Lessons Future Security-Force Assistance Brigades Should Consider

by LTC Stu James and CPT Andrew T. Kydes

The U.S. Army’s security-force assistance brigade (SFAB) mission is currently in full swing at Fort Benning, GA (https://www.army.mil/article/188004/security_force_assistance_brigades_to_free_brigade_combat_teams_from_advise_assistMission). These SFABs are tasked to conduct advise-and-assist missions for the Army in combatant theaters across the world.

The advise-and-assist mission is one the Army has arguably done for years under a different name: enable, advise and assist (EAA) teams.

One SFAB, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team (Bulldogs), 1st Armored Division, deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Spartan Shield (OSS) in Summer 2016 to support regional partners with operational missions, bilateral and multilateral military exercises and theater-security cooperation activities in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The Bulldog Brigade fulfilled the role of the CENTCOM commander’s theater reserve, which consisted of multiple missions; however, its primary purpose was to reassure our allies of U.S. commitment to the region.

While most battalions under the Bulldog Brigade served in support of OSS, there was a small element from 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment (Death Dealers), that deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. Task Force Dealer, which was attached to 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne (Strike), was responsible for filling an armor-expertise capability gap. Task Force Dealer’s mission was to advise-and-assist 9th Iraqi Army Division, which was the only Iraqi armored division in the fight to degrade and destroy the Islamic State (IS).

Task Force Dealer deployed to Iraq with about a platoon’s worth of Soldiers, responsible for serving as the battalion tactical command post (TAC) and as the TAC’s security element. The TAC consisted of a senior armor adviser, an intelligence section, an operations section, a fires team, a sustainment officer and a signal noncommissioned officer.

In late August 2016, Task Force Dealer, along with support from U.S. Special Operations elements, was tasked with its EAA mission: Iraqi Security Forces’ (ISF) seizure and clearance of Qayyarah Airfield, an airfield about 50 miles south of Mosul that later served as a strategic logistics base for Iraqi elements during the clearance of Mosul. Following the seizure of the airfield at Qayyarah, the ISF took a brief strategic pause before beginning the battle to retake Mosul in mid-October 2016. The ISF successfully cleared the eastern half of the city by late January 2017.

The ISF was supported by Task Force Dealer, as well as many other coalition EAA teams’ intelligence, fires, air support, targeting and logistics. During its nine-month deployment, Task Force Dealer partnered with and conducted EAA missions with the Iraqi army, Iraqi Federal Police and ISF elements, which were all a part of the ISF.

The task force learned five valuable lessons that future EAs or SFABs should consider to best enable and support a military-partner force in achieving its tactical, operational and strategic goals. These five lessons are:

- The power of relationships. They are the most critical aspect of a successful EAA team and should not be underestimated.
- Integrated intelligence, fires. Have an integrated intelligence and fires team proficient in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) as well as close air support (CAS) assets.
- Detailed/deliberate focus on logistics and sustainment. Required.
- Mental agility. Soldiers must have the mental agility to respond to and support the rapidly changing complex environment.

Power of relationships

Human interaction is at the forefront of effective advising. From this human interaction stems a relationship, hinged on the establishment of mutual trust that can make or break an EAA team.
The first exchange between Task Force Dealer and 9th Iraqi Army Division leadership was over dinner. Prior to arriving in theater, Task Force Dealer had heard stories from Iraq veterans about how important, yet uncomfortable, it may be to break bread with a partner force. Meals with the Iraqi officers and U.S. Soldiers were significantly different. Some differences included: 1) meals lasted several hours, and conversation did not include topics about the mission or work; 2) Iraqis did not use silverware but rather ate all foods with their right hand; and 3) refusal to eat something on your plate was unacceptable.

Breaking bread with the 9th Iraqi Army forced Task Force Dealer’s commander and intelligence officer out of their comfort zones and into a new cultural norm. They learned that patience and quality time spent with one’s counterpart significantly strengthened the adviser-counterpart relationship, which in turn generated a more productive working alliance that benefitted all other aspects of the mission.

Figure 1. The command team from 3rd Platoon, 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment, sits down for lunch in April 2012 with O’Jan, the Afghan Local Police commander in the village of Kvahjeh Molk on the banks of the Arghandab River, Afghanistan. The 1/67 also deployed to Iraq several years later to repeat their advise-and-assist role with the ISF. (Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Farrukh Daniel)

It is imperative that EAA teams avoid the “ugly” American advisory style. Characteristics of this style include being impatient, threatening, narrow-minded and commanding. A guiding statement by senior Army leadership that Task Force Dealer abided by was: “This can’t be the Task Force Dealer plan. It needs to be an Iraqi plan with Iraqi buy-in. It’s the Iraqis’ war and we (the U.S.) are here supporting them.”

This task was extremely challenging because the ISF lacked warfighting fundamentals and doctrine that are critical in establishing any type of military plan. The 9th Iraqi Army Division relied on Task Force Dealer to generate plans for upcoming operations. Due to the Iraqis’ lack of fundamentals, Task Force Dealer conducted basic officer professional development (OPD) that focused on maneuver basics as well as the characteristics of the offense and defense. The OPDs were well received by Iraqi senior commanders and facilitated them in developing thorough plans as well as procedures to assess their own plans and operations.

Advisers must work effectively with linguists (also known as translators or interpreters). Linguists are vital intercultural intermediaries and are essential for communicating with foreign counterparts. Task Force Dealer was fortunate to have two military linguists (09Ls), natives of Iraq, who understood military terminology and the commander’s intent, as well as the Iraqi history and culture of which the Iraqi generals prided themselves.

Typically, linguists lack vocabulary and cultural understanding to provide beneficial translations beyond a basic level. This, in turn, presents a large problem: without effective communications, advisory missions are fated for failure. Whether linguists assigned to the EAA team are military linguists or contractors, one must ensure the linguists have a robust military lexicon that can be translated and understood in the counterpart’s language.
Also, linguists must understand and not overextend their role when translating conversations between two senior leaders. The linguist’s role is simply to translate the conversation between both parties. Task Force Dealer had one instance when a linguist went rogue and explored his own agenda by bringing up a sensitive political issue with an Iraqi major general. This incident almost permanently ruptured the EAA team’s relationship with 9th Iraqi Army Division. Therefore, as a way to eliminate any misconceptions regarding a linguist’s position, it is critical that one properly coaches and mentors the linguist regarding his or her role and job expectations, especially for key-leader engagements.

**Integrated intelligence, fires sections**
The ISF’s capability gap, particularly regarding the intelligence and fires warfighting functions, forced Task Force Dealer to play a more active role in identifying enemy threats and removing those enemy threats from the battlefield. U.S. assistance to the ISF relied heavily on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), CAS and long-range and accurate indirect fires.

Often times, the ISF was hesitant to maneuver without the Coalition Force’s ISR or fires coverage. It seemed that knowing a UAV was overhead brought a sense of comfort and resolve to Iraqi generals and soldiers as they prepared to enter an IS-held village or city. ISR, CAS and long-range artillery emboleden Iraqi commanders’ decision-making and confidence as they understood the capabilities these assets brought to the fight.

Task Force Dealer’s detailed mission analysis of the terrain and enemy drove the fires and targeting process. Task Force Dealer’s senior intelligence officer provided the 9th Iraqi Army Division commander the enemy situation as it pertained to IS in a specific area, as well as intelligence priorities and focus areas for U.S. battalion and brigade intelligence assets such as Aerosandes/Portable Unmanned Aircraft, Grey Eagles (MC-12) and Reapers (MQ-9).

These focus areas that attempted to answer intelligence gaps became Task Force Dealer’s and 9th Iraqi Army Division’s named areas of interest (NAIs). These NAIs would often become target areas of interest for which Task Force Dealer would coordinate, integrate and deliver fires. CAS was the primary engager for high-value targets such as vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), VBIED factories, groupings of IS fighters and mortar and artillery pieces. Long-range artillery provided what the EAA teams and the ISF called “motivational fires” as well as provided terrain denial and illumination missions.

Simply put, the EAA team’s ability to provide actionable intelligence and lethal fires was arguably the most visible measure of U.S. assistance that built instant credibility and mutual trust with the partner force.

EAA teams must deploy with a trained intelligence section focused on collection management. Each task force should deploy with a trained collection manager who has attended the Collection Manager Course at Fort Huachuca, AZ, and who understands collection-management planning and integration with U.S. Air Force aerial platforms and joint tactical air controllers (JTACs). The integration of Air Force JTACs in a Task Force Dealer intelligence and fires cell provides a critical strike capability to the Iraqi Security Forces maneuver element on the ground.

Also, the team must have an intelligence Soldier who serves as the EAA team’s ISR tactical controller (ITC). The ITC is responsible for providing real-time overwatch during movement of unmanned aerial systems (UASs) to and from the target area. The 101st Airborne’s Strike Brigade often allocated at least one tactical UAS to each EAA team, sometimes with the ability of sensor-tasking authority over the asset; for the EAA team to control the asset, it must have a Soldier ITC-trained.

The EAA team’s success relies heavily on the team’s ability to integrate intelligence and fires. Unfortunately, this integration does not typically occur. Fires and intelligence sections frequently plan in a vacuum and fail to work on the targeting process together. The most successful EAA teams must have intelligence and fires sections that work closely together and that are in constant dialogue. Such dialogue consists of answering the ground commander’s priority-intelligence requirements and employing effects-based targeting across the battlefield.

**Agile mission-command suite**
Agile mission command is a top priority for most commanders and, in the case of Task Force Dealer, it became a necessity when enabling and assisting our partners. The ability to communicate up, down, between and across
echelons stationary and on the move was absolutely critical. However, this demand was challenging for Task Force Dealer due to limited resources, a tyranny of distance and heavy reliance on Upper Tactical Internet such as videoteleconferences and Secure Voice Over Internet Protocol.

Based on mission demands, Task Force Dealer was assigned two infantry companies in December 2016, both with JTAC and explosive-ordnance-disposal enablers, tasked to serve as advise, assist, accompany and enable (A3E) teams with the Iraqi Federal Police and Iraqi Emergency Response Division. Because A3E team commanders were responsible for accompanying ISF throughout parts of eastern Mosul, the teams required the ability to interact with and provide feedback to their higher-level commanders and subordinates on the move as they were bound to the partner force’s mission. A3E commanders were sometimes limited in their ability to maintain communications with their higher headquarters due to their constant on-the-move missions and often were dependent on attached U.S. Special Operations Command elements to help pass information to their higher headquarters.

Task Force Dealer’s and all A3E teams’ combat vehicles consisted of mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) all-terrain vehicles. These vehicles were integrated with Warfighter Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T) Increment 2 (Inc 2) points of presence and soldier-network extensions, making it possible for A3E commanders to not just make a frequency-modulation radio call or tactical-satellite call to headquarters, but rather to send a more holistic common operating picture (COP). WIN-T Inc 2 enables commanders to connect to U.S. tactical secure/non-secure networks and the Coalition network.

The only limitation to the MRAP was its limited carrying capacity of four Soldiers compared to the Stryker’s double V-hull that has the ability to move eight Soldiers with the same mission-command suite.

As a result, A3E teams and leaders must understand mission-command on-the-move (MCOM) and its importance in being able to exchange critical battlefield information between echelons. If understood and executed properly, MCOM provides the ability for Soldiers to be tethered to their respective tactical-operations centers to receive a COP. MCOM enables leaders to place themselves at the most critical points on the battlefield, such as an abandoned building or on in a remote valley, where he or she could best advise and assist a partner force. There is clearly a need for more expeditionary network communications equipment – such as inflatable satellite antennas – that can be deployed at the tactical edge of operations and as a slingloadable version of the WIN-T tactical-communications node.

**Detailed, deliberate focus on logistics/sustainment**

The logistics system is critical to the success of any army. One of its most significant tasks for the EAA team during the nine-month deployment was how to train 9th Iraqi Army Division on management of its supply, maintenance and transportation systems. U.S. logistics-training advisory teams are deployed throughout Iraq to teach Iraqi soldiers how to effectively complete logistics tasks such as ordering supplies and maintaining equipment.

Task Force Dealer only brought one logistics officer forward to Iraq. As you can imagine, this individual had his hands full, as the average operation-readiness (OR) rate for the only Iraqi armor division was less than 50 percent. To combat this low OR rate, the U.S. provided Iraq train-and-equip funds that supplied the necessary assets and capabilities to achieve increasingly higher levels of partner participation. With comprehensive and consistent coalition support, partner forces steadily gained the confidence needed to fight and win against IS.

Logistics challenges were also common for EAA teams across Iraq due to the fact that they were constantly on the move in relatively remote locations and supported the ISF’s increasing tempo. Task Force Dealer was forced to rely on third-party vendors and contractors for fuel, waste removal, water and security infrastructure (for example, berming and T-wall emplacement).

On many occasions it took days, sometimes weeks, before contracts were approved and funding was provided to get some of the most basic life-support essentials, including clean water. In comparison, our Special Operations partners had readily available funding that allowed them more flexibility when it came to acquiring basic life-support needs. Highly mobile Task Force Dealer Soldiers lived in Force Providers, essentially deployable base camps, that could be set up and fully operational in as little as 3 hours. Force Providers facilitated Task Force Dealer’s ability to move rapidly; however, they provided little to no survivability from enemy small arms, nor sheltered Iraqi defense forces from shrapnel.
As a result of the lack of survivability, Task Force Dealer was dependent on third-party/local-national contractors to bring in T-walls to help protect its Soldiers.

EAA logistics officers must remain proactive and integrative in the planning process to forecast contracts and mitigate potential sustainment issues. EAA commanders and executive officers must retain a deliberate focus on sustainment, as it drives the EAA team’s ability to move in support of the partner force.

**Mental agility**

EAA-team Soldiers and leaders must remain flexible and adaptable in the unstable, unpredictable and constantly changing conditions of war. During the nine-month deployment, Task Force Dealer worked with four Iraqi partner forces: 9th Iraqi Army Division, 16th Iraqi Army Division, Federal Police and Emergency Response Division. Each organization had a unique mission in the fight to defeat the Islamic Caliphate. Task Force Dealer was originally brought forward to advise the only armored division in the Iraqi army; however, when the team received a change of mission in December to advise the Federal Police and Emergency Response Division in the clearance of eastern Mosul, it needed to quickly learn new organizations and new leaders. Despite lacking experience working with police or emergency-response units, Task Force Dealer assumed the mission and succeeded because of the team’s mental agility and adaptability.

Successful EAA teams have leaders and Soldiers who can adapt to changing circumstances and environments, and who are resilient, flexible, resourceful and innovative.

In conclusion, this article highlights five vital lessons that future EAA teams and SFABs should consider before assuming an advise-and-assist mission with a foreign partner force. These lessons include the power of relationships, an integrated intelligence and fires section, agile mission command, a detailed focus on logistics and sustainment, and the mental agility to respond to a complex environment.

The most fundamental and important of these lessons is the strength of the relationship between the specialized unit or team and foreign force. The success of the EAA team or SFAB depends on it, as it affects all aspects of mission success.

**LTC Stu James** is the senior task-force trainer (Scorpion 07) at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, CA. Previous assignments include battalion commander, 1-67 Armor, Fort Bliss, TX, Kuwait and Iraq; G-5, 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss; chief, Army G-8’s Force-Development Dominant-Maneuver Maneuver Team; brigade S-3, 172nd Infantry Brigade, Grafenwoehr, Germany, and Afghanistan; and S-3, 1-2 Infantry Battalion, Grafenwoehr. LTC James’ military schooling includes the U.S. Marine Corps’ School of Advanced Warfighting, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Armor Captain’s Career Course, Scout Platoon Leader Course and Armor Officer Basic Course. LTC James holds a bachelor’s of arts degree in policy management studies from Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA; a master’s of arts degree in education administration from West Virginia University; a master’s of military science in military studies, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University; and a master’s of military science in operational studies, School of Advanced Warfighting, Marine Corps University. His awards and honors include a Silver Star, five Bronze Stars and five Meritorious Service Medals.

**CPT Andrew Kydes** is the battalion intelligence trainer, Scorpion Team, NTC’s Operations Group, Fort Irwin, CA. Previous assignments include battalion S-2, 1-67 Armor, 3/1 Armored Division, Fort Bliss, TX; cryptologic support team lead, 742nd Military Intelligence Battalion, 704th Military Intelligence Brigade, Fort Meade, MD; and assistant operations officer, 742nd Military Intelligence Battalion, 704th Military Intelligence Brigade, Fort Meade. CPT Kydes’ military schooling includes Military Intelligence Captain’s Career Course, Intelligence Collection Course, observer/coach/trainer academy and Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course. He holds a bachelor’s of science degree in civil engineering from the U.S. Military Academy. His awards and honors include the Bronze Star Medal from his Iraq deployment June 2016-March 2017.

**Acronym Quick-Scan**

A3E – advice, assist, accompany and enable
CAS – close air support
CENTCOM – (U.S.) Central Command
COP – common operating picture
EAA – enable, advise and assist
Inc 2 – Increment 2
IS – Islamic State
ISF – Iraqi Security Forces
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
ITC – (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) tactical controller
JTAC – joint tactical air controller
MCOM – mission-command on-the-move
MRAP – mine-resistant, ambush-protected
NAI – named area of interest
NTC – National Training Center
OPD – officer professional development
OR – operational readiness
OSS – Operation Spartan Shield
SFAB – security-force assistance brigade
TAC – tactical command post
UAS – unmanned aerial system
UAV – unmanned aerial vehicle
VBIED – vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
WIN-T – Warfighter Information Network-Tactical