

The Simple vs. The Complete

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In basic training, our drill instructor told us repeatedly that there were two kinds of people on the battlefield: the quick and the dead. My experience with the “train and equip” mission for Iraq’s security forces has led me to conclude that there are two unique views as to what the organization I commanded is supposed to do: the simple and the complete.

The fundamental principle of the simple view is akin to a fisherman’s catch and release policy. Recruit Iraqis or Afghans, provide some training, distribute uniforms and equipment, and release them into the combat zone. When the numbers caught and released reach the predetermined goal, the train and equip mission is complete and the intervening force can go home.

Of course no one held the simple view as starkly as just stated, but this description is not too divergent from many people’s view of the mission of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), which I commanded from June 2007 through July 2008. Visits to Afghanistan have led me to believe that this view prevails there as well. The most telling example of the prevalence of this view was the table in the report to Congress from the Office of the Secretary of Defense depicting how many security forces have been trained and equipped.

The reality of taking on the mission of re-creating, or in some cases creating, security forces like those of Iraq and Afghanistan is far more complicated than the simple view which too many held and still hold. This view, while potentially applicable in some situations, demonstrates a misunderstanding of what is needed to field and sustain the security forces of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Consider the U.S. Army as an example. No one would believe that one could simply recruit soldiers, send them to basic combat training, issue them equipment, form them into units, and then send them to war—and be “done.” We understand that the process of preparing soldiers for operations is much more complex. Individual specialty training—for example, training for mechanics, supply and administrative clerks, medical

or intelligence specialists, and repairmen, just to name a few—is needed beyond basic combat training. We also understand that units need leaders, sergeants and officers, and that producing leaders takes more time than producing soldiers. We know that keeping an army in the field requires established systems: systems for personnel replacement, supply and maintenance, command and control, indirect fires and aviation, intelligence, administration, and medical treatment. We know, too, that these systems are needed not just within a unit on the battlefield, but also among units throughout the battlespace. Furthermore, we know that, to be effective, these battlefield systems must be nested within sets of systems that connect all the way to the national command level. Finally, as in the case of the U.S. military, something like the Department of the Army, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Joint Staff are needed to perform the institutional functions that are required by any self-sustaining security force.

A change of a regime, as we had in Afghanistan and Iraq, entails problems too complicated for the simple view. A regime encompasses an entire security apparatus, the systems and institutions that run the nation's security sector. This realization is important as we could face similar situations to those in Iraq and Afghanistan, if we chose to assist in developing the security forces and institutions of failed or failing states in the future. Training and equipping fielded forces, whether military or police, is merely the face of a security apparatus, not its entirety. The simple view leaves un-recognized anything beyond the surface. A more complete view, however, is daunting.

It is daunting because of how complicated and lengthy the task becomes. When one's understanding of the mission is informed by a more complete view of the train and equip task, no longer are numbers of trained and equipped security forces sufficient to determine the scope of the task. No longer can the task be completed quickly. The commitment entailed by the complete view takes on an entirely different hue than the commitment made with the simple view in mind and entails the following three requirements: time, organization, and partnerships.

Time. Recruiting and providing basic equipment and training is often the easiest part of the task and takes the least time. Perhaps if the conditions are right, it might even be easy to find a sufficient number of people who are willing to lead these recruits-now-hastily-formed-into-units. From here the mission becomes more complicated. The reliability, cohesion, and capability of those units depend not just on their training and equipment, but upon the strength of the bond among the units' members as well as the quality of its leadership and the systems in place to support the units in a fight. Perhaps more important, an often un-noticed factor that affects reliability, cohesion, and capability, is the legitimacy of the cause for which units fight.

Quality leadership and support systems take time to develop. The Darwinian aspect of combat often identifies good leaders at the tactical level, but Darwin doesn't work as well at the higher levels. Processes for leader

selection and de-selection take time to develop and take root. Institutions and bureaucracies must form, grow, and mature in order to provide the kind of battlefield-to-national level support systems fighting units need to become a self-sufficient national security sector. History shows us that reliable, cohesive, and capable fighting units and the systems designed to support them can serve themselves, an individual, or any variety of causes. The goal that we seek in Iraq and Afghanistan is that, as institutions, the Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces serve their government. To achieve this goal, these institutions need a government that is sufficiently stable and recognized, at least from the standpoint of its citizens and security forces, as legitimate. If developing leaders, support systems, bureaucracies, and institutions build slowly, much more time is needed to develop a stable and legitimate government.

Organization. Time is only the first requirement in building a functioning security force. If one is willing to make the time commitment, then one needs a means to carry out such a commitment—an organization. The simple view of “train and equip” results in the belief that a few drill sergeants and a few supply sergeants will get the job done. Again, this is overstatement to be sure, but even if it is not exactly accurate, it is true in a general sense. The simple view underestimates the size and composition of the organization needed to execute the complete range of train and equip functions. The simple view also underestimates the experience and stability needed from those in the organization charged with the train and equip mission.

The complete view recognizes that the organization’s mission is not just to field forces once, but also to set in place the full set of processes, bureaucracies, and institutions needed to replenish and sustain those forces. Additionally, over time, they have the mission to grow these processes, bureaucracies, and institutions into a self-sufficient security sector and in order to accomplish this task, they must be large in size and varied in composition. Size will, of course, vary according to the size of the security force being fielded and security sector being developed. But the complete view gives one a significantly robust template from which to start, one that will list each of the support systems needed for fighting forces—from battlefield through national levels—and each of the security sector’s institutional functions—from force management, to acquisition, training, funding, sustaining, and development. This more accurate template gives one a sense of how necessarily large and varied in composition such an organization must be.

This more complete template will also provide insight into the breadth and depth of experience needed within the organization. Experience counts. Credibility is the coin of the realm when guiding others in the task not just of generating fighting forces once, but also of setting in place the full set of processes, bureaucracies, and institutions needed to replenish and sustain those forces over time and to develop into a self-sufficient security sector.

Finally, the template and time recognition derived from the complete view leads one to conclude that the organization formed to execute the train and equip mission will be more enduring than the organization formed in light of the simpler view.

Partnerships. Time and organization lead to the third requirement—partnerships. The organization assigned to the train and equip mission must establish three important partnerships if it to be successful.

First, partnership with friendly combat forces. Again, the U.S. Army provides a good example of why this partnership is essential. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) provides institutional training and education for the Army—for example, basic combat training, advanced individual training, specialty training, and officer and Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) training and education. No one questions the fact that the training, as good as it is, provided in TRADOC training centers and schools, has to be continued by the unit commanders of Forces Command (FORSCOM), whether at home station or even while in combat. Further, no one questions the role that the Department of the Army and the Army Materiel Command have in providing both TRADOC and FORSCOM with the personnel, funding, and materiel needed for training.

One should not be surprised, therefore, by the utility and necessity of the partnership between MNSTC-I (and NATO Training Mission-Iraq) and Multi-national Corps-Iraq—including the combat forces of our Coalition Forces. The corps plays a vital role in continuing the training of the Iraqi Army and Police forces. That role includes both the embedded training teams as well as the Coalition units who fight side-by-side with their Iraqi counterparts. This training and development includes continuous upgrade of combat skills, development of leadership techniques, and improvement of maintenance and maintenance management procedures. This same kind of institutional-to-field partnership extends to the Iraqi special operations forces, air forces, and naval forces. Training and development continues on the job in Iraq just as it does in the United States.

Second, partnership with the host nation's security sector—military and civilian. The final responsibility for the development of the security forces and institutions lies with the Governments of Iraq and Afghanistan. Organizations formed to execute the train and equip mission improve their chances of success not when they develop a plan internally, then try to “sell” that plan to their Iraqi or Afghan counterparts. Persuasion, not force, is the currency of those in a “train and equip” organization. To be sure, persuasion is forcefully delivered at times and there are red lines on either side; equally sure, however, is that recommendations derived from experience in one cultural setting may not work in another.

The dialogue between the advisor and those advised—whether that dialogue is conducted by members of an organization like MNSTC-I or like MNC-I—is almost always on practical problems faced by both parties.

This dialogue, and the relationship of trust that develops from it, often results in the best solution—even if it is not the best solution when judged by some abstract measure. In the final analysis, T.E. Lawrence’s 15th Article reigns, “Do not try to do too much with our own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly.”¹ *En route* to that final decision, however, there is room for much spirited discussion—a discussion that will only take place within the context of partnership, not paternalism.

Third, partnership with the organization responsible for developing civil governance and economic growth. This partnership, often left un-recognized, derives from the fact that the security sector of a nation is one part in that nation’s security architecture and governance structure which include the civilian leadership of the nation being advised. This partnership acknowledges that while organizations like MNSTC-I, in partnership with organizations like MNC-I, attempt to provide coherent advice regarding the training, equipping, and developing of a nation’s security forces and institutions, this effort takes place (or should) in the context of a similar effort to improve the processes and institutions of civil governance and economic development. In Iraq, the effort to develop civil governance and economic systems was a responsibility initially assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority, then to the U.S. Embassy. The ambassadors of our Coalition partners also played an important role in this aspect of development as well as in the development of the security sector. Security sector development, if not watched carefully, could result in lopsided governmental capacity. In this situation, the security sector ministries may become so much more capable than other elements of civil governance that a security-dominated state could result. In turn, such a state may revert to an authoritarian regime that uses its security sector contrary to the rule-of-law. This possibility is real.

To avert such a possibility, the organization responsible for the train and equip mission must remain a close partner with the organization responsible for overall civil governance and economic growth. These two organizations must be aligned not just with respect to goals and objectives, but often with respect to daily execution of their duties. This spirit of partnership must permeate both organizations from top to bottom. Wherever the two organizations diverge, this dangerous condition becomes a possibility.

The preceding discussion used examples from the army for sake of illustration. Similar observations apply to the variety of police and border control forces as well as the special operations, intelligence, air, and naval forces—for the Multinational Security and Transition Command-Iraq has responsibility for these forces as well. The complete view is indeed daunting in its breadth and complexity. Our anxiety toward this mission must be faced, however, prior to embarking on missions like Iraq or Afghanistan. To be sure, there are cases where the train and equip mission is much closer to the simple view side of the spectrum—our operations in the Philippines may provide such an example. Equally sure, Iraq and Afghanistan lean far more to the complete view. Actual conditions associated with any potential operation must dictate the appropriate

approach. Bias, ideology, political partisanship, or overly optimistic assumptions have no place in this discussion, for the stakes are too high.

It is clear that “train and equip” makes a great bumper sticker and a good elevator speech, but it does not reflect the full complexity of what many of these missions entail. Rather, “train and equip” admits to degrees. On one extreme lies the simple view, at the other extreme, the complete view. Each situation will differ and will most likely fall somewhere between these extremes. What is important is that the extremes are recognized, a thorough analysis of the actual conditions made, and fact-based decisions applied during the planning phase of a potential operation. The complete view with its three required partnerships begins to provide a framework useful for analysis and planning. The framework could help illuminate the potential size and composition of a train and equip effort. Once rough size and composition are known, analysts and planners can identify resources available and determine the difference between potential requirement and available resources so as to have at least some data with which to assess risk.

Others have written about the degree to which this process was applied to the planning for the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. I want to look forward, not backward. We have an opportunity with the change of administration to review the facts on the ground in both countries, assess the intellectual foundations and assumptions upon which our operations rest, and re-evaluate our strategies and policies. As we do so, we should be reminded that the 18-20 year-olds now fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan were 1-3 years old at the end of the First Gulf War, and only 10-12 years old at the start of this war. Decisions necessary to help resolve our economic crisis have already transferred financial burdens to the next generation. We should also not commit them to fight a war that we could not finish properly.

¹ Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized Biography of T.E. Lawrence*, (New York: Antheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), p. 962