference. Both MACV and the ARVN employed institutional structures and processes that prevented organizational learning. Although both sides made small improvements in phase 3 that corresponded to a slight rise in combat effectiveness, these changes were too little, too late to create a lasting change in the ARVN. As a result, the advisory mission in South Vietnam failed to accomplish in 18 years what KMAG accomplished in Korea in 8 years with similar challenges.
CHAPTER 5: ADVISING IN AFGHANISTAN

Following the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, the US military embarked on a mission to train and advise the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to enable them to eventually assume responsibility for the country’s security needs. The ANSF demonstrated no significant improvement through 2010, but has shown incremental progress since then. No doubt Afghanistan is a very challenging environment in which to attempt to build a modern military, and many attribute the lack of progress to these large but static challenges. What then explains the change in ANSF effectiveness over time?

Summary of the Argument This chapter argues that the institutional structures and processes that promote or inhibit organizational learning in both the US advisory effort and the ANSF explain the Afghans’ degree of improvement- or lack thereof- in combat effectiveness. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the cycle of reports and feedback, field visits by senior leaders, the establishment of a military school system, whether the advisors crossed the line into commanding rather than simply advising, and the Organizational Unity on the US side. On the Afghan side, this chapter evaluates the extent to which the Afghans’ command arrangements, potential limitations imposed on training, personnel selection, and information management practices impeded their ability to learn and implement key lessons that advisors taught.

I argue that early in the conflict the Afghan National Army (ANA) did not significantly improve because both the US advisory effort and the ANA engaged in worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes. In more recent years, the ANSF has made minimal improvement (level 1) and become mostly cohesive with some tactical improvement. This change was primary driven by major improvements in the advisory effort's institutional structures and processes. The advisory mission demonstrated mediocre institutional structures and processes, and the Afghans still had persistent problems with theirs, which the theory presented here indicates will produce minimal improvement in host military effectiveness. This case also illustrates the relative importance of each side's institutional structures and processes; the advisory effort made notable improvements on its side, but absent meaningful change on the host military side, host military improvement stalled at a relatively low level.
Unlike the previous case studies which relied heavily on archival sources, the Afghanistan and Iraq cases draw primarily from interviews with former advisors, supplemented by monographs and other secondary sources. Because archival documents are not yet available given the recent and ongoing nature of these conflicts, these chapters offer relatively little detail. Future work will address these gaps when the conflicts come to a close and, ultimately, when records are declassified and made available for archival research.

I. Overview

I break up the advisory mission to Afghanistan into two parts: phase I begins in late 2001 when the first advisors arrived and ends in 2010 with General Petraeus’ appointment as International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commander, indicating a shift toward a counterinsurgency strategy and a new emphasis on training and advising. Phase II runs from 2010 to the present. Institutional structures and processes in both the ANSF and the advisory mission varied over the course of the conflict, and the Afghans' combat effectiveness with them. Although Afghanistan has had a national army at various points in history, the 1979-1992 war eroded Afghanistan’s once modern army, and Taliban rule thereafter saw its complete disintegration. While no national military organization of any kind existed when US forces arrived, Afghanistan was full of military aged males with basic firearms proficiency and combat experience against the Soviets. Still, these combat veterans were mostly guerrillas who had never served in a unified and disciplined organization. Such was the situation that the US inherited.

Training the Afghan National Army began in early 2002, after US forces had defeated the Taliban. After the end of Taliban rule in 2001 first the British and then the Americans got to work building a new Afghan National Army. Recruitment and training efforts progressed reasonably well in the first few years with some notable successes. Several types of advisory teams operated in Afghanistan: mobile transition teams (MTT), embedded training teams (ETT), advisor teams (AT), and security force assistance advisory teams (SFAAT). Similarly, multiple other countries have assisted with various aspects of Afghan training, although these efforts compared to the American mission were quite small, so this chapter does not thoroughly explore
them. The security situation remained relatively calm, although the Taliban continued to step up their attacks throughout this period. By 2006, the Taliban had launched a full-fledged insurgency, and security deteriorated. After the Iraq war began in 2003, the US diverted its attention and top personnel to that war, which contributed to mounting challenges in Afghanistan. The Taliban adopted many of the same tactics as Iraqi insurgents, including suicide bombings and IEDs, whereas they had initially attempted to fight invading US and British troops head on in a conventional war during initial combat operations in 2001 and 2002. The dangerous environment and slow progress on reconstruction projects fueled anti-American and Western sentiment that in turn fueled the insurgency. The US reluctance to train local police forces in the early years also contributed to this decline, as local police are especially critical to security in a society as tribal and decentralized as Afghanistan.

It was not until 2010 that the Obama administration took a radically different approach to the war. Obama brought in General David Petraeus as commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to implement a new strategy modeled after the surge in Iraq. Troop deployments would temporarily rise dramatically, and the US military would implement a village stability program (VSP) that would focus on protecting locals from insurgents rather than simply killing the latter and building up local security forces to fill the gaps that were largely inaccessible to the ANA. Part and parcel of the new plan was an overhaul of the training program. The US would finally establish and train an Afghan Local Police force, embed advisors in units across the country as opposed to staying on base away from their Afghan counterparts, and increase training and advising efforts as evidenced by the deployment of additional advisors.1 The changes in institutional structures and processes that this policy shift produced narrowly improved the ANSF’s fortunes in phase II.

Formally, US combat troops withdrew on 28 December 2014, and with that the war in Afghanistan officially concluded. Security conflicts are never beholden to a foreign power’s schedule, however, so present security conditions and the Afghans’ inability to handle them has required a continuing US presence of about 10,000 troops as of 2016. As the decision to withdraw was not primarily base on the ANSF’s combat capability, it is unlikely to improve absent a considerable advisory presence.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. First, I delve into the US advisory effort’s institutional structure and processes and changes over time. The second does the same for the Afghan forces, highlighting the challenges posed by institutional processes that inhibit organizational learning. The third section details the Afghan forces’ military effectiveness and changes over time, tying this in to both sides’ institutional structures and processes. The fourth and final section addresses potential alternative arguments and sums up the argument.

II. US Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes

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While the US made a nominal attempt to train the nascent Afghan National Army in phase I, for all practical purposes the US military conducted its own combat operations, and the Afghans' development remained little more than an afterthought. It comes as no surprise, then, that during phase I the advisory effort was hardly structured to optimize its ability to advise the Afghans. Across the board, the advisory effort's institutional structures and processes revealed severe problems. A new focus on training and advising in phase II yielded many positive and necessary changes in the advisory effort's institutional structures and processes. This overhaul enabled advisors to finally start making incremental improvements in the Afghans' combat effectiveness in phase II.

**Reports** In the early years of the war, ISAF only paid lip service to training the Afghans, and this showed in the reports cycle. Advisors who served in the early 2000s did not fill out reports about the Afghans' development, although they did report on a number of other things. For the most part, US troops preoccupied themselves with hunting down insurgents with some thought given to the humanitarian ramifications of collateral casualties. For example, advisors were asked to provide information on how many insurgents they had killed and what they had done for humanitarian issues. Advisors did not do much advising at all, nor did they appear to be expected to; they were advisors in name only. The top-down aspect of the feedback loop was completely absent, as advisors virtually never received feedback from their superiors on advising matters or otherwise.

A well-functioning reports cycle enables advisors to overcome the challenge of developing good working relationships with host military soldiers such that they will act on advice. Advisors paid little attention to the Afghans they were theoretically tasked to advise and train, and as a result working relationships were exceedingly poor. Unlike most other advisory missions in which advisors live among their counterparts, in Afghanistan advisors lived on base, the opposite side of which housed Afghans in much poorer living conditions. Advisors shared that the US mission at the time suffered from a great deal of cultural illiteracy, and the fact that advisors maintained their distance from counterparts and did not convey what they could observe to leaders through reports, depriving them of the ability to remedy the situation.

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5 Advisor interview 9 March 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#1); Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2)
One advisor recalled an incident in which an American deeply offended a small group of Afghan soldiers with his cultural ignorance and insensitivity. An Afghan commander drew his gun on the offending American captain, and his men followed suit. The incident ended without bloodshed, but the advisors stopped working with that unit and they were no longer allowed to stay on base. The increased distance made building relationships even more difficult, and definitely no advising or training occurred. All advisors interviewed for this study who served during this period report that poor relationships undermined their ability to influence Afghan counterparts.

**Phase II** The reports cycle improved considerably during this stage, although the advisory effort never quite adopted best practices with regards to reporting and feedback. Advisors submitted reports about their units’ progress and rated them on a five-point scale based on their dependence on advisors and foreign partners. By all accounts, senior leaders read advisors' reports and used them to make relatively accurate assessments on the Afghans' progress; the Afghanistan mission did not suffer from senior leaders who apparently did not understand what was happening on the ground. However, advisors also indicated that whether their superiors read their reports and followed up with them varied significantly.

![Figure 5.2: Guidelines for Reports](image)

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4 Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone

5 Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, "ANSF Capability Assessments"14-33 Audit Report, February 2014
The feedback cycle varied by team and chain of command; some improved tremendously and others only a moderate degree. For those in the former category, advisors submitted reports after every engagement then had weekly meetings across advising teams to discuss advising roles, concerns, and successes. These advisors found information sharing with one another useful for their daily duties. However, this exchange of information only occurred in some chains of command, and mostly occurred when the advisors and their commanders did not have more pressing matters to address.6

Where it did function well, the reports and feedback systems helped advisors gain the cooperation of the Afghans with whom they worked. At first, advisors offered aid to hostile villagers with no strings attached hoping to win them over. They did not apply any kind of pressure or coercion.7 One Army advisor recalled that he had a budget of $10,000 a month to give to Afghans for various projects. According to him, the US military believed that providing generous aid would engender goodwill and support for the mission. Instead, advisors relayed that the Afghans demanded impractical projects (e.g. building a school when there were no teachers) and would refuse to cooperate if they did not get their way, saying that they would just wait for the next influx of advisors in a few months.8 Another Army advisor who served during the same period observed that money was one of his best tools for motivating the Afghans to make much needed changes; the advisors would fund Afghan projects in exchange for the Afghans acting on their suggestions.9 The Afghans did not feel a sense of ownership for these new constructions and would therefore not provide security from insurgent attacks, only to have additional US funding allocated for its replacement. This advisor circumvented that problem by agreeing to rebuild a bridge between two villages only if the villages on either side provided security.10 All advisors interviewed for this study believed that the US needed to tie its funding to certain behaviors or changes in the Afghan security forces. Some advisors who have served more recently indicated

6 Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2); Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#1&2)
8 Advisor interview February 17 2017 in Washington DC
9 Advisor interview March 2 2017 by phone
10 Advisor interview January 29 2017 in Washington DC
that the Afghans merely expected the Americans to provide them with material goods and take care of security and other tasks for them as a result, so they began shifting toward tying aid to behavioral changes. Afterward advisors saw the Afghan units’ capabilities increase since they were taking on more responsibilities. They indicated that this change arose from advisors reports and meetings to discuss their content.\footnote{Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#1); Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2)}

Advisory teams that enjoyed a well-functioning reports tended to be the most satisfied with their units’ progress among the advisors interviewed for this study. One advisor shared that he wrote reports every week for his own sake and biweekly reports to his commander, and his reports were used to discern what the Afghans knew, where current limitation in their knowledge and skills existed, and how they could be remedied. He felt that his leadership was extremely receptive and that their reports almost always formed the basis for any future training or changes to the program.\footnote{Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC} Similarly, one advisor to Afghan commando units shared that they wrote weekly reports about the Afghans' progress and daily situation reports. Superiors would consistently follow up with guidance on problems that were reported or further questions. This advisor and others who served under the same leadership found the feedback loop of reports and further guidance and discussion about the contents of those reports helpful in the Afghan units' development. These advisors were among the few with whom I spoke who were proud and pleased with the great strides their Afghan counterparts had made.\footnote{Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone} Advisors who worked on teams with more robust feedback systems reported greater progress among their Afghan units and a higher degree of optimism for the ANSF’s prospects than advisors who lacked such an information sharing system. The second group of advisors expressed mostly frustration at the situation and their units’ lack of improvement. The advisors interviewed for this study were close to evenly split on this dimension.

Other advisors report that the top down part of the feedback loop was entirely lacking. One advisor commented that he never received any information about best practices or lessons learned from advising, although such documents did exist, and an individual with a particular interest in the subject could have read...
about it. In particular, Special Operations Command (SOCOM) published pamphlets with lessons learned, including cultural information. Still, learning from others' advising experiences and incorporating key lessons into one's own advising was not considered part of the advisor's duties, so few people did it. Thus, it appeared that the bottom-up aspect of the reports cycle functioned well, while the top-down aspect did not.

There were two major problems with the reports system. First, advisors reported only on the progress of their units and not the challenges they faced in their job and how they dealt with them. Second, while information went up the chain of command in those reports, it did not always come down in the form of revised SOPs, suggestions, or any kind of follow up. Although these things did occur in some units, it depended entirely on the commander.

**Field Visits** Advisors reported a complete absence of field visits by senior leaders in phase I. They also assessed that senior leaders had a poor understanding of the situation on the ground and how to proceed.

**Phase II** From 2010 onward, senior leaders made regular visits to units in the field which they found useful for gaining a contextual understanding of the conflict and the Afghans' development. Advisors reported frequent battlefield circulations (BFCs) in which 20-30 senior leaders would visit advisors and their units to receive briefings and gauge the units' progress. One advisor was surprised at how frequently he received relatively senior visitors despite his unit's remote location and the difficulty required to get there. Units in far-flung parts of the country received fewer field visits than those in more accessible locations, but these visits still occurred frequently, and even advisors in remote locations felt that their superiors had a good idea of the situation on the ground. Senior leaders made good use of the field visits as an opportunity to address problems that advisors were facing. They met with advisor teams, the commanders of Afghan units, and took

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14 Advisor interview 12 February 2017 Washington DC

15 Advisor interview 9 March 2017 by phone; advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2); advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC

16 Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2)
the opportunity to engage and connect with Afghan leaders.\textsuperscript{17} While it appears that the leadership had a relatively accurate idea of conditions on the ground, advisors report that they do not remember any of these conversations or briefings including discussions of how to advise the Afghans with maximum effectiveness. The leaders did not ask advisors about this, the advisors did not brief about it, and as a result the leadership could not offer synthesized lessons that advisors could then incorporate into their jobs.\textsuperscript{18} The field visits served their purpose of facilitating an accurate understanding of the conflict for senior leaders, but they did not take the place of leadership's response to reports and amending advising SOPs because the leadership did not collect this information during these visits. However, others had weekly meetings with other advisors and their superior in which they provided full briefings on the Afghans' progress and how they should proceed.\textsuperscript{19}

In phase II the advisory effort performed relatively well on this metric. Field visits helped leadership gain an accurate understanding of the situation on the ground, and advisors believed that the visits served that purpose.

\textbf{Military School System} The US established military schools and training centers beginning in 2002, but schooling remained a local enterprise with the exception of a few national institutions for training the Army.\textsuperscript{20} In May 2002, the US established The Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), the Army's largest local training center with the capacity to offer basic training to 8,000 new recruits.\textsuperscript{21} In 2005, the US stood up the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA), a four year institution modeled after West Point intended to graduate Second Lieutenants for the ANA. The NMAA contains a range of subordinate schools.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2);
\item \textsuperscript{18} Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC
\item \textsuperscript{19} Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC
\item \textsuperscript{20} Advisor interview 12 February 2017, Washington DC
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to train Afghan officers in a number of career fields like armor, artillery, signal and engineer schools.\textsuperscript{22} Advisors relay that the establishment of training institution gave the impression on paper of a school system, when in fact training and advising in phase I was predominantly executed one-on-one. One advisor would advise an entire Afghan unit, and if he or she had other pressing concerns at the time, little advising would occur.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ANA_Training_Programs.png}
\caption{A Summary of Training For Afghans\textsuperscript{24} }
\end{figure}

\textit{Phase II} In phase II, training centers took on additional importance as the mission shifted toward training and advising. Phase II saw an increased emphasis in shifting from a US-led training program to having Afghans lead training and passing on the responsibility to them.\textsuperscript{25} Employing Afghans to teach each other developed their teaching and leadership capabilities and facilitated the institutionalizing of lessons that Americans taught Afghans. US advisors did formalize some parts of the program, including vehicle maintenance, mortars,\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#1); Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#1&2); advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Advisor interview 9 March 2017 by phone.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
artillery, and other tasks that advisors observed the Afghans needed. Still, these efforts remained largely ad hoc.\(^{26}\)

However, Afghanistan never had a military school system so much as a group of unconnected institutions and programs for training. The lack of systemic schooling limited the extent to which the Afghans could fully internalize the lessons the advisors taught and pass on those lessons to younger soldiers. Furthermore, not every new recruit went through basic training at the KMTC, and persistent gaps in training also forestalled the institutionalization of these lessons. Although the US decided early on that all new recruits should attend basic training at the KMTC before deployment to their units, advisors who worked in Afghanistan between 2011 and 2015 assessed that many new recruits did not actually go through basic training because of a lack of advisors and resources that created a huge backlog of recruits slated for training.\(^{27}\) The ad hoc nature of training and lack of sufficient capacity at the training centers resulted in inconsistent tactical training at the squad, platoon, and company levels. This produced some well-trained and capable units as well as many other that were not.\(^{28}\)

Afghanistan struggled with a centralized training system in part because the large country’s mountainous terrain and relatively poor infrastructure made travelling long distances for training impractical for many units, especially for local police forces. At the very least, however, the advisors should have made getting all new recruits through basic training a top priority. Even so, phase II training became more systematic than it had been in phase I. Advisors devised training programs for their units as needed, where previously the Afghans simply tagged along.\(^{29}\)

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\(^{26}\) Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone(#1); advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone; advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC

\(^{27}\) Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone; Obaid Younossi et al, The Long March: Building the Afghan Army, Santa Monica CA: RAND corporation 2009 p 30-1; Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#1 &2)


\(^{29}\) Advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#1&2); Advisor interview 28 February 2017 by phone
**Advising vs Commanding** US advisors sometimes took Afghans along with them on combat operations in phase I, but the latter did not always participate. Even when they did, the Americans paid very little attention to the Afghans' performance and offered little guidance for improvement.\(^{30}\) Several advisors commented that the US mission mostly used its Afghan counterparts to put an Afghan face on the mission. At the time Afghan units were never expected to become independent combat entities, so few worked toward that. Instead, one commented that "we went and did our own thing like cowboys."\(^{31}\) Due to the lack of focus on the training mission, very few advisors were deployed to Afghanistan in the early years of the war, and those who were had direct combat responsibilities as well, which they focused on to the exclusion of training and the alienation of their Afghan counterparts.\(^{32}\) The effort to train and advise the Afghans to the point of independence remained superficial throughout this phase. Instead, the Americans focused on hunting down and killing the Taliban themselves.\(^{33}\) One advisor called this a “wild west mentality” in which the advisors’ approach was “if the Afghan army can’t do what it needs to right now, then I should do what I do best, which is to go out and kill people. So we made a show of partnering with the Afghans and dragged a few along on every operation to put an Afghan face on the operations. But we drove everything.”\(^{34}\)

**Phase II** Phase II brought a concerted effort to teach the Afghans and push them to assume as much responsibility as possible. While this remains a critically important development, intertwining combat and advisory duties challenged advisors, who took on more responsibility than they desired by necessity. One advisor opined that his two main duties—advising Afghans and carrying out high risk missions—were mutually exclusive in practice. He described a heliborne night operation in which he was dropped into a village along with a couple other Americans and a group of Afghan soldiers, and when the insurgents opened fire, the

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\(^{30}\) Advisor interview 9 March 2017 by phone; advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2)

\(^{31}\) Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone

\(^{32}\) Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#s 1 and 2)

\(^{33}\) Advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone

\(^{34}\) Advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone; advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#1)
Afghans fled, creating chaos. The advisor did not feel that it was possible to carry out high risk operations with minimally competent foreign counterparts, especially when he could not count on their participation in battle.  

This advisor cited instances like this on as reasons that advisors had to assume command because the Afghans demonstrated themselves incapable or unavailable. Other advisors reported that they attempted to walk their counterparts through tasks like equipment maintenance multiple times with no improvement. He concluded that "there are only so many times you can teach someone to do something, and we got tired of them not figuring out how to do it, so we did it.” Pressure from one's chain of command to meet results without much awareness of the challenges that advisors faced in their daily duties compounded this problem.

Organizational Unity Unlike the advisory mission in Korea which a single institution oversaw, the advisory effort in Afghanistan was a decentralized collection of advisors from different services and subordinate to different commands. This fragmented structure impeded advisors' ability to learn from each other's experiences. Conversations with advisors reveal that a substantial amount of learning occurred at the individual level, but there was no established mechanism to pass on this information to new advisors or to advisors serving in other parts of the country. This was especially limiting since advisors' tours lasted only about six months to a year. None of the advisors with whom I spoke were aware of any central advising authority, and most were not entirely sure who else carried responsibility for advising outside of his or her own commend. For example, one advisor recounted that he partook in a SOF task force, which as subordinate to a special operations regional hub, subordinate to regional task forces such as the Special Operations Task Force Southeast (SOTF SE), subordinate to the Combined Joint Operations Talks Force, which unites all SOF in Afghanistan. He received little direction from his chain of command, and Navy and Army advisors report the same despite being siloed in their own organizations.

35 Advisor Interview 17 February 2017 in Washington DC
36 Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC
Individual advisors amassed useful information from which other advisors could have benefitted. One advisor emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence in this endeavor. She said, “you can’t convince someone [something] is a good idea if you don’t understand what they consider good and what their priorities are,” and that the ability to figure out how to be a good advisor in a given cultural context varies widely by advisor. This is especially true because incoming advisors were largely left to their own devices to learn the ropes (absent a couple week training class at Ft Dix that not all outgoing advisors were able to attend). One advisor found befriending the translator useful in order to make a game plan for every conversation with her counterpart, also indicating that she found it important to work on how she presented her ideas to the Afghans. She observed that first and foremost, the Afghans had a set of personal priorities, followed by their goals for the organization, and she learned to appeal to her counterpart’s self-interest. She began to frame suggestions in terms of what would create less work for her counterpart or augment his prestige, which was successful as the Afghans began acting on most of her suggestions. Other advisors observed the importance of friendship and took very small actions daily to build trust such that their counterparts would be more open to taking the advisors’ suggestions on more consequential matters. This frequently involved extended tea-drinking and socializing sessions.

To be sure, decentralized control of the advisory program has its merits. The services granted individual advisors and their teams a great deal of autonomy to adjust their training programs and other activities as they saw fit. This enabled advisors to tailor their solutions to the need of the particular Afghan unit with which they worked, which is especially important in a society as locally oriented as Afghanistan’s. Every advisor with whom I spoke emphasized how tremendously an advisor’s situation and experience varied.

38 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC
39 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone
40 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone
41 Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC
42 Advisor interview, 25 February 2017 by phone
based on a number of factors. Still, these conversations revealed many common threads, including how to motivate Afghans to be personally invested in their training and how to push them to delegate responsibility to more junior personnel. Even if a centrally organized advisory group rigidly dictating protocol does not offer an ideal fit for Afghanistan’s needs, its ability to share techniques that some advisors successfully used to overcome the ANSF’s greatest limitations is. Advisors also had competing non-advisory responsibilities that they felt frequently compromised their units’ development. An independent advisory group dedicated to the task (similar to KMAG in Korea which focused entirely on advising and was organizationally separate from combat units which were also present) would ameliorate this problem.

I use the terms “advisory mission” or “advisory effort” to refer to the sum of all advising and training activities to improve the ANSF’s capabilities. In contrast, previous chapters used the term “advisory group,” which denotes an organization charged with overseeing all training and advising going on in a particular country. A close to ideal reports system did exist in Afghanistan, and a separate institution charged with running the advisory mission could have helped standardize the practice. Doing so would enable the dissemination of critical information and helpful suggestions to all advisors, saving advisors the trouble of having individual advisors the need to re-learn things that their predecessors could have passed down to them. Many advisory teams did well and got remarkable results, but the decentralization of advising hindered advisory success nationwide.

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43 Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 17 February 2017 in Washington DC
### Advisory Group Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions, feedback, or reports sought from advisors in the field</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not about advising/training</td>
<td></td>
<td>Varied across teams, but improvement across the board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Use of advisors' feedback to discern key lessons, modify SOPs, and disseminate those SOPs and new knowledge back to advisors in the field | No | Somewhat |
| Visits to and investigations of units in the field by senior advisory group leadership | No | Yes |
| Establishment of a military school system staffed by at least some host military officers so that the new lessons become institutional knowledge | Military schools, but not a system and little importance given to training. | Military schools, but not a system |
| Advisors offered instruction and advice rather than assuming command responsibilities | No | Considerable improvement |

**Figure 5.4: Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time**

**Conclusion**

The US advisory mission approached worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes in phase I, exacerbated by the fact that combat operations remained the US’ focus in the country. Training and advising the Afghans remained an afterthought until phase II, which ushered in a new approach to the war in addition to institutional changes. In particular, field visits began, the reporting system became a bit more robust, and advisors made a greater attempt to advise rather than command. These changes enabled improvements in the ANSF’s combat effectiveness.

### III. Afghan Institutional Structures and Processes

The ANSF suffered from institutional structures and processes that limited the organizational learning necessary to significantly improve its combat effectiveness. The most limiting of these is centralized command and promotions based on non-merit factors, because they make developing good junior and mid-level leaders virtually impossible. As a result the ANSF’s major impediment to combat effectiveness has been poor leadership.

**Promotions**

In phase I Afghan officer promotion and selection was mostly based on patronage. By phase II, advisors shared that many promotions they observed were due to nepotism or other forms of non-meritocratic advancement. One advisor shared that “we need a no-kidding structured promotion system, but
they’re decades away from a truly merit-based promotion system.” 44 Most advisors noted that many Afghan commanders received their positions as a personal favor, by buying it, or as a result of nepotism. 45 Training a particular Afghan and developing his skills such that he performs well in combat has negligible impact on the Afghans' overall combat effectiveness if he is not put in a position to utilize those skills and an incompetent person is given the additional responsibility instead. A military organization generally reflects the society from which it is drawn, and while creating an institution that operates radically differently than that society may be possible, the ANSF has not done so to date. While advisors have influenced promotion and assignment decisions on a small scale in phase II, Afghanistan’s personnel selection practices still severely limited the Afghans’ combat effectiveness.

**Command Arrangements** Command across the ANSF remained unequivocally and extremely centralized from 2001 to the present. The inability to delegate decision-making to junior officers and NCOs greatly hinders the development of good tactical and operational leadership, which has remained one of the most steadfast barriers to mission success for at least the past 10 years. US commanders lamented the fact that ANA soldiers had to ask permission for everything they did and were functionally unable to make decisions at lower levels. For example, a brigade commander or higher must approve even minor decisions like going out on patrols. In fact, advisors observed that only commanders several echelons above the one actually on the ground were allowed to make quick decisions. 46 Many advisors believed that one of the greatest barriers to progress in Afghanistan lies in its extremely centralized command structure. 47 Very little coordination outside of one’s immediate chain of command occurred; any attempt at cross-unit coordination would need

44 Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC

45 Advisor interview 2 March 2017 by phone


to go up to the Minister of Defense. There does not appear to be an externally imposed reason for this other than the Afghans prefer to operate this way and are generally averse to taking responsibility for decisions.48

**Phase II** Some advisors to special operations forces units serving from 2014 onward were eventually able to coax their counterparts into delegating authority to junior officers, primarily by emphasizing that this would enable the counterpart to have less work to do and that the Afghan commander would still receive the credit for good work his subordinates did, which astute advisors noted was of primary importance to Afghan officers.49 Similar to the slight improvement in officer selection, improvements in command arrangements were not significant enough to allow a dramatic improvement in combat effectiveness.

**Information Management** While a few advisors indicated that Afghans largely shared information with the concerned parties, most reported otherwise. Afghans frequently would not share information with others if they did not think that doing so would directly benefit them. If one soldier had greater skill in operating a particular weapons system or procured a piece of intelligence, sometimes he would choose not to help or inform other Afghans. If he did so, then the other soldier may perform better than him or get promoted at his expense. One advisor commented that for Afghans “giving someone intelligence or knowledge is like giving away your power, and you never want to do that.”50 This occurred both horizontally and vertically, and created very cutthroat environment.51 In part, this reflects a deep lack of trust between Afghan service members. The ANSF contained men who fought both for and against the Soviets, as well as others who were aligned with the Taliban. Moreover, those aligned with the Taliban sometimes passed information to them, which made others less likely to share information since doing so posed a security issue. Trust among the

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48 Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC

49 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone

50 Advisor interview 2 March 2017 by phone

51 Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC
members of a unit is a critical component of military effectiveness; if basic trust does not exist, then a unit is unlikely to stand and fight together when doing so can require trusting others with one’s life.

On a positive note, across the board Afghans focused their intelligence efforts on the insurgents rather than one another. Most advisors felt that they did well on this front; intelligence collection was perhaps the area in which the Afghans contributed the most. Other advisors routinely saw more senior Afghans take younger ones under their wing and teach them what they knew. Similarly, no centrally imposed policy against association among officers existed. Still, little coordination or conversation existed outside of one’s chain of command because of centralization and that the conflict was so local in nature and the nearest ANA unit could be very far away.

Although information management was not uniformly poor, the Afghans' propensity to leverage information for personal gain hindered the Afghans' ability to collaborate with one another and thereby limited the ANSF's prospects for growth.

**Training Restrictions** No advisors or other primary sources indicate that the Afghan security forces or government imposed limits on training that US advisors recommended. The Afghans generally went along with whatever the advisors suggested but usually did not manifest a particular enthusiasm for it.

**Phase II** Advisors were generally able to motivate their counterparts to become more personally invested in training by adapting the training exercises to the Afghans' preferred learning style. A hands-on continuous learning approach whereby training exercises simulated real-life scenarios that required the Afghans to make decisions that would then carry on to the next day's exercise was a ”game-changer" for training. The more realistic and obviously applicable training was, the more interested the Afghans became and consequently

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52 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 12 February in Washington DC

worked together better. Leveraging personal relationships and ascertaining how the Afghans preferred to learn enabled them to get many more Afghans to feel personally invested in the training, whereas upon these advisors' arrival the Afghans dragged their feet on training. Sharing information like this will all advisors could have helped them enact similar changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Military Indicators</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Change?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the host military develop competent leadership by promoting and firing officers based on merit and performance rather than political loyalty?</td>
<td>Little to none</td>
<td>Infrequently</td>
<td>Positive but small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the host military restrict training exercises?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is the host military centralize command arrangements, leaving junior officers little to no autonomy in the field?</td>
<td>Excessive centralization</td>
<td>Excessive centralization</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is critical information held hostage for power instead of being freely shared both horizontally and vertically?</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.5: Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes Over Time*

**Conclusion** Persistent problems with Afghan institutional structures and processes limited how much the ANSF could improve through foreign advising and training. In phase I, the ANSF employed worst practices almost across the board, and while they improved in phase II, severe problems still remained. Although the ANSF performs poorly on all counts, an extremely centralized command structure and an unwillingness to promote based on merit has hindered ANSF development the most. Afghanistan's institutional structures and processes suggest that even with the best advising the ANSF's prospects for improvement are extremely limited. As the next section will demonstrate, the past 15 years of advising has shown this to be the case. These institutional challenges run so deep and are so complex that advisor persuasion is unlikely to change institutional processes enough that the ANSF no longer inhibits its own growth.

**IV. Military Effectiveness**

54 Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone

55 Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone
In phase I very few ANA units are judged capable of operating independently; in 2010 a GAO report found that not a single ANA unit could operate independently of international forces. Even in 2010 after eight years of foreign advising and $14 billion in aid, the Afghans were nowhere close to self-sufficiency. In fact, only 40 of 150 (27%) battalions could operate independently, and only 12% of district police forces were considered reliable in combat. Advisors who have served in Afghanistan in the past couple of years concur with that assessment of Afghan units' ability to operate independently, although they note incremental improvements in basic soldiering and tactical skills.

Most phase II advisors shared that the units they advised did improve, sometimes tremendously, in basic soldiering and tactics, but they continued to struggle with complex operations, operational planning, and even unit cohesion. While improvement has occurred on the individual and occasionally the small unit level, those lower-level gains have not translated into a significantly more capable ANSF. There are several reasons for this; the first is a matter of where the deficiencies remain. Improvements in basic soldiering skills matter little if Afghans scatter when fired on, never learn to plan operations, and never exercise leadership over their own forces in combat. No Afghan security force could overcome the tactical leadership problem, so none advanced beyond the ability to execute basic tactics as directed.

**Unit Cohesion** The Afghans generally did not play an active role in combat operations, so little opportunity existed to hone combat skills and build cohesion. While some exceptions did exist, Afghan units during this period generally fell apart without advisors around; they would either hide or flee when receiving fire.

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57 Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, "Actions Needed," audit 10-11, June 2010, p 2; West p 227

58 Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC

59 Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone #1; advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone #2; Advisor interview 30 March 2017 by phone
The advisors who served in teams with good reporting and feedback cycles reported the most improvement in their counterparts. These Afghan units remained cohesive even when they were outnumbered and taking many casualties. Advisors overwhelmingly indicated that Afghan units of all types fought cohesively in low threat situations and would frequently flee the battlefield in high threat circumstances. The Afghan Local Police forces, established in 2010, fought consistently cohesively. Advisors report that they observed valor in the local police, taking extraordinary risk to see a mission through and protect their villages. This was not universally true; other advisors-usually those with poorer working relationships with their counterparts and poorer reports and feedback cycles-noted a correlation between how likely they were to get killed and their desire to participate in operations and whether they scattered upon hearing enemy fire. Afghans virtually never wanted to lead operations. This is at least in part due to the fact that the Afghans knew that the Americans would be around to do these things for them and did not want to take on additional risk. Perhaps equally important was their confidence in their ability to handle greater operational responsibility without getting killed. This suggests that part of the problem can be remedied through solid advising and additional training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Cohesion</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?</td>
<td>Sometimes, but frequent problems</td>
<td>Yes, unless conditions are particularly difficult. Some units did well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the rates of surrender and desertion?</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Lower, but still high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do soldiers follow orders under fire?</td>
<td>Sometimes, highly variable</td>
<td>Yes, generally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the severity of enemy attacks or the privations of the battlefield environment effect the answers to the above?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, for some units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.6: Unit Cohesion in the ANSF

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60 Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC (#2); Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 28 February by phone; advisor interview 12 February 2017 by phone

61 Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 17 February 2017 in Washington DC

62 Advisor interview 28 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 25 February 2017 by phone

63 West p 228; Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC

64 Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC
**Basic Tactics** Afghans participated much less frequently in combat operations prior to 2010 than they did from 2010 to the present. Still, there exist a few examples of early tactical ability. One early example of a successful operation occurred in Herat in 2004; President Hamid Karzai sent an ANA battalion to Herat to resolve a dispute between two factions and establish order. Lt Gen Barno believed this to be a great example of the ANA’s competence; they didn't fire into the crowd and they established order. It was a good marker for their capability. 

Still, the vast majority of units through 2010 could not perform simple tasks on their own, much less tactical operations.

**Phase II** Advisors concurred that the Afghans had developed some competence in basic tactics, and most advisors saw considerable improvement in this area. Still, all Afghan forces from commandos to local police lacked competence in tactical leadership, rendering them ultimately unable to perform independently in tactical engagements. As one recently returned advisor put it, “they have the physical ability to carry out tactical operations; they can clear a house. But they have US leadership telling them what to do at every step of the way. They lack tactical planning and decision-making proficiency, and until they build it they won’t be able to operate independently.” The ANSF have improved, but not enough or in the skill areas that would enable them to eventually operate independently.

SOF advisors reported that their counterparts played an active role in combat operations. For example, in April 2012, ANA special forces, 8th Commando Kandak, Afghan uniformed police and coalition SOF successfully conducted a clearing option in Day Kundi province, killing 23 insurgents. One coalition SOF member commented, "Afghan National Security Forces successfully laid down fire while air assets dropped ordnance," and the Special Operations Task Force South East Commander Mike Hayes confirmed

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66 Advisor interview 24 February 2017 in Washington DC
that the Afghan forces were out front leading the operation against the insurgents. The SOF advisors relayed that at least since 2012 the Afghan Special Forces took initiative in operations like this one, and returned fire, demonstrating good unit cohesion and command of basic tactics. Still, even when the Afghans performed well, they never led operations. One advisor shared that “when we say that they’re leading an operation, that means they are physically in front. We are always there telling them exactly what to do. 

Problems still exist with basic tactics. When fighting an insurgency, a military must avoid indiscriminate fire lest civilians get caught in the crosshairs and their sentiments turn against the government. One advisor reported Afghans test firing their weapons into a village when preparing to enter the village for a clearing operation. They would also launch rocket propelled grenades in the distance to avoid having to carry them. Most advisors relay that when the Afghans do fire in combat, they do so without aiming. Overall the Afghan Local Police had no experience at the outset of the advisory mission and made tremendous progress in terms of simple soldiering, marksmanship, and basic tactics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactics</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units handle their weapons and equipment properly?</td>
<td>Uneven</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do units employ indiscriminate violence against civilians and rely heavily on overwhelming firepower?</td>
<td>Generally no, but some problems in this area</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit perform convoys, regular reconnaissance, raids, cordon and search operations, and patrols?</td>
<td>Only with US leadership and direction</td>
<td>Not independently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can units execute area defense operations to secure the population?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.7: Basic Tactical Proficiency in the ANSF*

**Complex Operations** The Afghans struggled with complex operations to the point of incompetence, and as of September 2016 this had not changed. Centralized command, huge delays in action, and the deficiencies


68 Advisor interview 17 February 2017 in Washington DC

69 Advisor interview 17 February 2017 in Washington DC

70 Advisor interview 12 February 2017, Washington DC

71 Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC
in junior leadership it imposed contributed tremendously to these difficulties. For example, while preparing
for a May 2009 major offensive in Badghis province, the ANA brigade headquarters took 6 days to plan and
write the operations order and did not even include a mission statement. This left subordinate units only one
day to prepare before deployment into a hostile environment to clear the area of insurgents. Inadequate
planning at the lower echelons and the battalion commander’s insistence on controlling companies from afar
led to a wholesale slaughter. The battalion lost an entire platoon, and those not killed were taken captive.
Afterward, the battalion commander was relieved of command despite the fact that his commander planned
every detail of the operation.\footnote{Park “Identifying the Center of Gravity in Afghan Mentoring p 47}
Noteworthy still is that to date, Afghans have never undertaken operational planning on their own. They do so only with advisory support or direction.

Advisors who attempted to involve Afghan commanders in operations planning and tactical
decision-making faced stiff resistance. One advisor noted that his counterparts were profoundly disinterested
in developing this critical capability. They told him, “why would we learn that when you are here to plan and
make decisions for us?”\footnote{Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Wasington DC}
Most advisors believed that the Afghans simply did not want the responsibility to lead operations and make decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex Operations</th>
<th>Phases I &amp;II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit conduct combined arms operations? Inter-services operations?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the unit demonstrate a capacity for both low-level initiative and high-level coordination?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit conduct patrols, search and attack, counter-ambush, and counter-sniper operations?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Figure 5.8: Complex Operational Proficiency in the ANSF}

The security situation in Afghanistan remains poor, and the US military has found that it is unable to
withdraw from the country despite former president Barack Obama’s best efforts. In 2016, a senior Pentagon
official relayed that “what we’ve learned is that you can’t really leave…They are not going to be ready in three

\footnote{Park “Identifying the Center of Gravity in Afghan Mentoring p 47}
personnel in Afghanistan has led to a Taliban resurgence, as they seized district centers and imposed heavy casualties on the Afghan security forces.

None of the former advisors interviewed for this project believed that the Afghans had come remotely close to ready to assume the majority of the responsibility for operations. Regular ANA units exhibited little combat effectiveness as late as 2015. Although special forces units fought better than regular units, a fairly low ceiling still existed on their abilities. They struggled with complex operations and completely lacked the ability to plan operations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Host Military Institutions</th>
<th>Bad Host Military Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Advisory Group Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Advisory Group Institutions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.9 Improvement in Combat Effectiveness and Institutional Structures and Processes, Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Scale</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success=3</td>
<td>Independently cohesive, tactically proficient, and capable of complex ops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Improvement = 2</td>
<td>Somewhat independently cohesive and tactically proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Improvement =1</td>
<td>Dependent with problems at all 3 levels, some improvement in cohesion and possibly basic tactics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No improvement = 0</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.10: Improvement in Combat Effectiveness and Institutional Structures and Processes, Part 2

Conclusion Advisors agree that the combat effectiveness has improved considerably since 2010, although some units are doing better than others. In phase I, the Afghans demonstrated little to no systematic improvement. The ANSF struggled with worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes, as did the US military since it paid little attention to training and advising. With poor institutional features on both sides and no systematic improvement, Afghanistan scores a "level 0" for phase I. In phase II, the advisory effort made institutional improvements, but the ANSF largely did not. As a result, the ANSF made only minimal improvements in its combat effectiveness (level 1). It became generally cohesive absent great stresses and learned quite a lot in the way of basic tactics and soldiering skills. Unfortunately, none of these

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75 Advisor interview 29 January 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 12 February 2017 in Washington DC

improvements were sufficient to enable the ANSF to lead tactical operations, thus it continues to depend heavily on US support.

V. Conclusion

While the advisory effort's institutional structures and processes allow room for improvement, critical shortcomings in the Afghan National Security Forces limit the potential for improvement in military effectiveness.

Afghans’ employment of worst institutional practices imposed major challenges that advising could not entirely overcome. By all accounts, the Afghan National Security forces are most lacking in leadership. In many cases, the Afghans can do tasks as instructed, but they are poor planners and cannot make combat decisions as an operation progresses. Extremely centralized command and non-merit based promotion system have made poor leadership an insurmountable challenge to date. The former stifles the development of leadership skills by withholding opportunities to practice them, and the latter can keep junior officers with good leadership skills or potential from contributing those skills in combat. Until these two institutional features change and leadership development along with them, the ANSF will probably stall at its current level. The Afghanistan case also demonstrates why the host military institutional structures and processes carry more weight in predicting the mission's outcome. A host military with major institutional impediments to organizational learning will struggle to absorb the advisors' lessons even at a basic level, as the Afghan mission shows. In phase II, the advisory effort significantly improved its institutional structures and processes across the board; it utilized a better reports and feedback cycle, leaders made regular field visits, and advisors did not command or perform tasks for their counterparts. The advisory effort did not reach best institutional practices, but it improved significantly. Unfortunately, large changes in the advisory program produced only a little improvement in combat effectiveness because Afghan worst institutional practices stayed consistently poor. As a result, Afghan units still struggled to run basic tactical operations because they lacked good field and company grade leaders. The ANSF's poor institutional structures and processes limited the degree to which combat effectiveness could improve. The ANSF would not have existed without the advisory mission or would have remained completely ineffective without continued advising. Although the advisory mission
was a net positive for the ANSF, improvement in combat effectiveness will probably remain minimal absent Afghan institutional changes.

Although the most significant barriers to success rest with the Afghans, a unified advisory group separate from the combat mission would have standardized the best advising practices that sometimes arose organically. Individual learning occurred frequently among advisors in Afghanistan, but no formal mechanism existed across the entire advisory effort to translate knowledge and insight gained by individual advisors to institutional lessons learned for any of the institutions that participated in the training mission. The organizational learning necessary for advisory success in Afghanistan would have required several services to devise their own systems for reviewing reports and codifying new SOPs, making field visits to aid this process, and stand up their own training programs. In theory, if every institution that participated in advising did this, mission success remains possible in spite of the duplication of effort. In Afghanistan, however, only some advisory teams employed good institutional structures and processes, particularly regarding the reports cycle; those teams reported greater unit cohesion, proficiency with weapons, and general tactical skill in their counterparts. A single authority to oversee the advisory mission could have extended these benefits to all teams.

Alternative Explanations: Three of the most commonly advanced explanations for why the Afghan advisory mission is failing are Afghan's underdevelopment and tribally oriented society make success impossible, and the US military’s failure to adopt an appropriate counterinsurgency strategy from the beginning of the war. This section will work to debunk all three as driving factors in the success or failure of the advisory mission.

First, Afghanistan's tribal culture and very locally oriented political structure presented perhaps the largest challenge to the advisory mission. Afghan soldiers were less willing to fight in parts of the country far from home where different ethnic groups lived. Their consensus-based style of decision-making meant that few Afghans were willing to act without an extended deliberation about the matter. Their traditionalism and deference to elders and those with authority had a similar effect. The importance of family and tribal ties encouraged corruption and non-meritocratic personnel actions. Afghans have also grown accustomed to
foreign powers coming and going over the years and are therefore probably less likely than other societies to embrace a new system when the old ways have served them well. These features are likely to limit prospects for success, but they do not preclude improvement. The most compelling evidence against this case is that phase II does reveal a degree of improvement in combat effectiveness, despite the fact that sectarian dynamics and the fundamental nature of Afghanistan’s society had not changed. Advisors integrated into the Afghan society and security forces, living in villages and getting to know people. The improved reports and feedback cycle enabled advisors in some units to learn how to deal with Afghans and these cultural features. Advisors who enjoyed a good reports cycle in their chains of command reported faring well on these dimensions. Similarly, the Iraq mission encountered many similar issues, and advisors felt that their reports enabled the advisory group to implement solutions to these problems.77

Others argue that Afghanistan’s underdevelopment make building a competent military impossible. This dissertation argues that a lack of education may not have caused the advisory mission’s failure in Afghanistan, but it definitely added to the challenge. High illiteracy and innumeracy forced advisors to spend valuable time on basic education. Without a basic understanding of science and technology, the Afghans could not hope to use and maintain the equipment the US gave them. For example, advisors had to teach the Afghans basic physics to dispel the notion that magic makes helicopters fly.78 The case of Afghanistan’s elite units illustrates why underdevelopment and insufficient education do not drive advising success or failure. Afghan commandos were consistently the highest performing units in no small part because they had education and literacy requirements, among others. Still, they suffered the same shortcomings in leadership as the regular ANA units did, even if they performed better on average. For example, commandos were no better able to exercise leadership at the tactical level than other Afghan forces, and they also sometimes scattered upon receiving fire. The Afghans are subject to the same institutional structures and processes that drive the leadership challenges, and therefore the commandos’ superior aptitude does not help them overcome the leadership problem that lies at the root of why the Afghans have not improved more.

77 Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone

78 Advisor interview 13 February 2017 by phone
Finally, the US failure to adapt to a counterinsurgency conflict could be responsible for the rocky advisory mission similar to the situation in Vietnam over 40 years earlier. To be sure, the US did not attempt a counterinsurgency or nation building strategy in earnest until 2009, and even resisted the formation of local police forces until 2006 in favor of a Western-style centralized security force. The propensity to discuss progress in terms of body counts reminiscent of the attrition-based approach used in Vietnam. Especially given the importance of getting and advising mission on the right track early on in a conflict before it loses the host country's confidence and political support at home, the late start on counterinsurgency was a costly mistake. However, I argue that this alone does not drive advisory missions. The most significant limitations to progress in the ANSF is the lack of leadership, especially at the tactical and operational levels, mostly driven by centralized command and promotions based on loyalty rather than merit and combat performance. Institutional limitations in the Afghan National Security Forces forestalled development beyond the ability to execute—but not lead—basic tactics; even after 8 years of fighting a counterinsurgency war, this is still the case.

**Conclusion** Despite dramatic improvements in the advisory effort between phases I and II, the ANSF’s improvement remained limited in any absolute sense. This demonstrates the relative importance of advisory group and host military institutional structures and processes. The advisory mission made large changes in 2010 that greatly improved the advisory mission’s institutional structures and processes; to be sure, the advisory effort did not approximate best practices. Still, the Afghans made only very incremental progress. Training up Afghanistan’s security forces to operate fully independently is unlikely to occur without significant changes in Afghan institutional structures and processes no matter what the advisory group does.
CHAPTER 6: ADVISING IN IRAQ

Despite the common perception of Iraq as a quagmire with little hope of redemption, the advisory mission and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) actually demonstrated impressive effectiveness and improvement at times. The mission began with incremental improvement in ISF capabilities, followed by a period of dramatic improvement in the wake of the Surge, followed by a sharp decline in combat capability culminating in a collapse of much of the Army in the face of the advancing Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), followed finally by a dramatic improvement and return to its previous height of effectiveness. What explains this variation in combat effectiveness and improvement over the course of the advisory mission?

Summary of the Argument

This dissertation argues that the outcomes of military advisory missions depend on the institutional structures and processes in place in both the host military and the US advisory group that either promote or inhibit organizational learning. Advisory missions in which both militaries have good institutional structures and processes to promote organizational learning are most likely to succeed in producing observable and lasting improvements in the host military's combat effectiveness. Similarly, advisory missions in which the host military and advisory group have institutional structural features that inhibit organizational learning are virtually certain to fail. Iraq falls between these two extremes both in terms of host military and US institutional structures and processes and Iraqi military effectiveness. Currently, the advisory effort's institutional structures and processes approach best practices, and the ISF’s institutional structures and processes are generally good, somewhere between middling and best practices. This illustrates that middling practices with regard to institutional structures and processes generates moderate improvement in combat capabilities.

Institutional processes and structures in both the advisory group and the host military are of paramount importance because of their ability to either promote or inhibit organizational learning. Both sides must learn well in order for the mission to succeed. The advisory group needs to correctly ascertain the host military's security needs, existing skills and weaknesses, and various customs and other cultural awareness that will enable advisors to establish a rapport with and earn the respect of their local counterparts. Building a solid working relationship is critical because without it the host military personnel will not act on advisors'
suggestions, which has historically been a problem with military advising. Specifically, the relevant institutional processes and structures for the advisory group are as follows:

Reports and field visits are the only reliable way for the advisory group leadership to ascertain the "ground truth." If leadership lacks a thorough understanding of the host military's problems and weaknesses, they will not be able to address them effectively. Establishing military school systems run by the host military is critical for institutionalizing the lessons that advisors teach, so that when advisors leave, the host military can continue teaching new recruits. Restricting advisors to an advisory (rather than command) role ensures that the Iraqi counterparts learn to perform independently. Finally, the advisory effort should be unified under a single organization that does not have direct combat responsibilities.

For a successful advisory mission, the host military must not promote or otherwise select officers based on political loyalty or factors other than merit. Similarly, it must not centralize command authority instead of delegating responsibilities to junior personnel. These factors are important because deficiencies on these fronts limit the host military's ability to react to changing circumstances quickly and develop the leadership skills among junior and mid-grade officers. It also must not impose restrictions on training exercises, limit information flows or direct intelligence assets internally.

I. Overview

The US advisory effort in Iraq began in late 2003 following the invasion earlier that year. The Americans disbanding the existing Iraqi Army and rebuilt it with the intention of leaving behind a military force that could take full responsibility for the country’s security. The first battalion of the new Iraqi recruits graduated from a 9-week basic training class in October 2003. The first year or so of the advisory mission was rough. Morale was low, advisors received little direction, and some Iraqi units flat out refused to fight. As phase I wore on, the advisory effort got itself together and began to operate relatively smoothly. By 2006, the insurgency had gained strength, and its efforts to kill or capture the families of Iraqi soldiers diminished the Army’s effectiveness.¹

¹ Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone
In order to address the sharp rise in insurgent violence, the US launched a 20,000 troop surge in 2007. The surge’s architect, Gen Petraeus took command of MNC-I then. In addition to the surge, Petraeus introduced a number of changes to the advisory program. These developments coincided with the Sunni Awakening; Sunni Iraqis originally tolerated al Qaida because of a shared anti-Shi’a sentiment, but by late 2006 they had grown dissatisfied with their fanaticism and violence. As a result, various Sunni groups became willing to partner with the US military. Both of these developments drove a drop in violence. By the end of this phase, the ISF had made remarkable strides.

On December 31, 2011 the last US troops withdrew from Iraq, marking the beginning of Phase II. This was a political decision- not because the ISF were judged capable of handling the security situation. Predictably, security in Iraq deteriorated, culminating in a complete collapse of the Iraqi Army when facing ISIS forces in the 2014 offensive. Phase III began in the summer of that year when ISIS’ major territorial gains prompted the US to reengage in the region by redeploying advisors. A new training mission began in earnest with both sides’ institutional structures and processes returning to their phase II state. These changes enabled the ISF to make tremendous progress in military effectiveness, even launching a successful campaign to retake territory in the Mosul area in late 2016 into early 2017.

I break up the US mission in Iraq into four phases: phase I is 2003 to the surge in mid 2007, phase II is 2007 through the US withdrawal in December 2011, phase III includes 2012 through the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) offensive in mid-2014, and phase IV includes the effort to drive back ISIS from 2014 to the present.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in four parts. The next section details each metric of advisory group institutional structures and processes over each phase of the mission. The second section does the same for host military institutional structures and processes, and the third ties together trends in both independent variables to explain variation in the dependent variable, changes in military effectiveness. The fourth and final section summarizes the findings of the Iraq case and refutes alternative arguments.
II. US Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes

This section tracks the advisory effort's performance across 5 measures of institutional structures and processes from 2003 to 2011, and again from 2014 to the present. Since the US had withdrawn in phase III, this section does not address advisory group institutional structures and processes during that time. Overall, the advisory effort's institutional practices were relatively good and conducive to learning; in phases II and IV, advisory group institutional structures and processes were close to ideal. The advisory effort’s institutional structures and processes remained virtually unchanged in phases II and IV with only one notable exception, so the following section offers details only for phases I and II.²

**Reports**. Early in the war, advisors submitted regular reports to their superiors detailing the status of their units’ progress, but never received responses or discussed how to forge working relationships with the Iraqis or challenges they faced. For example, Marine Corps and Army advisors filled out Transition Readiness Assessment (TRA) reports for each unit every month, detailing progress of their units and rating them on a four-point scale depending on the ability of each to operate independently. A level 4 unit was completely dependent, a level 3 unit was beginning to perform tasks on its own, a level 2 unit operated mostly independently, and a level 1 unit was completely independent.³ Developed in 2004, TRA measures the Iraqi units training and equipping status and operational effectiveness by considering personnel, command and control, training, logistics, equipment, and leadership. Military transition teams conducted these assessments at the battalion, brigade, and division levels.⁴ The TRA offers an easy-to-understand measure of the burden on advisors and a rough sense for when the advisory mission is complete. Although advisors dutifully filled out these reports, they did not receive feedback on their contents. One former advisor told me, "Let me

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² Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

³ Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone

know what you find. I’d really like to know what happened to all those reports that I wrote. Every advisor interviewed for this study who served during these years echoed the sentiment.

Advisors had varying degrees of success in building rapport with their counterparts. Many advisors recount making great attempts to bond with Iraqis during their free time by visiting Iraqi barracks, learning Arabic, swapping pictures, drinking tea, playing chess, and even eating sheep brains; “our Marines felt the motivations and frustrations of Iraqi enlisted men. They truly tied their hearts to the cause of Iraqi freedom.” Advisors found that these efforts boosted unit cohesion and esprit de corps.

Advisors also reported on other challenges they faced in training, infrastructures, finances, supplies, and the like. These reports helped gauge the Iraqis' problems, but did not address challenges advisors faced or how to do their job in terms of how to build good working relationships and getting Iraqi counterparts to act on their suggestions. "You were really left to your own devices on that," one advisor commented. Some advisors reported that casual conversations with other advisors about different approaches to working with the Iraqis were very useful in helping them persuade their counterparts to accept their suggestions. This transfer of knowledge relies on informal social and professional networks, and not all advisors have as good or easy access to more experienced advisors. Advisors who report success in Iraqis acting on their advice fell into 1 of 2 categories; they either had some prior experience (a liberal arts degree, cultural awareness through personal experiences) that they felt had been indispensable, or they had a good professional relationships with more experienced advisors who shared their knowledge. Advisors who did not fit either of these descriptions tended to experience much more frustration, having tried what they could think of to build good working relationships with their counterparts but did not succeed. Disseminating information and new SOPs on the subject would have offered all advisors the information and opportunities to build skill in connecting with

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5 Interview 7 February 2017, Washington DC


7 Tyson F Belanger, "The Cooperative Will of War: Lessons for Advising and Integrating the Iraqi Security Force," Marine Corps Gazette, January 2006; 90, 1; Advanced Technologies & Aerospace Database p 62; Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone

8 Advisor Interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC
Iraqi counterparts. Under the phase I arrangement, an advisor would do well if he happened to be exceptionally skilled in the area or have access to those who could transmit the relevant information.

**Phase II** With General Petraeus' arrival, MNC-I turned new attention to training and advising, resulting in improvements in the reports cycle. Advisors submitted reports containing a wider range of information, to include more details about the type of problems the advisors were facing and suggestions for how to improve them. A number of game-changing critical decisions came out of these reports. For example, the basic training program was condensed from 10 weeks of training 5 days a week and 8 hours a day to 5 weeks of training 7 days a week and 12 hours a day. This increased the training program's capacity to train more soldiers in less time and it gave these new soldiers more contact hours in less time. Similarly, units began to train for several weeks together before deployment as opposed to individuals coming together to form a unit immediately before deployment.\(^9\) This allowed men to bond and units to build trust and confidence in one another that enables unit cohesion to develop. Advisors who had trained with them would then embed in those units as they went into the field to continue dispensing suggestions, where previously advisors trained units that then deployed on their own.\(^10\)

In phase II, advisors did not necessarily receive feedback on how to work with Iraqis, but they attended a robust pre-deployment training that educated them on the subject for several weeks. The training material was updated as returning advisors observed changes in Iraq. Advisors role played interactions with Iraqi soldiers and civilians in a mock Iraqi village with American trainers of Iraqi origins. Advisors during this phase report good working relationships with advisors and felt that their training was indispensable in doing so.\(^11\)

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9 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

10 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

11 Advisor interview 17 March 2017 in Washington DC
Phase IV. As with most other institutional features of the advisory mission, the reports and feedback processes returned to their phase II practices.12

Field Visits In phase I advisors indicated that field visits by senior leaders did not occur, although they did receive visits from lower ranking leaders; the sergeant major made occasional visits. As a result, through 2006, a plurality of advisors felt that senior leaders lacked a thorough understanding of the situation on the ground. Advisors also note that the pace of combat operations made fields visits particularly challenging.13

Phase II Field visits took on additional importance from 2007 onward. For example, one senior leader of the training effort made a point to visit all 70 training sites in Iraq, meet with the advisors and Iraqi commanders there, and observe the Iraqis' performance first hand. He spent 10 hours weekly observing the Iraqis either in training, fighting alongside American units, or fighting with embedded advisors. He expressed that field visits were absolutely critical to truly understanding the Iraqis' strengths, weaknesses, and particular problems the advisory effort faced. Also beginning in 2007, MNSTC-I equipped all training centers across the country with technology to enable video conferences to enable virtual visits of remote locations that may be difficult or dangerous to reach by car.14 Field advisors also took note of frequent field visits during this time, and report that they felt that senior leaders had a good grasp of the Iraqis' development as well as particular problems that the advisors faced.

12 Advisor interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

13 Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 10 February 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC

14 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
Visits to training sites by senior leaders became commonplace again in phase IV. For example, the CJTF-OIR commander, General Stephen J. Townsend routinely visited training sites to observe border guards, Army soldiers, and police during training.\(^{15}\)

**Military School System** The training program for Iraqis began in an ad hoc manner, but by the outset of phase II in 2007, the advisory effort had made great strides in systematizing the training program, establishing a training machine, and turning over the majority of teaching and training responsibilities to the Iraqis.

**Phase I** Early in the Iraqi mission, training programs were mostly ad hoc. The Americans sent some leaders to the US for training, but most commonly new recruits to the Army and local police forces attended at 2-month school in Baghdad and Jordan for basic training. These schools were led by a mix of Americans and Iraqis. The Army frequently found that it needed many units for combat operations that were in training, so many units did not complete their initial training. The perceived need for Iraqi units to become operational immediately created incentives to skip or otherwise refuse training. Training also varied a lot by individual and by unit. For example, the Public Order Brigade received intensive training since it was originally a riot control force and had fewer preexisting skills.\(^{16}\)

**Phase II** By phase II, the advisory mission committed to teaching and training the Iraqi Army and Police in a systematic, rigorous manner and worked toward handing over these responsibilities to the Iraqis. The training program now involved 5 weeks of basic training, 2 weeks of training as a unit as well as staff training at the brigade and battalion levels, and then another two-week training in larger units. After this 9-week training course, units were sent out to the field together with embedded advisors. MNSTC-I tinkered with the training program to increase capacity and throughput to make sure that every single Iraqi recruit went through this program, and the advisory effort was successful on all counts. MNSTC-I also established a training center at

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\(^{16}\) Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone
every Iraqi division headquarters so that units could partake in a continuous training cycle to maintain their skills, similar to the US military. Previously, Iraqis had to travel to a centralized location to train, which was not only logistically difficult but frequently dangerous. By this point, there were 70 training sites in Iraq. In 2009 MNSTC-I began to phase out American trainers in favor of Iraqis, and by the end of that year, the majority of training classes and exercises were Iraqi-led.17

This dissertation argues that developing a military training system staffed mostly by host military soldiers is critical to institutionalizing the advisors’ teachings such that senior Iraqis can develop the skills of junior soldiers and continue doing so well after the advisory mission concludes. According to General James M. Dubik, Commander of MNSTC-I at the time, the stated purpose of these changes was to ensure that the US military was facilitating organizational learning in the Iraqi Security Forces, which would ultimately enable them to institutionalize their improvement for the long term.18

Phase IV Training virtually ceased during the US absence in phase III, and while the returning advisory mission remained much smaller than the one that departed several years prior, the training program remained very regimented and led primarily by Iraqis.19 Iraqis still train together as a unit and are ultimately deployed together, although the US has only four major training centers in Iraq currently.20 The US training program since 2014 bears resemblance to its previous one with a few additions to address changes in the Iraqi Army since 2011. The retraining program began in December 2014 and trained 5,000 Iraqi soldiers basic training in weapons and tactics for eight weeks. The new program emphasizes building leadership throughout the ranks and teaching soldiers how to complete a mission in the absence of their leader, since a collapse in the Army’s

17 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC


19 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

leadership spurred the collapse of four divisions six months prior. As occurred in the earlier iteration of the advisory mission, the US emphasized training Iraqis to train their own soldiers to eventually enable a transition to an Iraqi-led training effort. In phase II and again in phase IV, the US training program evolved into a rigorous and systematic process that succeeded in quickly developing Iraqis' combat capabilities.

**Advising vs Commanding** At all points during the advisory mission, advisors report that they were encouraged to give as much responsibility and control of operations to the Iraqis as possible. However, in practice advisors' forays into commanding operations and doing tasks themselves varied considerably over the course of the mission. Of course, the Iraqis' relative inexperience and lack of skill at the beginning of the mission necessitated more active involvement from advisors. Many advisors who served in this period believed that they took on more responsibility than was necessary, ultimately stunting the Iraqis' ability to learn key lessons and develop their skills, particularly in the later years of phase I. In phases II and IV, the advisory mission saw a distinct shift toward Iraqi control, and subsequently much better combat performance during those years.

**Phase I** The advisors’ approach in phase I was heavily unilateral, erring on the side of completing tasks for the Iraqis rather than offering them an opportunity to learn. Some advisors during this phase attempted to remain in an advisory role, but many felt that their hands-on involvement inhibited the Iraqis from learning to problem solve on their own. They observed that uncertainty scared their Iraqi counterparts; for example, they were more reluctant in the absence of close air support or when travelling through insurgent areas where they had previously been attacked. One advisor recounted a story in which his unit always encountered an IED at

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23 Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#2)
The advisors ascertained that a man in a house nearby had a switch that he used to set off bombs when he saw ISF forces coming. After the Americans neutralized the threat, the Iraqis were comfortable resuming their normal duties. This advisor noted that the Americans did not often involve the Iraqis in situations like this. He believed—as most advisors did—that instead of handing the problem for them to allow them to return to normal operations, advisors should have walked them through their thought process to build their confidence and their ability to handle future problems like this independently. Lacking confidence is a normal problem for a nascent military organization and inexperienced soldiers, and part of the advisors’ role is to build confidence among host military soldiers to enable them to take the lead on operations. Solving problems for them deprives the Iraqis of the opportunities to build skills and confidence, breeding dependence. Fortunately, Iraqis executed most combat tasks themselves with American support.

**Phase II** Beginning in late 2007, the advisory effort began to place a much greater importance on delegating as many responsibilities and tasks to the Iraqis as possible with minimal guidance as possible. Advisors and leaders describe their interactions with Iraqis as collaborative. They would bring to attention problems observed in Iraqi performance and allow the Iraqis to develop a solution to the problem in order to help them develop the independent capability to do so.

**Phase IV** Advisors in Iraq currently have done a good job restricting their activities to advising rather than exercising direct control over the Iraqi units, which has enabled Iraqi units to develop their own leadership

24 Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC


26 Advisor interview in Washington DC 22 February 2017

27 Advisor interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

28 Advisor interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 17 March in Washington DC
abilities and flourish. The comparatively small number of advisors helps keep advisors in a strictly advisory capacity, as there are simply not enough American troops in Iraq currently to play a dominant role in running the war. As of early 2017 about 5,000 US troops were deployed to Iraq as embedded advisors, compared to 170,000 at the height of the war. The advisory effort also took particular steps that led to this outcome. For example, since 2014 advisors have been assigned to higher headquarters units' keeps Americans out of imminent danger and the war a primarily Iraqi affair.

The only noteworthy change to the advisory program between phases II and IV is that when advisors returned in late 2014, the mission became narrowly focused on increasing combat capabilities alone rather than also building up the capacity of support functions and systems that support combat operations. This amounted to advisors taking on much more control of these functions that Iraqis would previously been encouraged to do. Currently, advisors handle much of the logistics, intelligence, and similar functions to support combat operations. This does not negatively impact the Iraqis’ combat capabilities or improvement therein currently, but it will impact the ISF’s combat effectiveness after the US fully withdraws all advisors. Well-functioning combat support functions are the linchpin of and independently capable host military. A full investigation of building combat support functions and the civilian institutions that support combat operations lies outside the scope of this study, but senior military leaders assess that the Iraqis will not be able to independently sustain their current level of combat effectiveness given the current advisory program. This is because the much smaller advisory program in Iraq focuses entirely on advising on combat operations, but is no longer working toward building the indigenous capacity to support combat operations.

**Organizational Unity** Advisors were overseen by Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), established in May 2004, and training was handled by a separate subordinate command, the Multi-National Security Transition


31 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), established in 2005. During phase I, these two organizations functioned separately for the most part, as many regarded security in Iraq and the training and development of the Iraqi Security forces as two separate pursuits.

**Phase II** Beginning in 2007, the advisory mission saw a shift in its organization; most importantly, what were previously separate lines of effort under MNC-I and MNSTC-I redefined their approach and created a joint plan for security in Iraq and training the ISF. While they remained organizationally separate, they worked closely together and shared information, essentially functioning as a single entity in terms of learning. They began to work much more closely together in defining priorities and a way forward. Unlike in phase I, MNSTC-I ended its separate campaign plan and had no separate priorities. The training program aligned itself with then MNC-I Commander Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno's plan, and both commands oriented toward building the Iraqis' capacity to eventually enable a transition to Iraqi control. Advisors' reports were circulated freely, and joint meetings were held frequently to review these reports and make decisions on the way forward. Advisors did not have combat responsibilities apart from accompanying and advising Iraqi units in combat. Any given area had two overlapping militaries operating in and responsible for it: US combat troops and Iraqi units with embedded advisors. The embedded advisors did not interact with US combat units in the area except when accompanying their Iraqi units when conducting operations with US combat troops.

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32 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 16 March 2017 in Washington DC


34 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 16 March 2017 in Washington DC


36 Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

37 Advisor interview 16 March 2017 in Washington DC
Phase IV. Unsurprisingly, the command structure of US advisors in Iraq has changed since returning in 2014. Neither MNC-I nor MNSTC-I exist anymore. Yet the critical features of the mission as they pertain to Organizational Unity remain the same. All advisors are subordinate to the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), and as the current mission is restricted in scope to training and advising, advisors have no combat or other responsibilities in country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Group Indicators</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions, feedback, or reports sought from advisors in the field</td>
<td>Average Practices</td>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>Best Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of advisors' feedback to discern key lessons, modify SOPs, and disseminate those SOPs and new knowledge back to advisors in the field</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to and investigations of units in the field by senior advisory group leadership</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of a military school system staffed by at least some host military officers so that the new lessons become institutional knowledge</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors offered instruction and advice rather than assuming command responsibilities</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Unity</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
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Figure 6.1: Advisory Group Institutional Structures and Processes

Conclusion. The US advisory effort improved tremendously over the first two phases, and by the time the US withdrew from Iraq in 2011 it employed best practices with regards to institutional structures and processes. It even succeeded in persuading the Iraqis to improve some of their institutional structures and processes. The advisory mission withdrew prematurely for political rather than evidence-based reasons. When advisors returned in limited numbers after the ISF’s collapse during ISIS’ 2014 advance, they replicated the majority of MNC-I’s successful institutional structures and processes, although the mission remained limited in scope and advisors lean toward executing combat support functions for the Iraqis rather than building indigenous capacity.
III. Iraqi Institutional Structures and Processes

Iraqi institutional structures and processes varied widely during the war, but the ISF always struggled with centralized command, albeit to varying degrees. In phase I the ISF experienced major deficiencies in both merit-based promotions and centralized command, both of which improved through phase II. At the height of the ISF's combat performance, the Iraqis had developed a capable and professional officer corps through merit-based promotions, but they still struggled somewhat to delegate responsibility where appropriate. This all changed in phase III when political changes resulted in deeply problematic institutional practices on all four metrics: officers were promoted solely on loyalty, the prime minister circumvented the military's chain of command, all training and professional development efforts stopped, and the prime minister directed the country's intelligence organizations inward rather than on the insurgents. Such severe deficiencies in the ISF's institutional structures and processes undid its earlier progress, and multiple divisions collapsed. From December 2014 onward, US advisors returned and the ISF returned to its formerly good institutional structures and processes, resulting in a return to phase II level combat effectiveness.

Promotions As is typical in many militaries of developing countries, selection based on personal or political patronage appears to have been Iraq's default setting. Nevertheless, advisors had varying degrees of success in persuading the Iraqis to shift toward a more merit-based system. As both phase II and IV wore on, the ISF approached a professionalized military force that rewarded good performance with responsibility and opportunity. Phase III saw a complete reversal of the good institutional processes in place to support a professionalized officer corps, and phase I lay somewhere between the two extremes. Unsurprisingly, changes in the ISF's combat performance follow this pattern.

Phase I In the early years of the mission, personnel decisions for officers were made based on a combination of factors: patronage, buying one’s position, and merit, but mostly patronage. Advisors attempted to reward good performance when they observed it through offering awards, which was the only real reward for effort
that Iraqi officers consistently received. Promotions and assignments for enlisted Iraqis were mostly merit-based.\textsuperscript{38}

Phase II Phase II saw a positive change in the promotion and selection processes in the Iraqi Army. In mid-2007, Iraqi officers were selected for assignments or promoted based on a combination of merit and patronage. By December 2007, the Army began to attend to promotion matters much more closely. Even without prodding by American counterparts, the head of the Federal Police fired two division commanders and many brigade and battalion commanders, instead promoting individuals known to be effective leaders. They also began hiring both Sunni and Shi’a individuals.\textsuperscript{39} Senior US leaders also received a lot of feedback from advisors about which Iraqi officers were competent and should be promoted and assigned to professional development activities and which were corrupt or inept and should be relieved. One senior leader stated that the advisory effort was 100\% successful in persuading Iraqi commanders to remove incompetent leaders, but as time went on, Iraqi leaders increasingly did so on their own without prompting by US counterparts. By 2010, Iraqi officers were selected almost exclusively based on combat performance and other metrics of merit; by this point, the Iraqi officers were very good, which enabled the dramatic increase in combat effectiveness that occurred during this period.\textsuperscript{40} The ISF also changed how it recruited in late 2007. It stopped picking up willing men off the street and giving them a gun and a uniform, instead holding new recruits to a higher standard and requiring that they all go through the training program first.\textsuperscript{41} This change helped professionalize the force.

Phase III Following the withdrawal of US combat troops in 2011, then Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki the Iraq’s professional commanders with political appointees from his own sect. The officers he dismissed

\textsuperscript{38} Advisor Interview 10 March 2017 by phone

\textsuperscript{39} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

\textsuperscript{40} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

\textsuperscript{41} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
had been trained and promoted under the supervision of US advisors. The Army effectively traded
competent and experienced commanders for incompetent ones, and unsurprisingly its combat effectiveness
fell as a result.

**Phase IV** The 2014 Army collapse prompted Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to do whatever was necessary to
reclaim territory from ISIS. Still, it took some time for changes in officer selection and assignments to be
consistently implemented. A couple of months after the retraining mission began, Iraqi officers reported that
corruption remained a problem. One Iraqi First Lieutenant, Mohammed Hashim Mohammed, commented
that “even today you have to pay to be promoted. But we are trying to correct the mistakes that have
happened.” Professional officers were reinstated to command combat units, and al-Abadi invited the US
military to return to retrain the ISF, and by early 2017 the officer corps comprised mostly of professional,
combat-proven officers.

**Command Arrangements.** Delegating decision-making responsibilities is a struggle for most militaries of
developing countries, and Iraq is no different. The Iraqi Army's centralization of command varied with the
advisors' ability to persuade the Iraqis to delegate authority and decentralize their command arrangements.
Command arrangements improved in phase II as the Iraqis gained confidence in their abilities and advisors
were able to push them to decentralize, but upon the advisors’ departure, Maliki made a number of
institutional changes, including centralizing command. The ISF’s combat effectiveness varied as expected
with its command arrangements.

**Phase I** Early in the conflict the ISF’s command arrangements were very centralized to the extent that in some
cases, junior officers were not given work to do. Most advisors observed that commanders felt that delegating

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42 Jim Michaels, "How the U.S.-led coalition transformed Iraq's army into a fighting force," USA Today, October 19,
iraq-military-islamic-state/92415314/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/10/19/united-states-led-coalition-
iraq-military-islamic-state/92415314/).

43 Loveday Morris, "The U.S. Military is Back Training Troops in Iraq, but It's a Little Different This Time," The
Washington Post, January 08, 2015, , accessed May 11, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-us-military-
is-back-training-troops-in-iraq-but-its-a-little-different-this-time/2015/01/08/11b9aa58-95f2-11e4-8385-
866293322c2f_story.html?utm_term=.1766a060ac06](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-us-military-
is-back-training-troops-in-iraq-but-its-a-little-different-this-time/2015/01/08/11b9aa58-95f2-11e4-8385-
866293322c2f_story.html?utm_term=.1766a060ac06).

44 Jim Michaels, "How the U.S.-led coalition transformed Iraq's army into a fighting force," USA Today, October 19,
iraq-military-islamic-state/92415314/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/10/19/united-states-led-coalition-
iraq-military-islamic-state/92415314/); Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
tasks was tantamount to admitting that there was a problem or that he was unable to do the task himself, and Advisors largely assessed that this stemmed from cultural factors and traditionalism. Iraqi commanders understood decentralization and its benefits, but often told advisors that they just did not feel like they could do it.⁴⁵

Phase II Advisors and senior leadership both noted that the US successfully encouraged Iraqis to delegate authority during from about mid 2008 onward.⁴⁶ Centralized command arrangements remained the only area with which the Iraqis really struggled during this phase, but they did make tremendous progress in the area.

Phase III Then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki meddled in command arrangements that compounded the ISF’s problems during this period. For example, he bypassed the military chain of command by directly calling mid-level officers and giving them orders on their cell phones, ordering the arrest of particular individuals or particular military actions.⁴⁷

Phase IV When Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi took office in 2014 and the US advisory mission returned, the ISF returned to its previously good command arrangements.⁴⁸

Information Management Advisors and other sources indicate that poor information management practices like holding information hostage rather than sharing knowledge, skills, or intelligence with others did not occur at any point during the advisory mission. That changed briefly in phase III during the absence of US advisors from the country. Maliki distrusted Iraq’s armed forces so he kept a close eye on them, targeting Army officers who spoke out against corruption or any other aspect of his sectarian agenda.⁴⁹ Upon

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⁴⁵ Advisor interview 5 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC

⁴⁶ Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC.


⁴⁸ Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

Maliki’s departure from office, al-Abadi discontinued these practices, invited advisors to return, and worked to re-professionalize the ISF.

**Training Restrictions** In phase I, advisors report that Iraqis were generally receptive to training exercises, and no institutional opposition to it existed in the Iraqi Army. One advisor noted that his units were supportive of whatever training they suggested as long as it did not conflict with other personally necessary activities, like ferrying their paychecks home to their families, which was necessary in the absence of functioning banks. The Iraqis were eager to learn relevant training and leadership skills for the officers. Similarly, they were pragmatic in orientation and preferred to learn by doing.\(^{50}\)

**Phase II** From 2007 onward, Iraqis enthusiastically participated in all training activities that the advisors prescribed. By this point, both the Iraqis and Americans were hopeful about Iraq's prospects and believed they could win the war, which buoyed their optimism and willingness to follow the training regimen.\(^{51}\) Moreover, the advisory effort found a way to circumvent issues caused by Iraqis returning home frequently and taking what the US deemed to be excessive leave; they adjusted the training output to 120% of the manning levels necessary to fill Iraqi units.\(^{52}\) This enabled an increase in the Iraqi units available to conduct combat operations and enabled the Iraqis to take the leave they were accustomed to, which was previously the only source of resistance to training.

\(^{50}\) Advisor interview by phone 5 February 2017

\(^{51}\) Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

\(^{52}\) Dubik, "Building Security Forces and Ministerial Capacity: Iraq as a Primer" p5
Phase III  After the advisors left, the ISF had virtually stopped all training efforts and equipment maintenance.\textsuperscript{53} Similarly, al-Maliki put a stop to all professionalization efforts.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, the ISF’s combat capabilities dwindled and its equipment fell into disrepair.

Phase IV  In Phase IV the ISF reverted to its earlier policy of eagerly accepting whatever training the advisors suggested. They are dedicated to and focused on the mission, and the advisors did not encounter any resistance or reluctance to implement their proposed training program.\textsuperscript{55} The Iraqis trained diligently in this period.\textsuperscript{56}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host Military Indicators</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military develop competent leadership by promoting and firing officers based on merit and performance rather than political loyalty?</td>
<td>Average Practices</td>
<td>Average/Best Practices</td>
<td>Worst practices</td>
<td>Average/Best Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military restrict training exercises?</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the host military centralize command arrangements, leaving junior officers little to no autonomy in the field?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Average/Best Practices</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Average/Best Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is critical information held hostage for power instead of being freely shared both horizontally and vertically?</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Best</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Figure 6.2} Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes

IV. Military Effectiveness  
The Iraqi Security Forces' military effectiveness varied widely during the course of this conflict. The United States disbanded the existing Iraqi Army when it invaded in 2003 and sought to rebuild it. Thus, the advisory mission began at level "0," and made it to the upper limit of level "1" by the end of phase 1. In phase I, the Iraqis grew to be proficient at basic tactics, although unable to run simple operations independently. By


\textsuperscript{54} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

\textsuperscript{55} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC

\textsuperscript{56} Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC
the end of phase II, the ISF could execute basic tactical operations independently and demonstrated some ability to conduct complex operations, though not independently (level 2).

After the US withdrawal in 2011, these gains vanished as ISIS steadily gained ground, culminating in the Iraqi Security Forces fleeing the battlefield without even attempting to fight in 2014. The ISF collapse was mostly due to changes Maliki made to its institutional structures and processes. When advisors left in 2010, the ISF ran its own tactical operations and needed only limited support (namely air strikes). Maliki completely changed the ISF’s institutional structures and processes, taking them from relatively good with only a couple of areas for improvement to worst practices.

Since late 2014, advisors have returned and key institutional structures and processes on both sides have changed, yielding a military capable of running a 100,000 man ground campaign largely on its own. the ISF’s performance has risen dramatically to the point that it demonstrates significant capability in complex operations. Still, I rate them in phase IV as moderate improvement (level "2") because US-led air strikes played such a definitive role in the recent Mosul campaign. Despite numerous challenges, the ISF and its advisors have made impressive progress in rebuilding and retraining the Iraqi Army. CJTF-OIR commander Lt Gen Stephen J. Townsend commented that "today they're conducting a multiple-division combined arms assault on a major city 400 kilometers from their capital. This operation would challenge any army."57

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness Level</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1 minimal improvement ISF forces generally stood and fought together even in difficult circumstances. Overall, they made tactical progress too, but most units still depended on US direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>2 moderate improvement Many units were capable of conducting operations independently and demonstrated competence in complex operations. Still, they still depended on advisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>0 completely ineffective Dropped weapons and ran, didn't attempt to fight. Mounted little to no resistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>2 Moderate improvement Many units were capable of conducting operations independently and demonstrated competence in complex operations. Still, they still depended on advisors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3: ISF Change in Combat Effectiveness over Time

**Unit Cohesion** Early in the war, most Iraqi soldiers were quite motivated and units fought cohesively until insurgents compromised them and began threatening soldiers' families starting in 2006 and later. One advisor recalled that insurgents kidnapped the family of his Iraqi unit's commander and sent videos to him. This compromised soldiers' focus and unit cohesion even though they were otherwise very motivated.\(^{58}\) Most advisors reported that the Iraqis they advised did their best to be proactive with regard to the enemy and were quite willing to take initiative in operations, especially in the advisor's absence.\(^{59}\) When Iraqis were confident in their abilities, advisors report that they did not need to push their counterparts to take responsibility and initiative much. However, Iraqis remained reluctant to conduct operations when they knew insurgents were in the area and they felt the enemy had the upper hand.\(^{60}\)

Advisors tried a number of different things to mitigate unit cohesion problems, including giving senior officers personnel security detachments at their homes and encouraging tribal leaders to support young men in their communities joining the local police, and the tribe would protect their families. This approach worked somewhat, but ultimately its success rested on the tribes being strong enough to fend off insurgents. As insurgents grew in strength, this became untenable. By 2006, insurgents attacked the tribes directly and began assassinating their leaders.\(^{61}\) Thus, unit cohesion began to erode by 2006, a problem which would not be solved until the surge and subsequent developments in the ISF’s capacity in 2007.

**Phase II** A combination of the Surge and the Sunni Awakening resulted in a considerably weakened insurgency, and a new counterinsurgency focused approach that emphasized training and advising resulted in a more capable ISF that had high morale and fought aggressively. Advisors relay that Iraqis demonstrated good cohesion; even when they experienced unexpected circumstances like enemy ambushes, they fought

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\(^{58}\) Advisory interview by phone 5 February 2017

\(^{59}\) Advisor interview in Washington DC 22 February 2017

\(^{60}\) Advisor interview in Washington DC 22 February 2017

\(^{61}\) Advisor interview by phone 5 February 2017
well together and were able to handle the operation without relying on US direction. One advisor recounted a story in which his unit rehearsed an operation multiple times and talked through various contingency plans. During the actual operation the truck broke down upon reaching a village, but the Iraqis remained unfazed and set up the outer cordon as they were supposed to, even though they had not rehearsed that particular contingency plan. The advisor described watching his unit stick together and complex the operation under unfamiliar circumstances as his proudest moment. In phase I, this is the type of scenario in which Iraqis demonstrated reluctance and apprehension, but that was no longer the case.

**Phase III** The ISF’s dismal performance during the ISIS advance in 2014 underscored how precipitously their capabilities had dropped as a result of changes in institutional structures and processes. On June 11, Tikrit fell to ISIS despite the relative ease of defending the city; a single highway running through the city center offers the only practical means of entry. Instead of positioning even just a few armored vehicles outside with limited air support, Baghdad mounted no response and the Iraqi Army soldiers abandoned their posts and fled. The city fell in mere hours. Around the same time, Iraqi Army and police forces dropped their guns and attempted to flee before being overrun by militants in Iraq's second largest city. The ISF demonstrated the lowest level of unit cohesion in phase III- not even attempting to fight. The Iraqi Army was not able to maintain its prior level of effectiveness in the absence of US advisors because of changes in institutional structures and processes within the Army. In particular, the stoppage in training and professional development, meddling in command arrangements, and promoting political supporters instead of commanders with a track records of success.

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62 Advisor interview 31 March 2017 by phone; Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone

63 Advisor interview 10 March 2017 by phone (#1)


Unit cohesion improved tremendously in recent years. Iraqi Private Najah Hassan Kathim commented that his fellow basic trainees “are close to my heart, more than my own brothers. We’ve had enough time to train together, we know each other and we’ll go to battle together.” These bonds within units have proven effective in helping the ISF stand and fight in the face of fierce resistance from ISIS militants as the government forces fought to recapture Ramadi, Tikrit, and now Mosul. Iraqis also fared well on the battlefield; members of sniper units talk about endurance as a key challenge of sniper operations; “sometimes we don’t eat, but you forget your hunger,” one said.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Cohesion</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units stand and fight when they encounter the enemy?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the rates of surrender and desertion?</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do soldiers follow orders under fire?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the severity of enemy attacks or the privations of the battlefield environment effect the answers to the above?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.4: ISF Unit Cohesion Over Time**

**Basic Tactics** The ISF began phase I with no proficiency in basic tactics but steadily improved in the first few years of the mission. The Iraqis achieved proficiency at this level as phase II wore on and conducted many operations independently, and reached that level again in early 2017 in phase IV.

**Phase I** Iraqis made early progress in basic tactical proficiency, but most units did not become able to conduct basic tactical operations independently. For example, in 2004, CAP India conducted IED sweeps along the battalion's avenue of approach and provided rear area security. The ING also participated in searching and

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raiding homes in Fallujah, and the advisors slowly reduced their presence on patrols over time.\textsuperscript{68} Still, this level of effectiveness crumbled when the Iraqis did not feel in control of the situation. One advisor observed that uncertainty scared them, their demonstrated capabilities dropped precipitously. For example, when the Iraqis repeatedly encountered IEDs in a particular area and knew that insurgents were near, they frequently became disorganized rather than seeking out the insurgents. When they did engage, however, advisors recount that the Iraqis did a good job minimizing collateral damage.\textsuperscript{69} Individual advisors overwhelmingly indicated that they were pleased with the incremental progress their units had made in basic tactics during phase I.

\textit{Phase II} Advisors serving during this period spoke very highly of the ISF’s tactical abilities. The Iraqis learned quickly and virtually all advisors with whom I spoke recount that their units could independently execute patrols, raids, and cordon and search operations. The use of excessive firepower or violence against civilians was rare.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{Phase III} By the phase III, the ISF was not capable of maintaining basic unit cohesion and therefore demonstrated an absence of proficiency in basic tactics as they abandoned their posts and fled the battlefield, only to be executed by the invading militants.

\textit{Phase IV} By early 2017, the ISF built a solid counter-sniper capability that they leveraged in the ongoing battle for Mosul. Sniper units advance behind Iraqi troops, changing their position so as to not be seen by the enemy.\textsuperscript{71} They consistently hit Islamic state fighters and sniper, forcing units to scatter.\textsuperscript{72} The Iraqis have also

\textsuperscript{68} Zachary Iscol, "CAP India: Patience and Leadership Result in Successful CAP Operations." \textit{Marine Corps Gazette}; January 2006; 90, 1; Advanced Technologies & Aerospace Database, 55-61. p 56

\textsuperscript{69} Advisor interview in Washington DC 22 February 2017

\textsuperscript{70} Advisor interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 22 February 2017 in Washington DC; Advisor interview 30 March 2017 in Washington DC


done well in limiting civilian casualties. Most civilian casualties in Mosul are collateral damage from air strikes, not a relentless firepower directed at the civilians as was the case in Vietnam and Afghanistan to a lesser extent.\textsuperscript{73} The smoking gun evidence of the ISF’s tactical proficiency in recent battles lies in their success (albeit incomplete) in executing complex operations. The ISF carries out most of its combat tasks entirely on its own and has succeeded in running a ground campaign that is well on its way to recapturing Mosul from ISIS fighters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Tactics</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do units handle their weapons and equipment properly?</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do units employ indiscriminant violence against civilians and rely heavily on overwhelming firepower?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the unit perform convoys, regular reconnaissance, raids, cordon and search operations, and patrols?</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can units execute area defense operations to secure the population?</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6.5: ISF Proficiency in Basic Tactics Over Time*

**Complex Operations** Iraqi units did not display competence in complex operations until phase II, although they still relied heavily on the Americans for coordination across units and services. To date, the Iraqi Security Forces have not yet demonstrated the ability to perform complex operations independently. In the initial years of the advisory effort, advisors were responsible for anything requiring coordination between units, so the Iraqis did not begin to build competence in this area until much later.\textsuperscript{74}

**Phase II** By the end of 2009, US military leaders assessed that the Iraqis were approaching the ability to operate independently of US advisors and combat troops, although they still lacked proficiency in indirect fire and coordinating air strikes, which the embedded advisors continued to do. Both the Iraqis and Americans at the time were convinced that they would win the war and in the not terribly distant future gain the ability to

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\textsuperscript{74} Advisor interview 21 February 2017 in Washington DC.
fight independently. They simply needed more time to continue building capacity in support functions like logistics and intelligence operations, a task at which advisors were hard at work.\textsuperscript{75}

**Phase III** The ISF demonstrated no unit cohesion or proficiency in basic tactics, so their inability to carry out complex operations goes without saying.

**Phase IV** Since the beginning of the operation to retake Mosul in October 2016, the ISF has recaptured nearly 2500 square miles in the eastern and western sectors of the city. As of late March 2017, the ISF continued clearing operations along the Tigris River and other locations against stiff ISIS resistance, and the Federal police coordinated its defensive operations with the Army and the Iraqi counterterrorism service.\textsuperscript{76} In this campaign, the ISF quickly penetrated concrete barriers, roadside bombs, and other obstacles that ISIS placed to slow the government forces’ advance, rebuffed multiple ISIS counterattacks, and disrupted the militants’ use of drones to conduct reconnaissance of Iraqi positions. Airstrikes aside, the ground campaign has been almost entirely run by the Iraqis. Advisors generally avoid direct combat.\textsuperscript{77} To be sure, the ISF’s performance in 2015 and early 2016 left a lot to be desired in some instances. Retraining takes some time, and within two years the US military successfully retrained the Iraqis to conduct much of the ground war on their own in the face of stiff resistance and challenging circumstances.

Despite impressive progress, the ISF has not yet gained the capability to operate independently of US advisors. Coalition air and artillery strikes have played a critical role in the ISF’s recent success in Mosul, but embedded advisors bear responsibility for calling them in.\textsuperscript{78} Still, the Iraqis deserve great credit for their relative success conducting ground operations.

\textsuperscript{75} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC.


The ISF made an incredible turnaround since 2014. It went from complete collapse that summer into an effective fighting force that retook western Mosul in March 2017. Moreover, US advising efforts prior to the withdrawal in 2011 focused on counterinsurgency whereas the ISF fought a conventional war against ISIS from 2014 onward. In less than three years’ time, the ISF went from completely ineffectual to a cohesive fighting force capable of leading and executing successful operations to reclaim territory, which it had not squandered.

“...squander its victory.
previously been trained to do. Since the Iraqis still rely on US troops to call in air strikes and therefore cannot execute complex operations on their own, I rank them at “moderate” improvement.

V. Conclusion

Iraq is not a place one would expect success in military advising. Advising in Iraq has many of the same challenges it does in Afghanistan: sectarian strife, a relatively traditional and hierarchical society in which a chosen few make decisions of any consequence. Even so, the advisory mission in Iraq has at various points been lacking and wildly successful. In fact, some senior Army leaders assess that if the US had continued training as it had been during phase II rather than withdrawing at the close of 2011, it would have eventually developed a modern and independently capable military. The mission simply needed more time.

*Alternative Explanations* One major alternative explanation for the advisory mission's success rests on the impact of individual leaders. Fortunes in Iraq began to turn in 2007 with the appointments of General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker who ushered in a new approach to the war. Similarly, Iraqi military effectiveness declined with Nouri al-Maliki’s changes to the ISF’s institutional processes and improved yet again when his successor, Haider al-Abadi both reversed the changes Maliki made to the ISF and invited the United States back to retrain and advise. Other counterarguments include that the mission succeeded because both sides were committed to the mission, or that it failed due to cultural and societal problems.

First, of course leaders are important and exert considerable influence on the mission's direction. However, the longer-lasting power of institutions to limit options and incentivize behavior long after a leader departs is more important in extended advisory missions that may last a decade or more. Petraeus overhauled the US approach to both combat operations and advising in Iraq for the better, but he left Iraq in the fall of 2008. The changes made to the institutional structures and processes of the advisory effort enabled the advisors to continue successfully developing the ISF well after his departure. In fact, many aspects of CJTF-OIR's institutional structures and processes are holdovers from the earlier mission; advisors train Iraqis as units and deploy an embedded advisor with them, and work with Iraqis collaboratively to build their problem

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80 Interview March 15 2017 in Washington DC
solving skills rather than telling them what to do. The difference between the previous advisory effort and the current one is one of scale, not substance.\textsuperscript{81}

The advisory mission’s dedication of personnel and resources to Iraq could have driven mission success. However, a small advisory presence with many fewer resources than the US previously contributed through 2010 raised the Army to its previous high of competence in less than two years. The Iraqis were no more or less highly motivated than they were in phase I, and the US contributed even fewer personnel and less resources. Under these conditions the ISF achieved its greatest degree of improvement in very little time.

Third, Iraq's Middle Eastern and Islamic culture has been cited as an explanation for the ISF’s poor performance. Both variations in key variables within the US advisory mission to Iraq as well as a comparison to the mission in Afghanistan suggest that cultural factors do not drive the outcomes of advisory missions. Culture remains relatively constant over a 10 to 15-year period, and the key factors of Iraqi culture that may negatively impact an advisory mission remain as true today as they were in 2003. It is still a relatively traditional, tribally oriented society that values hierarchy and defers to authority. For example, Iraqis tend to defer to authority and are reluctant to take initiative without a superior’s approval, which creates challenges for developing junior leaders and a decentralized command structure. By the end of phase II, however, advisors successfully persuaded the ISF to delegate, enabling combat success. Cultural factors may well have created challenges for the advisory effort, but the ISF did perform remarkably well at various points, including from 2008 through 2011 and again from 2016-2017. Cultural arguments that predict failure cannot account for the fluctuations in Iraq's combat performance, especially Iraq's good military performance and rapid improvement since December 2014.

Conclusion It is peculiar that two concurrent advisory missions implemented in countries with similar cultural and societal features (Iraq and Afghanistan) had such different outcomes. The ISF saw tremendous improvement in combat effectiveness, whereas the Afghans made only small improvements in cohesion and to a lesser extent basic tactics. There are two apparent causes for this. First, all advisors interviewed who served in both countries observed that the Iraqis were more receptive to advise. The ISF’s comparatively

\textsuperscript{81} Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
good institutional structures and processes relatively to those of the Afghans enabled the Iraqis to implement advisors’ teachings and develop capabilities accordingly. Where the Afghans exhibited worst institutional practices, the ISF never restricted training or used information as leverage, and problems with centralized command and unmeritocratic promotions improved over time (excepting the phase III interlude). The ISF’s superior institutional structures and processes made it more receptive to advisors lessons than the ANA was, and therefore enabled greater improvement in combat effectiveness.

The second cause lies in differing institutional structures and processes on the advisory group side. Where the Iraq mission reached best institutional practices by phase 2, the Afghanistan mission’s institutional structures and processes did not evolve nearly as much. After 2010, it no longer employed worst practices, but remained a long way off from best practices on every metric. A superior advisory group institution in Iraq enabled advisors to quickly ascertain Iraq’s security needs and how to forge good working relationships with Iraqi counterparts such that they would act on advisors’ suggestions. In contrast, the Afghanistan mission misread the country’s security needs prior to 2010 and had only limited success in getting the Afghans to act on advice.

The Iraq mission comes close to a modern day advising success story. Like the mission to Korea, advisors trained the ISF to competently perform both counterinsurgency and conventional operations and successfully retrained the Army after its collapse. Virtually all advisors interviewed for this study were optimistic about the ISF’s prospects, believing that it could become completely independent of US support if the mission continued along the path of phases II and IV.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Training, advising, and transforming a nascent foreign military into a capable fighting force is an unequivocally herculean task with many potential complications and few paths to success. It is unsurprising that the majority of advisory missions fail; for every Korea, there are several Vietnams or Afghanistans. The challenges that some of these advisory groups faced were so great that one wonders whether some advisory missions are simply unwinnable. Some lucky missions do succeed, and most experience a wide range of success and failure along the way. What accounts for this variation?

I. Summary of Findings

This dissertation looked to the institutional structures and processes in place in both the advisory group and the host military to explain variation in host military combat effectiveness as a result of advisory missions. Advisory mission outcomes vary with the degree to which both sides employ best practices for institutional structures and processes. This section first summarizes the institutional structures and processes on each side that drive mission outcomes, and then link the interaction of those two independent variables to the dependent variable—change in combat effectiveness.

Advisory Group: The advisory group must ascertain what the host military’s security needs are and how to meet them while working within the local cultural and political context. There are five key structures and processes to accomplish that goal. First, the advisory group must utilize a reports and feedback cycle wherein advisors write reports about their units’ development and other problems they encounter, the advisory group leadership must review those reports and codify them into lessons learned, and finally those best practices must be disseminated as new policies and SOPs. Second, senior leaders must regularly visit units in the field to ascertain the “ground truth.” Third, the advisory mission must establish a military school system that aims to hand over teaching responsibilities to the host military to institutionalize knowledge. Fourth, the advisors must remain in an advisory rather than command role as much as possible. And finally, the advisory effort must be united under a single organization with advisors focusing on advising and training rather than diverting attention to combat responsibilities.
**Host Military** The host military must remove institutional barriers to success. First, it must not promote or otherwise select officers based on political loyalty or factors other than merit. Second, it must not centralize command authority instead of delegating responsibilities to junior personnel or create multiple overlapping chains of command. These first two factors are important because deficiencies on these fronts limit the host military's ability to react to changing circumstances quickly and develop leadership skills among junior and mid-grade officers. Third, it also must not impose restrictions on training exercises. Finally, it must not limit information flows or direct intelligence assets internally.

The tables below summarize this study's argument and findings, which the following section explains in detail.

| Level 0 | Ineffective as a fighting force. Lacks cohesion under minimal threats and no tactical or higher competence demonstrated |
| Level 1 | Demonstrates cohesion under ordinary circumstances but demonstrates little tactical proficiency on its own. |
| Level 2 | Mostly cohesive and demonstrates the ability to lead and execute tactical operations independently |
| Level 3 | Cohesive under difficult circumstances and able to conduct complex operations independently while demonstrating a good command of tactics. |

*Figure 7.1: Measuring Military Effectiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Scale</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success=3</td>
<td>Independently capable of complex operations</td>
<td>Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Improvement = 2</td>
<td>Independently capable of basic tactics</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Improvement =1</td>
<td>Somewhat cohesive, may have some tactical proficiency</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No improvement = 0</td>
<td>Completely ineffective</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.2: Summary of Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Host Military Inst'l Features</th>
<th>Bad Host Military Inst'l Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good Advisory Inst'l Features</td>
<td>3 (Success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Advisory Inst'l Features</td>
<td>2 (Limited/Moderate Improvement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (Minimal Improvement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (No Improvement)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.3: Institutional Structures and Processes and Advising Outcomes*

**Successful Missions** Missions in which advisory groups have all five institutional structures and processes that enhance their capacity for organizational learning, combined with host militaries that have none of the institutional structures and processes that can impede their ability to learn, are likely to reach the highest level of success: a host military that was previously totally ineffective or nonexistent that becomes capable of executing complex operations independently (level 3, see Figure 2). In Korea, both the host military and
advisory group employed best institutional practices by phase IV, and only then did the ROKA become independently capable of complex operations. Moreover, adopting best practices for all institutional structures and processes enabled the ROKA to make an impressive turnaround; in 1950 multiple units collapsed, demonstrating no effectiveness at all, but less than three years later the ROKA transformed into an independently capable modern military. In 1953 the ROKA sustained high casualty rates and continued to fight aggressively, launching counterattacks, calling in air strikes, and by all accounts, facilitating the negotiation that ended combat operations.

Moderate Improvement The difference between the two middling outcomes, minimal (level 1) and moderate improvement (level 2), rests with the magnitude of problems with each sides' institutional structures and processes. A mission in which a host military or advisory group exhibits worst practices with regard to institutional structures and processes may be cohesive with some tactical ability (level 1), but is unlikely to achieve success and autonomy in basic tactics (level 2). In order to learn and develop to level 2, the advisory group and host military must exhibit average or best institutional practices. If one side exhibits worst practices, then host military combat effectiveness is unlikely to exceed level 1.

The Iraqi Security Forces have achieved moderate improvement (level 2)- the ability to operate independently at the tactical level and some degree of competence short of autonomy in complex operations. The advisory effort in Iraq eventually demonstrated best practices in institutional structures and processes. The host military's institutional structures and processes steadily improved during phases 2 and 4, but they still struggled to delegate authority and promote solely based on merit, although advisors report that Iraqis continue to improve and have the desire to do so.

Minimal Improvement The Afghanistan mission from 2010 to the present offers a good example. The advisory effort dramatically improved and gradually approached best practices, while Afghan institutional structures and processes remained largely unchanged. The ANSF did show systematic improvements, so the advisory group clearly matters for mission outcomes. Unfortunately, the magnitude of the improvement remained
limited due to the ANSF’s institutional problems. In Afghanistan, the ANSF grew to be cohesive enough to achieve some degree of tactical proficiency (level 1). The advisory effort on average exhibited middling practices with regard to institutional structures and processes, but the ANSF continues to experience severe problems with centralized command and meritorious promotions to a lesser extent.

Alternatively, the distinction between level 1 and level 2 improvement could also be which side experiences problems with institutional structures and processes. Of the two, the host military’s institutional structures and processes carry greater importance because ultimately the host military can enable or preclude organizational learning necessary for an improvement in combat effectiveness. An advisory group employing best practices with regard to institutional structures and processes could provide instruction that the host military needs in order to improve, but the advisors’ impact will likely be limited if the host military’s institutional structures and processes are poor. On the flip side, a host military with excellent institutional structures and processes to promote organizational learning paired with an institutionally poor advisory group can still find ways to maximize the more concrete skills that advisors can offer, like marksmanship and basic soldiering. They are likely to have a harder time learning complex and abstract skills like operational planning and leadership. The ARVN 1st Division offers a good example. Both sides’ institutional structures and processes are critical to mission outcome, but between the two, that of the host military carry more weight. Empirically, a host military with good institutional structures and processes matched with a host military with poor ones is a rare occurrence. In most cases, the magnitude of problems with institutional structures and processes on both sides with distinguish whether an advisory reaches level 1 or level 2.

Learning the necessary tasks and skills to meaningfully improve a host nation’s combat effectiveness requires good institutional structures and processes to enable the host military to absorb and implement new lessons as well as enable the advisory group to learn both what the host security needs are and how to teach the host military to address them. Deviations from best practices inhibit the advisory group and host military to learn their respective things, which limits the degree of improvement in combat effectiveness the host military will see. The greater these deviations, the less the host military will improve.
Unsuccessful Missions (No Improvement) A mission in which both the advisory group and the host military employ worst institutional practices is not likely to see any improvement in combat effectiveness. A host military that was either ineffective or nonexistent at the outset of the mission will continue to be so (level 0). In Vietnam the ARVN remained ineffective at all levels throughout most of the mission because both MACV and the ARVN performed poorly on all relevant institutional structures and processes throughout the advisory mission. Most importantly, MACV’s reports and feedback cycle was lacking and leaders never made field visits, so they had little understanding of the ARVN’s progress or what changes it required for improvement. On the Vietnamese side, centralized and fractured command arrangements, an internally directed intelligence organization, and a lack of merit based promotions most hindered the ARVN’s development. ARVN performance improved briefly only in phase III when MACV devoted more attention to training and its reports and feedback cycle and the ARVN began to decentralize command arrangement and promote based on performance, but ultimately it was not enough to substantially or permanently improve the ARVN’s effectiveness. Vietnam began and ended the mission with a completely ineffective military with only small variation along the way. The ARVN was completely ineffective, dropping their weapons and fleeing the battlefield even when facing minimal threats. Unsurprisingly, both the host military and advisory group exhibited worst practices regarding institutional structures and processes. The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) succeeded by Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) is an example of complete advisory mission failure.

Additional Observations In addition to these key findings, this research yielded three key observations. The first addresses the US military’s ability to learn between advisory missions. The second deals with a reasonable timeline for advisory mission success. The third addresses the implication of this study for strategic success in advisory missions. Finally, the fourth observation offers thoughts about the relationship between the independent variables.
US Ability to Learn Between Missions. This dissertation primarily addresses learning that must occur within a single advisory mission. As the preceding cases illustrate, organizational learning is important for the advisory mission because success requires context-specific knowledge and understanding that is not transferrable across missions. However, some general lessons are transferrable across missions, yet the US military appears to have done a poor job learning and retaining them. One commander of a training mission shared that the particular cultural context and security needs of a given host military and how to work within and meet them respectively are unique to each mission.¹ For example, advisors to Iraq found that publicly calling out laziness, poor performance, or other bad behavior improved the Iraqis’ performance, whereas advisors to Korea found that a similar course of action would cause the Korean counterpart to lose face and become unreceptive to feedback, so criticism had to be given in private.² However, the features of an advisory mission that enable it to discern the country-specific things stay constant across advisory missions.³ Those features are the institutional structures and processes detailed in this study, yet the US military has not codified these lessons about how to run an effective advisory mission. The Iraq mission bears a striking resemblance to that of Korea for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the similarity in institutional structures and processes on both sides. As I listened to senior commanders who served in Iraq discuss their experience, the reports they received, and the changes they made to the advisory effort, I noticed that in Iraq the US military had to relearn the same "best practices" that their predecessors employed so successfully in Korea 60 years prior. The US military’s demonstrated poor ability to learn from the last 70 years of advisory missions continues to hinder its advisory mission success.

The US Army has recently shown signs of increased awareness of its knowledge deficiency and taken limited steps to remedy it. The Army first codified its advising doctrine in the 2008 Security Force Assistance Field Manual (FM 3-07.1). This document and its successors demonstrate progress by discussing some of the elements that this study highlights as important, including the importance of understanding the local context

¹ Advisor Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
² Advisor interview 31 March by phone
³ Advisor Interview 15 March 2017 in Washington DC
and culture, but says little about how to learn those. A recent RAND study points out deficiencies in the field manual: “it does not capture the critical issues of designing and adjusting institutions needed to plan, field, maintain, and develop the foreign security forces…and it leaves out most of the details needed to implement it.”

Thus, the US military has learned the basics of what it must learn about each host nation in order to succeed: the cultural context and how to work with counterparts, the host military’s security needs, and how to meet the need while taking into account the host nation’s culture and societal norms, including developing institutions compatible with combat effectiveness and the local context. The field manual does not offer insights on how to learn, codify, or disseminate that knowledge in order to ultimately succeed. This dissertation fills that gap. The institutional structures and processes outlined here will enable the advisory group to learn the host military specific lessons in each mission and give it the best possible chance at mission success.

While a number of documents demonstrate the US Military’s progress, including both field manuals and publications from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), those publications are post-2008 developments. At the outset of the Iraq and Afghanistan advisory missions the US military lacked documents and institutionalized lessons that could guide advisors. Several advisors recall searching for such publications before deploying but found nothing. Another resorted to reading books about how advisors in Vietnam approached the mission and attempted to learn from that.

Inter-mission learning has probably remained poor because advising is a low priority despite its increasing importance in winning the nation’s wars. Nearly every advisor interviewed for this study offered multiple indicators of advising’s low ranking in the hierarchy of the services’ priorities; advisory duty would make promotion less likely, and usually the less qualified individuals got stuck with advisory duty.

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5 Advisor interview 5 February 2017 by phone

6 Advisor interview 31 March 2017 in Washington DC(#1 and #2); Advisor interview 31 March 2017 by phone
One of this study’s more peculiar observations lies in the fact that in the past 15 years, the US military concurrently advised two separate foreign militaries and employed different institutional structures and processes in each. The Iraq mission benefitted from a single organization that employed a good reports cycle, made regular field visits, worked to systematize training, and advised rather than commanded. The mission in Afghanistan did none of these things, although it improved after 2010. The huge differences in institutional structures and processes between the concurrent Iraq and Afghanistan missions probably reflect the military’s practical lack of doctrine addressing advisory missions. Advisors and historical sources alike pointed out that US foreign and defense policy largely treated Afghanistan as an afterthought after the invasion of Iraq, and both the US combat and advising missions in Afghanistan suffered as a result. Most advisors felt that the Afghanistan mission received little strategic consideration from policymakers in Washington, which likely contributed to this difference.

Necessary Duration of Advisory Missions Second, relatively quick success is possible to achieve in advisory missions. This dissertation includes two case studies of relatively successful advisory missions and another two of failures. Both successful missions revealed relatively short periods of time in which the host military’s combat effectiveness dramatically improved. Within a couple of years of the ROKA’s collapse in 1950, an aggressive refitting and systematic retraining effort underpinned by the rapidly improving training centers enabled a rapid turnaround in combat performance. Units and replacements trained together at all levels, building excellent junior leadership skills that enabled proficiency in maneuver warfare. Also around this time President Rhee handed over operational control of the ROKA to the Eighth Army, which removed the only remaining institutional barriers to improvement: frequent officer “rotations” and promoting political loyalists at the expense of combat proven officers. The Iraqi Security Forces made a similarly remarkable turnaround between 2015 and 2017. When American advisors returned and the ISF reverted to its earlier instructional structures and processes that approached best practices, the Army learned to conduct complex operations with minimal support and made major territorial gains. These short periods of dramatic improvement were driven by a felicitous alignment of good institutional structures and processes on both sides that enabled each
military to learn its respective tasks. They also demonstrate that although many regard foreign military advising as an extremely long term endeavor, the right institutional structures and processes in the advisory group and the host military can dramatically increase the host military's combat effectiveness in a relatively short period of time. Of course, building the necessary civilian institutions and combat support functions takes more time, but adopting the institutional structures and processes outlined here and pushing the host military to do similarly can reduce the scale and duration of US military involvement in the host country. Not only does this result in a successful mission, but also a more sustainable and politically viable policy.

**Strategic Success** Third, my review of US-led military advisory missions suggest that strategic success - training a host military to perform competently at all levels - is rare because it requires both the host military and the advisory group to adhere to exacting standards of institutional structures and processes. The Iraqis made great strides in combat effectiveness in phases II and IV; they suffered high casualties, coordinated across units (except calling in air strikes) and at the time of writing recaptured parts of Mosul. Despite this impressive progress, the ISF still requires ongoing US support. Advisors currently bear responsibility for air strikes, which played an enormous role in the ISF's success against ISIS in Mosul. If the mission's goal is to build and leave behind a competent and wholly independent military, Iraq would not have met this standard. Success does not often occur in part due to poor institutional structures and processes in the militaries of developing countries, which the US most often advises. In phases II and IV, challenges with decentralized command and to a much lesser extent building a professional officer corps through promotions and assignments. Iraq has far fewer problems with poor institutions than many potential advising recipients. These cases demonstrate that if any of the institutional structures and processes are lacking, the US military will see a sharp decline in its ability to advisor foreign militaries to strategic success. Without institutional best practices on both sides, the host military combat effectiveness can still improve, but not enough to operate independently. In these cases, the host military will continue to require advisory support to varying degrees, depending on its level of combat effectiveness. Either the US achieves all its security goals through the advisory mission as occurred in Korea, or it leaves behind security forces that are not able to provide for all
of their own needs, even if their combat capabilities have improved. This is yet another reason to concern ourselves with how to lead a successful military advisory mission; the consequences of less than total success are usually billions of dollars and thousands of lives that ultimately accomplish little to nothing.

_Potential Interaction Between Independent Variables_ Fourth, this study treated the independent variables, institutional structures and processes of the host military and advisory group as separate from one another, when in reality the institutional structures and processes of one side can exert a limited effect on those of the other. Advisors can and should implore the host military to adapt institutional features that will enable mission success, and they did so in every mission explored here except Vietnam. In Iraq and Afghanistan advisors pushed the ISF and ANA to delegate command responsibilities to junior officers and promote based on merit, which the host militaries did to varying degrees. In Korea, advisors exerted tremendous influence on which ROKA officers received promotions and key assignments. Still, the advisory group is unlikely to be able to make sweeping changes to the host military’s institutional structures and processes can also influence host military institutions because a well-functioning reports and feedback cycle can enable advisors to build good working relationships such that host military counterparts act on suggestions. The host military’s institutional features can also influence the advisory group’s performance; advisors may be more eager and focused on the training mission when they see the host military improving and few institutional impediments to such improvement. Advisors to Iraq and Afghanistan emphasized that successful advising requires much of the advisor: long hours socializing and building relationships with host military in an unfamiliar environment, working to influence the counterpart while not possessing any real control, learning to operate in an entirely different country and society, and the frustration of working with host military institutions which are invariably slower and less efficient that the American ones to which advisors are accustomed. Especially given the demanding nature of the job, an advisor who works with a higher performing host military with fewer institutional barriers to success will probably invest more effort in advising. Advisors to Korea were very optimistic about the ROKA’s prospects for improvement, and advisors to Iraq expressed similar sentiments, which were noticeably less common among advisors to Vietnam and Afghanistan
II. Alternative Explanations

This dissertation also addresses common alternative arguments to the institutional argument presented here. These include culturally based explanations, the commitment and motivations of both the host military and advisory group, the influence of individual leaders, and external factors.

Culture and Society

Culture remains relatively constant over the course of a 10 to 20 year period, roughly the time horizon for the advisory missions investigated here. Yet tremendous variation exists in the extent to which host militaries were able to improve their combat effectiveness through advising, both across the four missions in the preceding chapters as well as within them. Moreover, many of the cultural factors considered responsible for major challenges or failure in some missions are present across all four countries in this study. For example, all of these missions occurred in countries with relatively traditional societies that value deference to elders, which has been cited as a potential reason that the Afghans cannot delegate command responsibilities or build up junior leaders. However not only has this cultural element proven surmountable in Korea and Iraq, but small scale change has occurred in Afghanistan as well. A culture, broadly speaking, that does not vary over a short period of time cannot explain this divergence in dependent variable outcomes. The host nation's culture still plays an important role in any advisory mission as it sets the parameters within which the mission must operate: it can contribute to problems and define how advisors should go about solving those problems.

A host nation’s culture and societal norms can frequently do conflict with best institutional practices that host militaries must adopt in order to improve combat effectiveness. Every advisory mission investigated in this dissertation occurred in a host nation that values hierarchy and deferring to those with authority, which make decentralized command and promotions driven by merit. In all four countries, “corruption,” or using one’s position and connections to benefit oneself and one’s family is commonplace. Yet advisory missions experienced a range of outcomes on the dependent variable, even within each mission.

Features of a host nation’s culture can present challenges for an advisory mission or they can be a source of great influence for advisors who learn to work with the local culture to achieve their goals. Most
commentary favors the former, treating culture as a net negative and an impediment to building a competent military. Examples abound of culture impeding success. Every advisory mission in investigated in this dissertation occurred in a host nation that values hierarchy and deference to those with authority, which make decentralized command and promotions driven by merit difficult. In all four countries, “corruption,” or using one’s position and connections to benefit oneself and one’s family, is commonplace. Cultures that value honor and reputation can present a challenge to advisors as it did in Korea, where Korean officers would stick with a course of action that did not work simply to save face. In Iraq, where the local culture also values those qualities, advisors used this to motivate Iraqis. One advisor recalls training an Iraqi unit in which one soldier in his early 20s complained about having to exercise, instead resting in the shade and drinking water. The advisor addressed this in front of the entire unit, praising another soldier more than three decades his senior who was very focused, worked hard, and took no breaks and pointing out that the lazy soldier’s behavior undermined the entire unit’s performance. This motivated the young man to work harder; he did not want to bear responsibility for the unit’s failure or be outdone by someone else. He worked hard and became one of this unit’s most proficient and dedicated soldiers, and the unit’s morale and performance improved accordingly. Other advisors in Iraq shared similar stories. These examples demonstrate that culture can be a hindrance, but it can also be harnessed to amplify the advisor’s positive impact. Whether analyzing small-scale or larger-scale cultural influences there simply is no correlation with the dependent variable.

Advisory Group Personnel and Resources Some have argued that the US must commit vast sums of money and personnel to an advisory mission for a successful outcome. While the failure in Afghanistan and the diversion of focus, finances, and personnel to the concurrent mission in Iraq supports this theory, the mission to Korea as well as Iraq from 2014 to the present undercuts it. Both combat troops and advisors in Korea remained cognizant of the public opinion limitations their mission faced; Korea ranked low on a list of US priorities in the 1940s, so the mission made do with personnel and resource shortages. The recent mission to Iraq faces a similar challenge. The US presence is low and funding is much lower than it once was. Nevertheless, Korea

7 Advisor interview 31 March 2017 by phone
and Iraq are the success stories of US advising, albeit to differing degrees. Moreover, the enormous commitment to Vietnam on all fronts did not forestall abject failure on both the combat and advisory missions. These cases do not demonstrate a positive correlation between the US military's commitment to the mission and how much the host military improves. The US sent tens of thousands of advisors to Vietnam, but In short, an advisory group cannot throw money and personnel at the problem and expect an improvement in host combat effectiveness.

Leaders The quality of leadership in both the advisory mission and the host military could drive mission outcomes. This study argues, however, that while leaders are important in a number of ways, ultimately, advisory group and host military institutional structures and processes are more significant drivers of mission outcomes and improvement in combat effectiveness. Leaders frequently play a large role in the direction of advisory missions and are also responsible for putting in place the institutional structures and processes that can enable or inhibit the organizational learning necessary on both sides that drive advisory outcomes. General Roberts revamped the advisory program in Korea much as Petraeus did in Iraq and later Afghanistan. Advisory group leaders inhibited mission success in Vietnam as leaders refused to make field visits or consider reports that contradicted their understanding of the situation on the ground. Especially in Vietnam, these leaders’ actions appear to suggest that individual psychology at the individual level played a significant role in Vietnam’s failure. It is hard to imagine an institutional structure or processes that would ensure good organizational learning and therefore mission success under such conditions. Host military leaders are also important; the Iraqi Army’s collapse in 2014 was largely driven by Prime Minister Maliki’s dismantling of the Army’s good institutional structures and processes that enabled its success through 2010.

This section asserts that institutional structures and processes are more important drivers of mission outcomes for the following reasons. First, more often than not, institutional structures and processes are the mechanism through which leaders impact mission outcomes. In Korea, General Roberts set up the reports and feedback cycle, consolidated and unified advising and training responsibilities within KMAG, instituted regular field visits, made advising instead of commanding the norm within KMAG, and laid the groundwork
for what would become an extensive and indigenously led training apparatus. While some entity needed to establish these processes, leaders like Roberts had such a profound and long-lasting impact on the advisory mission's outcome because they altered institutional structures and processes in the advisory group that would far outlast their own command and limit or otherwise incentivize their successors to follow largely in the same mold. All of the above leaders were succeeded by less remarkable ones who in some cases were much less dedicated to the mission's established approach. Yet for the most part, they continued handling reports the same way, making field visits, and the like. Poor leaders also undermine the advisory mission through undercutting institutional structures and processes. Beginning in 2011, then Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki halted training and professional development activities, amended the Army’s promotion and assignment processes to favor his political favorites, fractured and centralized command arrangements, and limited officers’ communications with one another and surveilled them. These institutional changes led to the sharp decline in the Iraqi Army’s effectiveness, not specifically Maliki himself, who had been in office since 2004 and also oversaw the ISF during its period of greatest combat effectiveness between 2008 and 2010.

Good institutional structures and processes cannot guarantee mission success in all circumstances; in the Vietnam case, individual leaders made choices that negatively impacted the advisory mission in ways that even the best institution would be unlikely to fix. If a reports cycle exists but leaders refuse to read reports or consider alternatives to the dominant paradigm, it is hard to imagine an institutional structure that would overcome that challenge. Still institutions but can shape the incentives that leaders face and the options open to them. Good institutional structures and processes can limit the effects of poor leadership rather than letting those effects run rampant.

External Influences Finally, any improvement in the host military's combat capability could have nothing to do with the advisory mission at all; some exogenous but concurrent development could produce the observed changes in combat effectiveness. For example, major improvements to a country's education system resulting in higher literacy rates and understanding of science and technology could produce an educated and high quality pool of potential professional soldiers. Similarly, improvements in public health and fitness over the
years preceding the advisory mission can offer a higher quality pool of recruits that could produce an improvement in combat effectiveness. The cases explored in this dissertation do not have any of these qualities. Education and literacy had not meaningfully changed in the decades leading up to the war, and in most cases was quite poor.

A second example is the availability of personnel with previous combat experience; such individuals could also help a nascent host military learn more quickly as they have latent combat skills. Afghanistan and Iraq had a large number of men who had previously fought the Soviets in the 1980s, and the Iraqis had a large group of people who served in Saddam Hussein’s Army. According to a preponderance of advisors, while these recruits possessed individual combat skills (e.g. marksmanship), they generally lacked the ability to fight together in and across units. In Korea, the presence of officers with experience fighting in the Imperial Japanese Army actually undermined progress, as advisors found them unreceptive to their lessons. This study does not reveal a positive correlation between the presence of combat veterans and mission outcomes; the Korean mission succeeded in just eight years in a country lacking homegrown combat veterans or a military tradition, and Afghanistan saw comparatively little improvement in combat effectiveness, despite a large availability of veterans.

This study considered many external factors in addition to education and availability of personnel with combat experience to determine if any could account for variation in advisory mission success. To be sure, many of those factors can and sometimes do exert an influence on combat effectiveness and improvement independent of institutional structures and processes. However, this study did not reveal any consistent pattern between such factors and combat effectiveness in the missions described.

III. Policy Recommendations

This dissertation emphasizes the importance of institutional structures and processes in both the advisory group and host military, but the US military controls only one of the two. This leaves two options on how to deal with the host military and its institutional structures and processes. First, the US can choose advisory missions in host nations with relatively few of the poor institutional practices discussed here.
However, leaders make advisory decisions based on various circumstances and developments, not only the expected ease of success. Still, wherever a potential choice exists to train one military over another, this research suggests that the US should select to train the host military with the fewest of the institutional barriers to organizational learning and therefore the one with the highest probability of success, all else equal. Second, the advisory mission must exert pressure and persuasion on the host military to adopt the institutional changes necessary for success. While persuading representatives from a foreign nation to alter basic aspects of how institutions in that country operate may seem like a fruitless pursuit, advisors in Korea and Iraq were notably successful. Among other things, persuading the host military leaders to change their approaches to promotions and centralized command enabled these missions to ultimately succeed.

The second recommendation concerns learning from prior advisory experiences and carrying that knowledge into future missions. To date, the US military has performed poorly in this regard. MNSTC-I Commander Lieutenant General James Dubik writes that "despite the success in developing security forces during the Iraqi surge, our current military doctrine does not reflect the lessons learned or best practices used in 2007-2008." This is true not only of the US experience in Iraq, but across all experiences training and developing foreign military forces. The US military has executed many such missions and experienced the pinnacle of success and the nadir of failure, yet has never codified its lessons learned and established a doctrinal approach for advisory missions. As a result, each time the United States takes on an advising mission, it must start from the beginning in discerning basic things about how the mission should be run. While many aspects of advising foreign militaries vary with the particular location, security needs, and culture of the host military, the institutional structures and processes necessary for promoting the learning on both sides that is necessary for mission success remain constant across advisory missions. Therefore, this study recommends that the US military establishes a handbook or manual for such missions that highlights the importance of institutional structures and processes: how to structure an advisory group that is optimized for mission success, and how to encourage host militaries to adopt institutional structures and processes that will

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enable rather than hinder their mastery of new skills. While the US military published Field Manual 3-07.1 in 2009 entitled "Security Force Assistance," neither this nor any other doctrinal document on the subject systematically addresses these factors. They should. Doing so will codify the lessons that the US military has learned over and over again into the collective institutional memory such that future advisory missions can progress much more quickly without such a trial and error based approach.

Finally, if training and advising foreign militaries remains an integral part of what the US military does, it should further develop and grow its capabilities to execute these missions well. This most likely means better training for more personnel in foreign military advising and tying aid to reforms that promote best practices. Many advisors with whom I spoke and scholarly works I consulted throughout this project emphasized that it takes a certain kind of person, skill set, or training to be a good advisor. If policy makers expect military advising to take center stage of our military engagements abroad, it may be worth making advising a core competency for which many more individuals receive specialized training. One former advisor shared that the fact that Special Forces soldiers shared such a similar skill set cultivated through rigorous training allowed for relatively seamless transitions between advisors, despite the fact that Special Forces advisors did not serve longer tours. Despite rhetoric, the US military's institutional structure reveals a lack of focus on advising. Second, if we expect to employ advisory missions in the future as a key tool of foreign and defense policy, we should tie aid to internal institutional reforms that maximize the effectiveness of the aid and advising that we do provide. This is unlikely to be successful if Talmadge is right about what causes these institutional deficiencies, because the threats to personal power are likely to consistently and significantly outweigh the desire for improvements in military effectiveness and aid if the heads of state explored in this dissertation are any indication. However, adopting a policy like this offers a greater chance for mission success than unconditional aid and advising, and it could at least help the United States waste less resources.

Given the enormous challenge and unlikelihood of strategic success in advising and training a foreign military, the US should reconsider its utility as a tool of foreign and defense policy. Currently the Department of Defense considers it a critical competency and a low-cost, low-risk option to project power and influence abroad. From a practical standpoint, these missions rarely succeed; even when advisors do improve a host
military’s combat effectiveness, the US generally finds itself unable to completely or even mostly divest from combat operations. An ongoing military commitment is neither low cost nor low risk. The US military should weigh these missions carefully and more frequently choose another course of action when a potential mission appears especially challenging.

IV. The Way Forward

This dissertation tackled the question what drives outcomes of military advisory missions, specifically looking at the most involved and ambitious projects that the United States military has attempted since World War II. Future research should investigate other nations’ efforts to train and advise lesser capable militaries, or look at more limited US missions, which are much more numerous and last longer. Future research should also use archival resources on Afghanistan and Iraq when they become available in order to subject this theory as applied to those conflicts to a more rigorous evaluation than advisor interviews, news articles, and secondary sources. This argument centers on the military to military aspect of the problem but many civilian entities support these missions in various ways. These are especially important in missions like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq with a heavy nation-building component. Specifically, most advisors and senior leaders of training and advisory missions emphasize the importance of building institutions and functions that support combat operations for building a host military that can sustain its newly developed combat power after advisors leave. This study offers the first step toward systematically understanding why one military advisory mission fails where another succeeds, and offers policy recommendations to ensure that future advisory missions create better outcomes than previous missions.
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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Basic Information
- Time period in which the advisor served
- The advisor's unit
- The host military unit to which the advisor was assigned
- The advisor's rank and responsibilities at the time (i.e. direct advisor or in a more senior/supervisory role) What kinds of tasks did the advisor teach/advise on?
- What was the morale/disposition/motivation/commitment level of the Iraqis/Afghans you worked with?
- What was morale/disposition of the US troops like?

Questions about Host Military Performance
- How did the host military perform in terms of learning to execute basic tactics and complex operations? Did its performance improve over time? In cases of inadequate performance, with what tasks did they experience the most difficulty? Why do you think they could not do better?
- How often did you/advisors grant host military personnel opportunities to assume operational control (leading a convoy, for example)? How did they perform, and with what aspects did they experience the most difficulty?

Questions about Host Military Institutional Structures and Processes
- Did you/how often did you encounter resistance from host military or political leaders on matters of training? What was the sticking point on training?
- Were you (and your colleagues, superiors, subordinates) satisfied with the amount and type of training the host military received? If not, what was the limiting factor (time, money, politics?)
- In your observation, how much command authority did junior officers in the host military actually have/exercise? How frequently did more senior officers micromanage or fail to delegate? How often did US advisers assume command responsibilities?
- In your observation, were host military soldiers promoted primarily based on merit/combat performance or other factors? Examples?
- In your observation, did the host military personnel share pertinent mission-related information with others who had a need to know? Examples?

Questions about US Military Institutional Structures and Processes
- How did you relay information about host military performance to your superiors (or colleagues, when necessary) Written reports? Orally in meetings? How frequently did this occur, and what kind of information did you relay?
- To your knowledge, what happened to these reports=this information? Did your supervisor consistently follow up with you about them, or did they seem to disappear into a void?
- Did you or anyone you know ever make a suggestion that was implemented? What was it/details?
- Did you and your peers feel that your input would be valued and consequential? Did you feel that if you spoke out contrary to current policy that your career would lag? What were the common perceptions on these issues?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eighth Army Commander</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lt Gen Robert Eichelberger</td>
<td>January 1944-August 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lt Gen Walton Walker</td>
<td>August 1948-December 1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen Matthew B. Ridgway</td>
<td>December 1950- April 1951</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen James A. Van Fleet</td>
<td>April 1951- April 1953</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen Maxwell D. Taylor</td>
<td>April 1953-March 1955</td>
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*Figure 8.1: Eighth Army Leadership during the Advisory Mission*

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<tr>
<th>KMAG Chief</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brig Gen William L. Roberts</td>
<td>May 1948-May 1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Col William H. Sterling Wright</td>
<td>May 1950-July 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brig Gen Francis W. Farrell</td>
<td>July 1950-May 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brig Gen Cornelius E. Ryan</td>
<td>May 1951- May 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brig Gen Gordon B. Rogers</td>
<td>May 1953-October 1953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.2: KMAG Leadership during the Advisory Mission*
Figure 8.3: Political Maps of Korea

Figure 8.4: The Korean Front Line, June 1950 through July 1953


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1 Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection - UT Library Online, accessed May 11, 2017
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/korean_peninsula.gif
**Figure 8.5: Expanding the Korean Army, 1950-1953**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Company Training (Bn Complete)</th>
<th>Battalion Training (% Complete)</th>
<th>8-day Battalion Maneuver (Bn Complete)</th>
<th>Regimental CPX</th>
<th>Change in Combat Effectiveness (% Estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Div, 11 Regt</td>
<td>100%, Feb 1950</td>
<td>75-90</td>
<td>Completed Mar 1950</td>
<td>Completed Feb 1950</td>
<td>Decrease (35, 40, 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Div, 12 Regt</td>
<td>100% Sep 1949</td>
<td>40-80</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Completed Feb 1950</td>
<td>Decrease (55, 55, 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Div 13 Regt</td>
<td>100% Sep 1949</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>One Bn, May 1950</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase (55, 60, 72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Div 5 Regt</td>
<td>1 Bn Feb 1950</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase (50, 50, 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Div Regt</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase (50, 50, 65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Div 22 Regt</td>
<td>2 Bn Jan 1950</td>
<td>2x Bn 10</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>None (40, 50, 60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Div 23 Regt</td>
<td>2x Bn 75%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase (35, 35, 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1x Bn 25%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Figure 8.6: Status of Training as of June, 1950**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Regiment</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
<th>BN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Div 15 Regt</td>
<td>60-80</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Not conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(40, 30, 40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Div 20 Regt</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(35, 40, 25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Div 7 Regt</td>
<td>1x Bn (Mar 50)</td>
<td>1x Bn 25%</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(50, 55, 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Div 8 Regt</td>
<td>100% Jan 1950</td>
<td>2x Bn 25%</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>(50, 40, 55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Div 19 Regt</td>
<td>1x Bn 0%</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(50, 45, 35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Div 1 Regt</td>
<td>100% Feb 1950</td>
<td>100% May 1950</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(60, 60, 60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Div 9 Regt</td>
<td>100% Sep 1949</td>
<td>100% May 1950</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(55, 65, 65)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Div 25 Regt</td>
<td>100% Dec 1949</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>(60, 60, 60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Div 10 Regt</td>
<td>100% Nov 1949</td>
<td>3x Bn 100%</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>(50, 50, 45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Div, 21 Regt</td>
<td>100% Sep 1949</td>
<td>1x Bn 100%</td>
<td>1x Bn May 1950</td>
<td>Not Conducted</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>(40, 35, 40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.6 (continued)
Figure 8.9: The Campaigns of Early 1951

Figure 8.10: The Communist Spring Offensive

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Figure 8.11: The Fall of South Vietnam

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