

ENABLING OTHERS TO WIN IN A COMPLEX WORLD: MAXIMIZING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE POTENTIAL IN THE REGIONALLY ALIGNED BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

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An examination of the U.S. Army's security force assistance efforts during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM reveals significant issues in effectively advising Iraqi Security Forces due to several organizational and personnel shortcomings within the Army's approach to this crucial mission. The merging of the Army's operational and advisory efforts at the core operational formation—the brigade combat team (BCT)—occurred with the advent of the Advise and Assist Brigade in 2009. This resolved some of those issues operationally, but did not fix the underlying structural issues in the Army.

In 2013, the Army began to examine a new way of conducting business in the area of conflict prevention, looking to “engage regionally and respond globally.” The tool chosen for this strategy is the regionally aligned forces (RAF) concept, which aligns various units with the geographic combatant commands. One potential mission for RAF that has the possibility of yielding substantial dividends is security force assistance. By aligning units regionally, particularly the BCT, the Army could greatly increase its ability to conduct security force assistance through building enduring relationships with partner militaries and in gaining genuine regional expertise in potential areas of conflict.

However, the security force assistance lessons learned in Iraq are currently not operationalized to their maximum level within the BCT. If regionally aligned BCTs are to be truly effective in future security force assistance missions, several changes must take place in how the Army mans, trains, and equips its formations:

- First, the Army should expand regional alignment to the majority of its BCTs.

- Second, the Army should change its personnel management policies to ensure that soldiers serving in regionally aligned units remain focused on a geographic theater for the majority of their careers.
- Third, the Army should institutionalize relations between regionally aligned special forces groups and conventional forces co-located on installations.
- Fourth, the Army should create a distinct “Army advisor” functional area for officers and noncommissioned officers to form a cadre of experts in training foreign security forces at the tactical and operational levels.
- Finally, the Army should modify the organization of the BCT to increase its security force assistance capacity by assigning these Army advisors down to the maneuver battalion level.

As this analysis will demonstrate, the recommendations are not a cure-all for security force assistance within the BCT, but what they do provide is a possible means to develop more effectively and efficiently the militaries of partner and allied nations. By maximizing advising potential at the BCT and below, the Army will be able to build partner capacity more effectively, to develop enduring relationships with partner military forces while gaining regional expertise at the tactical and operational levels, to institutionalize special operations forces and conventional forces interdependence, and, most importantly, to attain unity of effort in the operational and advisory components of operations while also getting the soldiers best suited for advisor duty into those roles.

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