USIPEACE BRIEFING

The Role of the Ministerial Advisor in Security Sector Reform:

Navigating Institutional Terrains

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INTRODUCTION

International actors in Security Sector Reform (SSR) are increasingly taking on roles as "advisors" to Ministries of Interior, Defense, and Justice. Rather than directly implement changes necessary for SSR, these advisors must persuasively articulate suggestions to their local counterparts. Advisors' success depends on their ability to convey recommendations in a manner that makes change acceptable to their advisees. Ministerial and governmental advising is not the exclusive purview of any one entity. Rather, advising is undertaken by a diverse range of individuals from U.S. and foreign governments, militaries, NGOs, private contractors, and U.N. agencies. These actors have correspondingly diverse objectives and approaches to SSR; without coordination or consensus on SSR programming, advisors may find themselves working at cross-purposes. Furthermore, the multiplicity of advisors and institutions makes sharing best practices and improving over time and across conflicts extremely difficult.

What common challenges do foreign advisors face, and how might they pool intellectual resources and "lessons learned" to address these challenges? This question was addressed by a panel of distinguished experts at a recent meeting sponsored by the Institute's Security Sector Reform Working Group. Principal speakers included:

- Michael Metrinko, Ministry Reform Advisor, U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute;
- Col. Christopher Tone, Senior Advisor to Afghan Defense Ministry, U.S. Army, 2007-2008;
- Col. David Dornblaser, Security Assistance Officer - Iraq, U.S. Army, 2006-2007;
- Julie Werbel, Senior Security Sector Reform Advisor, U.S. Agency for International Development;
- Lawrence Cooley, Founder and President, Management Systems International; and
- Nadia Gerspacher, Advisor, Education and Training Center, U.S. Institute of Peace.

Robert Perito, director of the SSR Working Group and a senior program officer at USIP, moderated the panel. The following is a summary of views expressed during the meeting.

IMPROVING ADVISORS' SELECTION AND SUPPORT

The challenges that face ministerial advisors are multiple and varied. Advisors from different backgrounds and with different objectives approach these

challenges in different ways. Yet there is a clear consensus around key suggestions for improving advising as well as common ground within more controversial topics.

Select Advisors, not Experts: The interpersonal networking and cultural navigation demanded of advisors requires rigorous selection for specific skills and qualities. Local language competency and relevant technical knowledge and experience are critical qualifications. Advisors must be able to establish a meaningful dialogue with local leaders in order to provide useful, substantive advice. Less tangibly, patience and humility are crucial traits. Advisors are not merely experts, but are negotiators, teachers and partners. The characteristics of successful advisors generally differ from those required to *execute* the task for which they are advising, particularly in a military context. As a result, successful military commanders may prove unsuccessful advisors, as they move from the 'world of command' to the 'world of influence'.

An advisor's success depends on the advisee's response to the information and advice provided. An ineffective advisor can negatively influence the success of the entire advisory mission. Inappropriate selection and high turnover of advisors can contribute to "advising fatigue" among local officials who may become frustrated with perceived social engineering by the foreign institutions represented by a parade of advisors. The necessary trust for individuals and institutions in an advising relationship can only develop if advisors are stationed long enough to establish mutual confidence and close personal relations.

Balance Legitimacy and Efficiency: In post-conflict settings, there is a need for quick improvement and maximum efficiency. Yet in order to gain and maintain legitimacy with the population, security reforms must be products of local, autonomous institutions and processes. The lengthiness and complexity of these processes may threaten the efficiency of implementation of the necessary reforms. Advisors must try to improve efficiency without undermining the legitimacy of local government in reality or perception.

This challenge can be exacerbated when the demands of the advisor's superiors are unreasonable. There is a need for "expectation management" on the part of foreign institutions to focus on reasonable outcomes in the short term. Otherwise, advisors are pressured to prioritize output over process, which can undermine local ownership and public faith in the government, and thus the long-term sustainability of the local institutions. This highlights the importance of effective training for advisors and their supervisors.

Improve Coordination: Interagency coordination among U.S. entities is one of the major challenges to effective advising. Representatives from the U.S. military and government agencies, commercial contractors, NGOs, the UN and other international and donor governments often have overlapping advising responsibilities. Without coordination, these advisors can give conflicting advice,

in part due to the different approaches and measures of success held by different institutions. Coordinating enables advisors to pool administrative resources, assess progress, and increase understanding of the organizational dynamics at work. Coordination mechanisms also create support networks for advisors to share strategies for communicating with their counterparts and their superiors. For these reasons, employing a team of advisors that create an effective support network is preferable to multiple advisors operating independently.

Most advisors agree on the need for improved selection, training, and coordination, which can be difficult because the "correct" approaches to advising and measuring success are contentious. Yet even within these controversies, there is space for agreement and collaboration.

COMMON GROUND WITHIN ADVISING CONTROVERSIES

Supply-Driven v. Demand-Driven Advising: One of the major challenges confronting advisors is ensuring that advice is useful to and accepted by advisees. Advice varies in the extent to which it is "supply-driven" advice, initiated by international institutions, versus "demand-driven" advice, specifically requested by ministry officials. Demand-driven advice is more likely to be considered acceptable and useful by advisees. However, this advice more often relates to issues of functional administration and execution of decisions, rather than shaping the content of decisions. Advisors may be pressured by their international chain of command to "deliver the message," but effective advising requires constant attention to meeting the needs of local officials for information and solutions to their problems. There is space for advisors with different approaches to advising to collaborate on providing demand-driven administrative training and support.

Measuring Success: There are no agreed-upon ways of measuring the success of advising, due in part to institutions' different objectives for advising, organizational cultures, and lexicons. The range of opinions widens when local participants are brought into discussions of measuring progress and defining success. However, there is some common ground. The importance of local officials becoming able to operate effectively without the presence of the advisor is a shared goal among most advisors – the idea is to "advise yourself out of a job." One concrete way to measure this is by focusing on whether officials enact the plans they set according to a defined process, such as implementing an agreed-upon budget. To some advisors, budget execution may not provide a complete measure of success, particularly if an advisor is focused on the content of the budget, the priorities it reflects, and whether it is equitable. Yet it provides a useful starting point from which advisors from different institutions and their advisees can work together and provide a framework for joint assessments.

Individual v. Institutional Advising: Advisors may focus on increasing the capacity of the local official they are advising or they may work to improve the

overall performance of the institution in which the advisee serves. Concentration on a single individual may yield early returns, but may accomplish little in the long term, if the local official is transferred, resigns, or is removed from office. Institutional development may take longer and require broad interaction with a number of local officials, but it may yield greater success, in the long term. All advisors focus on personal relationships, and the choice between these two approaches may not always be obvious. Most advisors agree that personal relationships are an important *means* to achieving the *ends* of improved processes and institutional reform. An organizational approach is enhanced by awareness of the individual or personal influences on the workplace and how individual motivations affect organizational processes. For instance, administrative training for an advisees' staff has the simultaneous benefit of increasing institutional capacity and building trust for later partnership regarding the content of decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Advising illuminates the tension between the international community's wish to foster local ownership over institutional reform and its wish to maintain some influence over decisions and processes. It is an inherently fraught process, yet a critical one for the success of SSR programs overseas. While there is controversy within the advising community about approaches to advising, there are clear areas of consensus about the need for improvements in the selection, training, and coordination of ministerial advisors in post-conflict environments. As for selection, the different personality requirements of the typical military commander and the successful SSR advisor may call for a distinct selection process within the military. Not every successful military officer is qualified by temperament to become an advisor, at least without appropriate training and initial supervision. Further, length of tour is essential to all advisors' chances for success. Advisors should not be assigned unless they can serve for two years, the minimum tour for optimal advising.

Pre-deployment training for advisors is a crucial element of their success. Without training, preferably by experienced former advisors, past "lessons learned" and particular contextual knowledge are lost. Including former advisors in training of new advisors ensures that training is as useful as possible and provides important professional and personal de-briefing opportunities. Advisors' training should include superiors to assist with expectation management and to develop appropriate means of assessment, feedback, and support. Ideally, training and discussions of joint assessment could include representatives from multiple agencies and institutions. Interactive, interagency training would help provide a strong foundation for coordination in the field.

Once in the field, advisors from various agencies should participate in joint assessments to share best practices, address practical challenges, improve shared understanding of the organizational mechanisms at work. Budget

execution and other administrative functions can serve as goals and outcomes for measurement, since they are shared among most advisors as minimal goals. This may refocus some advising institutions on more realistic and timely goals and increase understanding of how multiple institutions' goals interact with each other.

The role of advisors in SSR deserves increased attention and policy development. Advisors and those who send them overseas must work to expand the understanding of the role, the preparation and the evaluation of the ministerial advisor in both policy and practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This USIPeace Briefing was written by Liz Panarelli, a Program Assistant in the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

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The Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations designs and manages the Institute's efforts in areas emerging from conflict. The Center also conducts research, identifies best practices, develops new tools for post-conflict peace and stability operations and supports related training and education efforts. Daniel Serwer is vice president of the center.

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