

Interesting Things Happen at Intersections

by Captain William J. George

Introduction

Since the inception of the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB), people have asked me, “What is it like to be in the SFAB?” My reply vaguely describes the unit’s accomplishments over the past 18 months. The more difficult question to answer is, “What is it like being an S-2 in the SFAB?” My experience as a squadron S-2 leads me to respond by highlighting the advising aspects of the job or the traditional intelligence support. In many ways, the newness of the SFAB seems to cloud people’s perspective of the SFAB’s original purpose, which typecasts its members in the role of advisor or support personnel.¹ Neither fully embodies the essence of an intelligence advisor, and during deployments the reality lies somewhere in between. One of the greatest challenges that an SFAB S-2 faces is balancing the role and responsibilities of senior intelligence advisor and primary staff member. If I had one phrase to describe my experience in navigating these challenges, it would be that “interesting things happen at intersections.”²

This article describes various aspects of being an SFAB intelligence advisor, and it highlights experiences from the 1st SFAB’s recent deployment to Afghanistan. The article—

- ◆ Illustrates how doctrinal tasks affect the intelligence professional.
- ◆ Describes the difference between an intelligence advisor’s internal and external functions.
- ◆ Illustrates how the intelligence advisor’s internal and external functions can directly affect one another in relation to the operational environment influences.
- ◆ Describes how to assess a foreign security force and establish advising goals.
- ◆ Discusses the intelligence advisor’s role in the intelligence community.

Internal and External Functions of an Advising Team Member

ATP 3-96.1, *Security Forces Assistance Brigade*, divides the functions of an advising team member into two



U.S. Army photo courtesy of 3rd Squadron, 1st SFAB

Advisors from 3rd Squadron, 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade alongside their partners from the Afghan National Army’s 4th Brigade, 203rd Corps in front of their Persistent Threat Detection System, in Logar Province, Afghanistan.

subcategories: internal and external, as shown in Figure 1.³ The internal functions are recognizable to any primary staff member, and the external functions are primarily advisor centric.

Operational Environment’s Influence

The impact of the operational environment and its ability to alter the distribution of an SFAB S-2’s internal and external advising functions cannot be overstated. *Balancing the internal and external advising functions in the SFAB is not only a requirement but also an essential aspect of advising for the intelligence warfighting function.* In a permissive environment, intelligence advisors may find they are only required to conduct external advising functions, with some internal functions not being applicable.⁴ For example, at larger bases in Afghanistan, the preexisting infrastructure provides many of the internal functions of intelligence advisors, limiting their need to complete these tasks themselves. In a less permissive environment or in situations where the advising team is responsible for the majority of the internal functions, like at the smaller manned forward operating bases, the execution of internal functions may be

the higher priority for the intelligence advisor. Figure 2, on the next page, shows the balancing of functions in permissive, semi-permissive, and hostile environments.

As we deployed to Afghanistan, it became apparent that we would be heavily involved with both sides of the spectrum. I found myself filling the role of senior intelligence officer for a forward operating base that grew from 400 to 1,200 service members. It can be frustrating to find yourself working on these internal functions because it is easy to inaccurately view these functions as contradictory to your role of advisor. Despite the frustration, *it is imperative to view these functions as complementary to improving your ability to advise security forces in the region.* All the efforts in base defense, construction of a targeting process, and management of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance are key to understanding the environment. This understanding allows advisors to provide their partners with guidance that is not constructed in a vacuum.

As a minimally manned intelligence section consisting of one 35F (Intelligence Analyst) and one 35D (All-Source Intelligence Officer) responsible for an entire squadron of

Intelligence Advisor Functions	
Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises the team leader on intelligence. • Monitors routine situational updates (weather, road conditions, and recent activities). • Provides reach back capability to leverage multidiscipline, multi-echelon intelligence enablers in support of advising team operations. • Maintains the cultural calendar and advises the team of key dates and significant activities. • Trains and advises the team in the use of biometric and forensic equipment used in tactical site exploitation. • Advises on the intelligence preparation of the operational environment to support operations. • Advises on the preparation of the information collection plan. • Assists the team with collecting information for required reports during missions. • Coordinates through higher headquarters for counterintelligence support for insider threat, antiterrorism, and force protection assessments. • Provides input for training assessments. • Assists with monitoring the accountability for, and welfare of, interpreters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises the foreign security forces’ (FSF) intelligence section. • Advises the FSF on using intelligence assets. • Advises the FSF on processing tactical information into predictive analysis. • Supports intelligence for the FSF combat operations. • Supports intelligence briefings to the FSF commander. • Integrates intelligence reporting with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners’ intelligence enterprises, where allowed. • Shares intelligence and information with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners according to foreign disclosure officer approval when allowed. • Adheres to the principles and tactics, techniques, and procedures of effective cross-cultural communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

Figure 1. Intelligence Advisor Functions

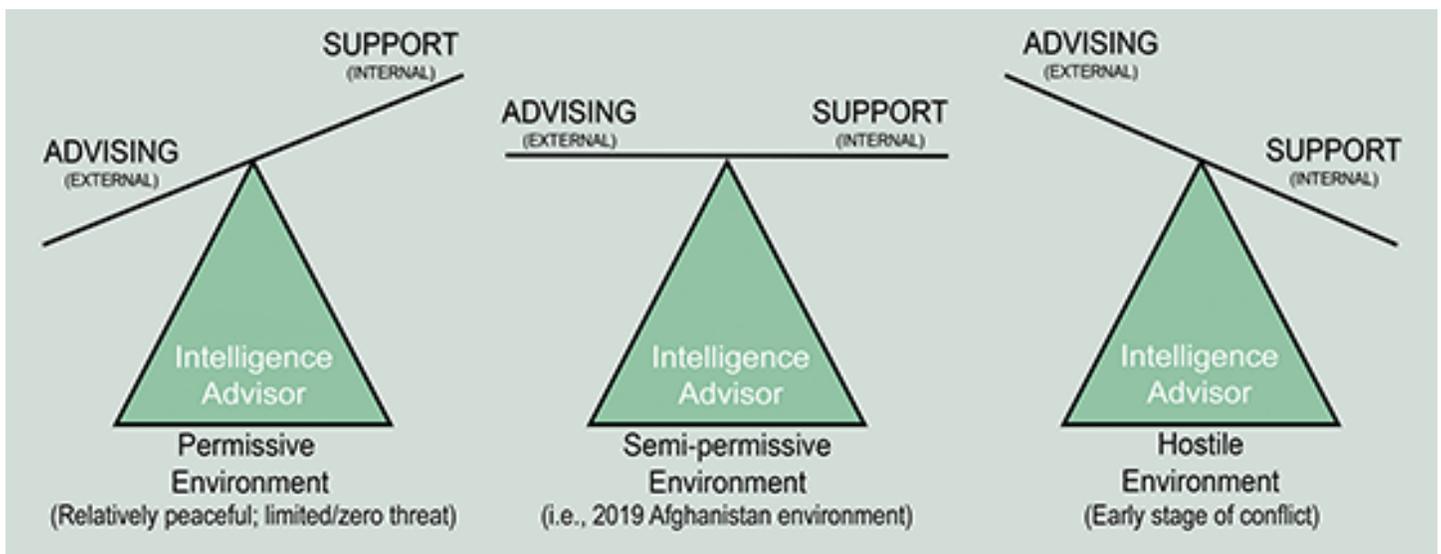


Figure 2. Operational Environment's Influence on the Intelligence Advising Functions

advisors, it was critical for us to find ways to increase proficiency while eliminating the need for additional manpower. The best way for us to achieve this was to understand that *every task we completed had to result directly in an advising effort*. Many of the ways we improved proficiency were simple and in many cases just required a mindset change. One way we accomplished our goal was by creating a team at our base, merging three conventional units into a make-shift intelligence section that could incorporate several civilian advisors, and coordinating with collocated special operations forces. Creating this team helped our future advising efforts.

The most tangible example of this was our effort in improving base defense. As everyone understood, force protection came first and was a prerequisite to accomplish our advising efforts. As we arrived in Afghanistan, an indirect fire threat commandeered a lot of our time, and until we built our base-wide intelligence team, the responsibility fell to my small shop of two to address the problem. Instead of viewing this as an obstacle to achieving our advising mission, we had to develop ways of addressing the various threats in our area while maximizing effectiveness. By harnessing several core advisor imperatives,⁵ we were able to capitalize on the resources and personnel around us to accomplish our advising mission.

A lesson learned about balancing the internal support functions and the external advising functions is to *leverage the work accomplished in your internal functions against your advising efforts*. One example is understanding the threat in your operational environment, specifically in terms of what you expect to be your most likely/dangerous course of action. Execute your normal duties, build your most likely/dangerous course of action, and once completed instruct a

class on how to execute your methodology. By doing so, you develop a rubric with which to compare your counterpart's end product. This process will be mutually beneficial by allowing collaborative work to improve force protection for both forces, and it will achieve both your internal and your external functions.

Assessing Your Partner and Establishing Goals

Assessing your partner and establishing your advising goals should be the first thing you do when entering a theater. Advisors cannot undervalue the importance of this initial assessment. It is the foundation for everything you will achieve during the deployment. You must synchronize assessing your partner and establishing goals because completing these tasks independently of one another will only impede progress and you will find yourself having to start again after having wasted precious time. Understanding your partner's capabilities and priorities is integral to developing your priorities. Doing so will allow for greater success in working with your partner because your investment in their goals bolsters their confidence in you (their advisor) and subsequently their confidence in the advising relationship. Key to establishing your goals is not to overreach your counterpart's capabilities. If you take a simple task for granted, your goals may not be feasible.

A piece of advice that I can offer a future intelligence advisor is to understand your partner's culture and its effect on their decision-making process. Understanding the Afghans' desire to reciprocate gifts and favors provided me the opportunity to share intelligence with my partner and get a response in kind. This sharing of intelligence became crucial to our understanding of the environment. In some cases, the intelligence provided led to our successful interdiction of several indirect fire attacks on our forward operating base.

One of the greatest lessons learned that I can offer an advisor as he/she sets advising goals is to “find the easy win.” It is critical to approach advising with realistic expectations about how you can assist your counterpart. Identifying your counterpart’s priority project will increase their buy-in to your advising relationship. An example of an easy win that we experienced while assisting our Afghan brigade counterparts was in improving the functionality of their Persistent Threat Detection System. This example illustrates an advising effort that was simple for us to influence and provided immediate positive feedback. It instilled a lasting resource for our counterpart.

Find the Easy Win

Our Afghan counterparts were proficient in maintaining and operating the Persistent Threat Detection System but lacked the ability to monitor and sync this capability with their operations center. As a joint advising effort with intelligence, operations, and signals advisors, they located the problem and determined that a technical issue with the information feed prevented the transmission into the operations center. With little effort, this slight technical problem was corrected and our partners had live video feed in their operations center. Within a week of the fix and with some minimal guidance on collection management, the brigade tracked five individuals as they emplaced a daisy chain of three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at a school and voter registration site. The Afghan S-2 section monitored the individuals’ movements from emplacement back to their production site. They also coordinated efforts in their joint operations center to deploy their quick reaction force and explosive ordnance disposal element. All five individuals were detained along with the components at their production site, and the IEDs were disarmed with no casualties. This example illustrates an advising effort that was simple for us to influence. It also provided immediate positive feedback and instilled a lasting resource for our counterpart.⁶

In working toward assisting my counterpart in collection management, I found myself back-peddling and reestablishing goals because I looked at the basic aspects of my profession, like understanding the importance of leveraging multiple intelligence disciplines, and assumed my counterpart was proficient. Collection management became a long-term goal, and the focus shifted to establishing systems that allowed for the simple management of two intelligence disciplines rather than one. Understanding your counterpart’s historic effectiveness in the unit is also important in order to assess your partner correctly. An example of this existed in our partner’s chain of command, which prevented the staff from providing assessments. Therefore, setting an advising goal of getting my partner to develop multiple courses of

action for future operations would have been futile because his leadership would not have accepted his recommendations. Instead, we set our goals on increasing their ability to analyze and assess the environment to better disseminate intelligence to his battalions.

The Intelligence Advisor’s Role in the Intelligence Community

I want to highlight an aspect of the SFAB that has not been fully explored, which is codifying the intelligence advisor’s role in the intelligence community. In many ways, the intelligence advisors in the SFABs are like a new piece of hardware available to the intelligence community. In some cases, *these advisors may be the only intelligence professionals with access to a particular foreign security force*, giving them a unique ability to answer priority intelligence requirements and specific information requirements with regard to their host nation’s capability.

The recent deployment to Afghanistan revealed intelligence gaps left in the wake of the 2014 troop drawdown. In many ways, we were filling intelligence gaps that no other intelligence discipline or organization had the ability to do. This proved crucial in assisting our partners across eastern Afghanistan to synchronize efforts in preparing the environment for successful parliamentary elections. An intelligence advisor can greatly influence the intelligence community by fully using opportunities to communicate up and down the Advising Network.⁷ This allows intelligence advisors at the kandak (battalion), brigade, and corps levels to verify information as it travels inside the Afghan chain of command.

At the core of this problem is establishing the level of output the intelligence community reasonably should expect intelligence advisors to provide in terms of synthesized intelligence without overwhelming the advisor’s ability to fulfill the primary role of assessing, advising, supporting, and liaising with the foreign security force. It would be a misappropriation for the intelligence advisor to rely completely on the existing intelligence apparatus in their area of operations for analysis. I argue that there are aspects of collated intelligence production which the advisors themselves should produce because they are the lone subject matter experts. By doing so, the intelligence advisor acts as a force multiplier freeing up intelligence support in the area for other mission sets. In an environment where the theater has personnel constraints, the intelligence advisor’s unique ability to advise their counterparts, while simultaneously producing intelligence, provides an additional capacity and flexibility to the regional command and to the Department of Defense as a whole.

Conclusion

Balancing the internal and external advising functions in the SFAB is not only a requirement but also an essential aspect of advising for the intelligence warfighting function. It is imperative to view the internal advisor functions as complementary to the advising mission set. These functions can produce a hectic environment, but with the application of the right tools, systems, and processes, these issues transform from challenges into opportunities. Although the operational environment influences the distribution of these functions, understand that the division of these functions is not set. The operational environment shifts the focus and at times blurs the line between the internal and external functions. If you see everything as an advising effort, the frustration that may result from attempting to balance these functions will be limited.

Future mission sets will contribute to the ever-shifting life of an SFAB advisor and will provide additional context and lessons to continue to shape both doctrine and best practices that intelligence advisors use. The broad yet focused experiences of being an SFAB S-2 will continue to shape my effectiveness as an intelligence professional, and I am looking forward to the next mission set because “interesting things happen at intersections.” 

Endnotes

1. For the purpose of this discussion, *support* refers to the members of the Security Force Assistance Brigade who focus more on support than advising.
2. In a conversation with the author, in Logar, Afghanistan, 2018, Kyle Oman (U.S. contractor) used the phrase “interesting things happen at intersections.”
3. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2 May 2018), 1-22–1-23.
4. *Ibid.*, 3-7.
5. Department of the Army, ATP 3-07.10, *Advising Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Advising Foreign Security Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 13 November 2017), 33.
6. Matt Fontaine, “Afghan Army Captures IED Maker, Prevents Attack on School, Voting Center,” Resolute Support Afghanistan, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 19 July 2018, <https://rs.nato.int/news-center/feature-stories/2018-feature-stories/afghan-army-captures-ied-maker--prevents-attack-on-school--voting-center.aspx>.
7. The *Advising Network* is an established hierarchy, in which advisors complete their external advising functions at multiple echelons, providing the ability for communication and solution of problems at echelon. For example, in Afghanistan the network consists of the kandak (battalion), brigade, and corps level.

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