

Creating a NATO Military Advisory Force

[Daniel Korski and Michael Williams](#)

Introduction

For more than a decade a debate has raged about the respective roles of NATO and the EU. With the recent Irish veto of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's military build-up appears on hold, at least until EU leaders decide what to do next with the Treaty. Even once they know, few believe that the EU will develop full-spectrum military capabilities in the next fifty years. NATO meanwhile is back and will, for at least another two decades, remain the only effective military alliance in the world, capable of mounting a range of missions, from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. The U.S has come back to NATO and a new U.S president - whether Barack Obama or John McCain - will give the Alliance at least the benefit of the doubt.

But to hang on to its pole-position, NATO must tackle considerable challenges that plague the organization's effectiveness. Two immediate operational tests stand out: First, NATO's Afghan operation; second the KFOR mission in Kosovo. Risks abound, not least that the U.S will come to see the decision to hand ISAF over to NATO in 2003 as a mistake and will again favour a "coalitions-of-the-willing" policy, with consequences for intra-NATO solidarity. A dual gap - both political and capability-wise - may open up further between a U.S-led caucus and the rest of the Alliance. A two-tier alliance, as U.S Defense Secretary Robert Gates said.¹

Reforms are needed to improve both current and future operations including, adjustments to NATO's command structures so that greater authority can be delegated to military commanders and in-theatre integration with partners like UN can be improved, without, of course, compromising the roles of the North Atlantic Council and the Secretary-General.

Changes in the way NATO missions are financed should also be explored, perhaps through the development of a commonly-financed NATO operations budget or, initially, joint financing for parts of NATO operations. But most importantly NATO needs to improve its capacity to build indigenous security forces at brigade and battalion level in and before combat. The ISAF mission has been steadily built-up since its 2003 deployment from 4,500 troops to some 50,000. But adding more Western troops does not remove the inevitability that indigenous forces will be required to maintain security long-term. As such it should be a priority for the Alliance to establish a standing capacity to build indigenous security actors.

The return of security assistance

Recent missions have shown that while Security Sector Reform - rebuilding a state's entire security sector - is important, building the capacity of indigenous forces, training and fighting with them, can be even more important, at least in

the short-term. Naturally, security forces need to be under civilian and democratic control, financially-supported and administratively and logistically sustained. No doubt, military power - indigenous or international, UN-mandated or not - is unlikely to help defeat a localized insurgency, which feeds off local grievances, poor services, economic dislocation and so on. Increasing the Afghan army to 80,000 men will not be enough. To deal with the challenge requires more civilian input, funding and deployable civilians. It means extending the Rule of Law helping the Afghan governments and provincial outposts deliver basic services.

But besides expertise to build a Ministry of Defence, such civilian capacity is likely to remain beyond NATO's mandate. Even Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) rely, in the main, on civilians - diplomats and development workers - to undertake reconstruction tasks. Moreover, such expertise will also be irrelevant unless a permissive security environment can be created and maintained. That, in turn, requires capable indigenous security forces. As John Nagl², a former U.S officer and counter-insurgency expert, writes, in future the importance will "not be the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our allies to fight with us."

This realization is not new. During the Vietnam War, the United States Marine Corps operated the Combined Action Program, which combined a squad of

marines with local forces. Foreign Internal Defense, that is, helping allies organize and train forces is a “principal mission” of U.S. Special Operations Forces. But to undertake this task in Afghanistan, ISAF has created Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, or OMLTs (known as “omelets”).³ NATO requirement stipulates that the teams should be at least 10-15 soldiers strong, usually of more senior rank, from staff sergeant to colonel - but designed to work with almost any size unit from battalion to division. In practice, the OMLT sizes vary. For example, the Canadian-run OMLT alone consists of approximately 150 personnel. The UK’s Helmand OMLT is also more than double the standard NATO size. For all, however, the primary task is the same: to advise the Afghan army on intelligence, communications, fire support, logistics, and infantry tactics. In military operations, OMLTs participate in the fighting, calling for close air support, indirect fire and medical evacuation.

First-hand accounts tell of the morale boost provided to indigenous forces by the presence of OMLTs. When the British Army’s 52 Brigade arrived in Helmand, the Afghan Army units were deemed incapable of even the simplest tasks. Half a year of OMLT-style training by five British teams and the 3rd Brigade of the Afghan Army’s 205th Corps was able to deploy in full, conduct a passage of lines⁴ - a complex maneuver - and break into the Taliban-held town of Musa Qala⁵.

In Iraq, OMLT exists but are called Military Transition Teams or MiTTs. As of December 2006, more than 5000 U.S. military personnel were assigned to MiTTs in Iraq. In Afghanistan, 36 OMLTs are deployed. In 2005, in order to provide similar mentorship to Iraq’s other security forces, Police Training Teams (PiTTs) were created. Unlike MiTTs, these teams are augmented by contracted civilian police officers. If NATO’s KFOR mission is restructured to help build Kosovo’s security forces, it is not inconceivable that

OMLT-style units will be required, although tailored for the decidedly more permissive environment and tasks.

Improvised adaptation

OMLTs and MiTTs suffer from a number of problems. The Afghan army is fielding units faster than NATO can supply OMLTs to train them. As General Ray Henault, formerly chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, has said, increasing the number of OMLTs is NATO’s “number one force generation priority at the moment”. The Manley Committee, which studied Canada’s Afghan contribution, called the OMLTs “critical to the Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan.”⁶ But getting OMLTs staffed is a problem. As a Danish officer put it: “It is dangerous work and highly demanding. That’s why many countries hesitate to send more troops.”⁷ But even if NATO can field enough OMLTs - the target is 100 - a number of problems will remain.

If the U.S struggles to provide standardized training, other allies face similar if not greater problems

Few NATO countries have the manpower to supply more than one or two OMLTs. In Iraq, only Britain “MiTTed” with Iraqi forces. Many allies also have restrictions - so-called “caveats” - on their forces, which can make it hard to make the most of OMLTs.

Fewer troops still arrive with the training required to make a success of a six-month tour. The U.S Army has sought to remedy this by concentrating training at Fort Riley. By January 2008, more than 4,800 soldiers, airmen and sailors were trained under a 72-day training program.⁸ But U.S mentors are still trained at

different posts with no standardized training or a standardized doctrine. U.S Marines, executing the same mission as Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel are trained separately at Twenty-Nine Palms, PRT staff and OMLT personnel rarely meet - and train together - before arrival in theatre and PiTTs are trained separately at Fort Leonard Wood.

In addition, as ISAF and MNF-I headquarters are not always capable of identifying in what capacity personnel will serve prior to their arrival in theater, it is hard to tailor the training. As it takes an average OMLT or MiTT four to six months before it becomes effective, little time is left to leverage the skills learnt and the relationships created given that U.S rotations are one year, and most NATO allies deploy for only six months.

The U.S Army’s own assessment concluded that MiTTs are: “[currently being severely hampered by the quality and diversity of individuals assigned [to serve on these teams], the inadequacy of the curriculum, the lack of experience of the instructors, and the overall lack of external support.”⁹

If the U.S struggles to provide standardized training, other allies face similar if not greater problems. OMLT training is meant to be a 3-phase process, comprising national training, NATO pre-deployment training, and in-theatre training. But few allies have the dedicated resources to train their own personnel for advisory tasks or to train together for deployment in multinational commands. The UK has worked hard to improve pre-deployment preparation. When the British Army’s 16th Air Assault deployed to Helmand in 2005, they had had little training for advisory-style tasks. Their successors - 3 Commando, 12 Mechanized Brigade, and 52 Brigade - underwent specialized training and altered their force structure to better be able deploy five OMLTs. Problems, however, still remain.

U.S Army Advisory Corps

To deal with these problems, John Nagl has proposed that the US build a standing military organization - an Army Advisory Corps - able to take on OMLT-style tasks. As envisioned, this corps would oversee the training and deployment of some 750 25-soldier advisory teams. These 750 teams would be organized into three 250-team divisions each commanded by a 2-star officer. Proposed tours of duty in the Advisory Corps would be for three years, and soldiers could then return to conventional units or stay for additional tours with the Advisory Corps, if desired.

The U.S Army maintains that creating specialized units, including for advisory tasks, goes against experience from Iraq

Republican Presidential candidate John McCain has supported the initiative, pledging in a recent *Foreign Affairs* article that he would “create an Army Advisory Corps with 20,000 soldiers to partner with militaries abroad.”¹⁰ The idea builds on past U.S experience, for example during the Vietnam War when the USMC ran the Combined Action Program, which, at its height, had 114 units working with and training local forces. CAP, in turn, was the child of Marine Corps experience in the “Banana Wars” of Central America for example against Augusto Sandino’s guerrillas in Nicaragua between 1925-1933.¹¹

The U.S Army has a similarly long history of training missions. After World War II, the US Military Assistance Groups (MAG) or Military Advisory Assistance Groups (MAAG) provided equipment, training, advice, and assistance in Greece, the Philippines, China (Taiwan), Iran, Japan, and Korea. With the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950, the U.S States Military

Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG) reorganized itself and worked with the Korean army. In El Salvador, a small US Military Group (MILGROUP) oversaw a counterinsurgency effort for 12 years.¹²

But despite their historical pedigree, the 21st century version of these organisations - the Army Advisory Corps - has not met with success. LTG Peter W. Chiarelli, the influential Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S Army has written: “I don’t believe that it is in the military’s best interest to establish a permanent “Training Corps” in the conventional military to develop other countries’ indigenous security forces.”

The U.S Army maintains that creating specialized units, including for advisory tasks, goes against experience from Iraq, where Brigade Combat Teams have been required to rapidly transition between counterinsurgency, stabilization and training. They also note that Special Forces are more than capable of conducting the kind of tasks required. Critics, however, counter that training jack-of-all-trades officers and NCOs is asking too much and that the Army leadership is choosing a path of least resistance. The U.S Marines has already established a Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG) at Ft. Story, Virginia, which could be a precursor to a standing Marine Corps formation.

NATO Military Advisory Force

Whether or not the U.S Army will benefit from a stand-alone formation, success in places like Afghanistan and Iraq will rely on the legitimacy of the government and its international supporters. One nation - and perhaps particularly the US - will always find it difficult to garner this kind of legitimacy. Therefore, rather than build in an exclusively U.S set-up, it is necessary to invest in international capabilities, and this is where NATO could come in. Co-hosted by France and Germany, NATO’s next summit will tackle a long list of strategic and tactical challenges,

including capability shortfalls. Perhaps most importantly, France is expected to announce its full integration into the Alliance. Where better to announce the intention to set-up a 2000-person NATO Military Advisory Force?

Built on the NRF model, the NMAF could consist of multinational forces committed, on a rotating basis, to a six months’ period of joint training and exercising prior to the start of an operational stand-by period. Joint training would continue through-out the stand-by period. This would ensure that NATO has a highly flexible, standing OMLT-style capability.

Recent mission have underscored the need to systematize the Alliance’s security assistance

Each ally would, of course, need to develop its own capabilities - and decide whether to create stand-alone advisory formations or teach skills across their militaries. Most armies have resisted the creation of special units to deal with counterinsurgency, stabilization, and training/advisory operations. In the U.S, Foreign Internal Defense, that is, helping allies organize and train their forces to enhance is a “principal mission” of U.S. Special Operations Forces though Green Berets carry out many other tasks. But the existence of NMAF ought to, in the first place, galvanize the necessary capability build-up across the Alliance however it is organized in each military establishment.

To ensure the necessary standards of readiness, the summit should declare an intention to create a purpose-built Military Advisory Centre (MAC) to gather training currently done at the Joint Force Training Centre in NATO’s Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast and the U.S. Army Europe’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. The centre - which could be

built on an existing centre or as a new institution - would teach prospective advisors - who already would be first-rate specialists in military skills - the tricks of the advising trade and sufficient language skills to be effective in-country.

Those soldiers who have already served in OMLTs could be identified, offered a train-the-trainers course and their names committed to an alliance-wide database. They could then serve as a NMAF's alumni and be brought in to help tailor and deliver MAC's courses, act as support for those deployed or about to be deployed, as well as make up NMAF's most senior and experienced mentors. On the ground. OMLTs now are conducting training one week, then calling in fires and providing other assistance the next. In a similar way to the USMC CAP programme, this requires mentally robust, well-trained soldiers. These should be drawn from the combat force, where they will maintain currency. But being NMAF alumni need not affect this.

The Military Advisory Centre could also act as an information clearing house for institutions which engage in training. Clearing house activities could include the production of a journal, maintenance of websites, virtual collaboration sites, or other information exchange mechanisms. In addition, the centre could assist in developing national training programmes. To ensure the link between OMLT-style tasks and broader security sector reform, the centre could develop links with SSR-focused institutions, like DCAF (the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces).

Learning from the experiences of ISAF and MNF-I, most NATO armies have initiated a multitude of doctrinal changes, focused primarily on improving counterinsurgency and stabilization capacity. But a vacuum still exists: doctrine to support advisory missions. The Military Advisory Centre should be tasked to draft a separate doctrine for mentoring and advisory tasks.

Conclusion

NATO's 60th anniversary in 2009 presents an opportunity to revitalize the world's premier security organization and following this year's US presidential election, to re-build a consensus on Euro-Atlantic security. The revitalization of NATO is likely to be high on the agenda of the next American administration. But for this opportunity to be grasped, capability-delivering reform will be critical.

Recent mission have underscored the need to systematize the Alliance's security assistance. The U.S Army may yet decide to create standardized units - especially if John McCain enters the White House, while in Britain, the head of the army, General Sir Richard Dannatt, has argued that the British army needs to be restructured, grow bigger, and acquire new peacemaking and reconstruction skill, including by establishing specialized reconstruction units as part of eight "organic" manoeuvre brigades.¹³

But what is lacking is a NATO "chapeaux", which could help build capabilities elsewhere, ensure greater interoperability and guarantee that the new security assistance mission is a priority for all NATO allies. Creating a 2000-person NATO Military Advisory Force, supported by a Military Advisory Centre, would be the next logical move to achieve this. This is perhaps the most important way the Alliance can 'go global'. NATO cannot be everywhere all the time. Through building indigenous capacity in places like Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa, however, the Alliance can spread best practices and effect real change for the better. ■

Biography

Daniel Korski is a Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Michael Williams is a Lecturer at Royal Holloway.

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