U.S. Army photo by Sean Kimmons

SPC Stephen Powers, right, a communications advisor with Combat Advisor Team 1131, uses the Afghan National Tracking System to show his counterparts where Afghan soldiers are located during a clearing operation near Kabul, Afghanistan, September 16, 2018.

Lessons Learned and the Way Ahead for the SFAB Intelligence Warfighting Function

by Lieutenant Colonel Todd Harkrader

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) was in the process of manning, training, and equipping the first-ever SFAB when it received notification of an accelerated deployment timeline to support advising efforts in Afghanistan. The author, who was the brigade staff officer (S-2) of the 1st SFAB, and a small cadre of truly exceptional intelligence professionals were tasked with building, training, and deploying the first-ever SFAB intelligence warfighting function in just 6 months. Over the past 2 years, 1st SFAB completed a Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) proof of principal rotation, a JRTC validation rotation, and the first-ever rotation in a combat zone for an SFAB supporting operations in Afghanistan. Through it all, the 1st SFAB intelligence warfighting function continued to grow, adapt, and prepare for the future while keeping an eye on how to train intelligence advisors and improve the SFAB intelligence enterprise as a whole.

In this article, readers will find both lessons learned and recommendations for the future of the SFAB intelligence warfighting function. The first half of the article covers the task organization and employment of the SFAB intelligence warfighting function in Afghanistan. It also provides observations on advising constraints created by mission command requirements as well as a discussion and recommendations for the SFAB intelligence architecture. The second half focuses on the recommended training glide path for building an intelligence advisor and closes with final thoughts from the author on the future of the SFAB intelligence warfighting function.

Building and Employing the Intelligence Warfighting Function Team

The initial deployment of the 1st SFAB saw the entirety of the organization's intelligence warfighting function employed in every Train Advise Assist Command and Task Force area of responsibility across Afghanistan. Consisting of approximately 30 brigade intelligence staff (S-2), battalion S-2, and military intelligence (MI) company advisors, plus 29 intelligence enablers added to the combat advisor teams shortly before deployment, the 1st SFAB intelligence warfighting function advised at every echelon up to the corps level. The 1st SFAB intelligence advisors also worked closely with provincial senior leaders of the Afghan National Directorate of Security as well as the MI kandak (MI battalion equivalent) of the Afghan National Army's 203rd Corps. The sheer scope and depth of intelligence advising that this relatively small cohort achieved was exceptional and proved critical in leveraging U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enablers to support the Afghan National Army's offensive operations and election security activities.

Immediately before the first of two JRTC rotations, a decision was made to task-organize the MI company to support both the brigade S-2 and battalion S-2 sections. This turned out to be critical to the success of intelligence warfighting function advising. Although modified during the 1st SFAB's deployment, the original modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) for battalion S-2 sections only consisted of a 35D (All-Source Intelligence Officer) captain and a 35F (Intelligence Analyst) staff sergeant, with several of the battalion S-2s not having previously served as battalion S-2s. Each battalion S-2 was augmented with either a 350F (All-Source Intelligence Technician) chief warrant officer 2 or a 35F staff sergeant, as well as one 351L (Counterintelligence Technician) or 35L (Counterintelligence Agent) to provide counterintelligence (CI) support to force protection (Title 10 of U.S. Code).[1]

With the brigade S-2 section providing senior leadership and mission command to the Task Force Southeast G-2 section, all 35Ts (Military Intelligence Systems Maintainer/Integrator) and 35Gs (Geospatial Intelligence Imagery Analyst) were leveraged to augment the Task Force Southeast's intelligence and electronic warfare and geospatial intelligence mission command and advising function. The MI company command team handled day-to-day institutional advising of the 203rd Corps and MI kandak while the brigade S-2 officer in charge functioned as both the Task Force Southeast G-2 and the primary advisor for National Directorate of Security senior leaders in the seven provinces encompassing the area of responsibility. Because 1st SFAB

Photo courtesy of LTC Todd Harkrader

Advisors from the 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade S-2 team during their 2018 deployment to Afghanistan.

intelligence leaders performed both mission command and advising functions at nearly every echelon, the augmentation of MI company personnel provided a much needed capacity to battalion S-2s and is a recommended best practice for all future SFAB S-2s to consider.

Although prepared to function primarily as intelligence advisors, the mission requirements levied against the 1st SFAB in Afghanistan created a dynamic environment in which a majority of the intelligence leadership was "dual hatting" in both a mission command and an advising role. These competing demands ultimately degraded some of our capability to perform intelligence advising, particularly at the brigade and corps level where persistent, daily advising and leveraging of NATO enablers were critical to the success of our Afghan partners. In several lessons learned forums, a major regret of intelligence advisors was a desire to do more across multiple intelligence disciplines—something they never achieved because of the competing requirement to perform mission command functions. In spite of these challenges, intelligence personnel identified and acted upon opportunities to advise, particularly within the brigade S-2 and elements of the MI company supporting the mission command functions of the Task Force Southeast G-2 team.

SFAB Intelligence Architecture

1st SFAB's deployment also identified gaps within the intelligence architecture of the organization. Simply put, the current allocation of the Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS–A) components residing within SFABs does not fully meet the needs of the SFAB intelligence warfighting function in an expeditionary environment. Although part of the ineffectiveness of DCGS–A was tied to a standardized system employment by intelligence warfighting function stakeholders across the area of responsibility, the pending Service Pack 1 upgrade provides only a limited number of Portable Multi-Function Workstations down to the

battalion level and does not address the 36 x intelligence advisors at the combat advisor team level. Conversations with leaders across 1st SFAB indicate a strong agreement that small intelligence warfighting function advising teams or solitary advisors on combat advisor teams need a system-agnostic, "plug and play" classified capability to quickly "push and pull" intelligence while also providing a ruggedized platform from which to operate. Such a capability is truly critical when one considers a future in which SFABs operate concurrently in multiple combatant command (COCOM) areas of responsibility.

The SFAB senior intelligence officers agree that Capability Drop 1, or a similar capability, is a perfect solution for combat advisor team intelligence advisors and that the system may be the answer for battalion- and brigade-level advisors as well. Although not currently earmarked for SFABs, Capability Drop 1 removes the need for bulky servers, equipment, and associated intelligence and electronic warfare support. It also arms the user with both a suite of intelligence warfighting function applications and portability/flexibility in employing the system, which is perfect for small teams operating independently in distributed locations. If combined with Service Pack 1 at the brigade and battalion level, SFABs would have the ability to establish reachback nodes in garrison with Service Pack 1 tied into theater intelligence brigades while forward-deployed teams link into the overall architecture with Capability Drop 1 equipment. With the future of SFAB deployments pointing squarely at aligning with and supporting multiple COCOMs through rotational, persistent advising, it is important to resource SFABs with this mission essential intelligence architecture in the immediate future.

Building an Intelligence Advisor

Before the 1st SFAB's deployment, the author participated in a U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence (USAICoE) Lessons Learned forum and described how the 1st SFAB was "building" intelligence warfighting function advisors within an extremely constrained timeline. This discussion also included recommendations on "MI skills refresher training" and "high-payoff intelligence enabler training," which are military occupational specialty (MOS)-specific training opportunities that, if training time was available, would pay long-term dividends to intelligence advising. A majority of these training concepts and recommendations never reached fruition because of the unit's deployment timeline. However, revisiting this foundational document in the months following our deployment proved invaluable and provided a road map for the 1st SFAB's MI Training Strategy moving forward.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the foundation of the SFAB intelligence warfighting function training is attendance at the Combat Advisor Training Course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

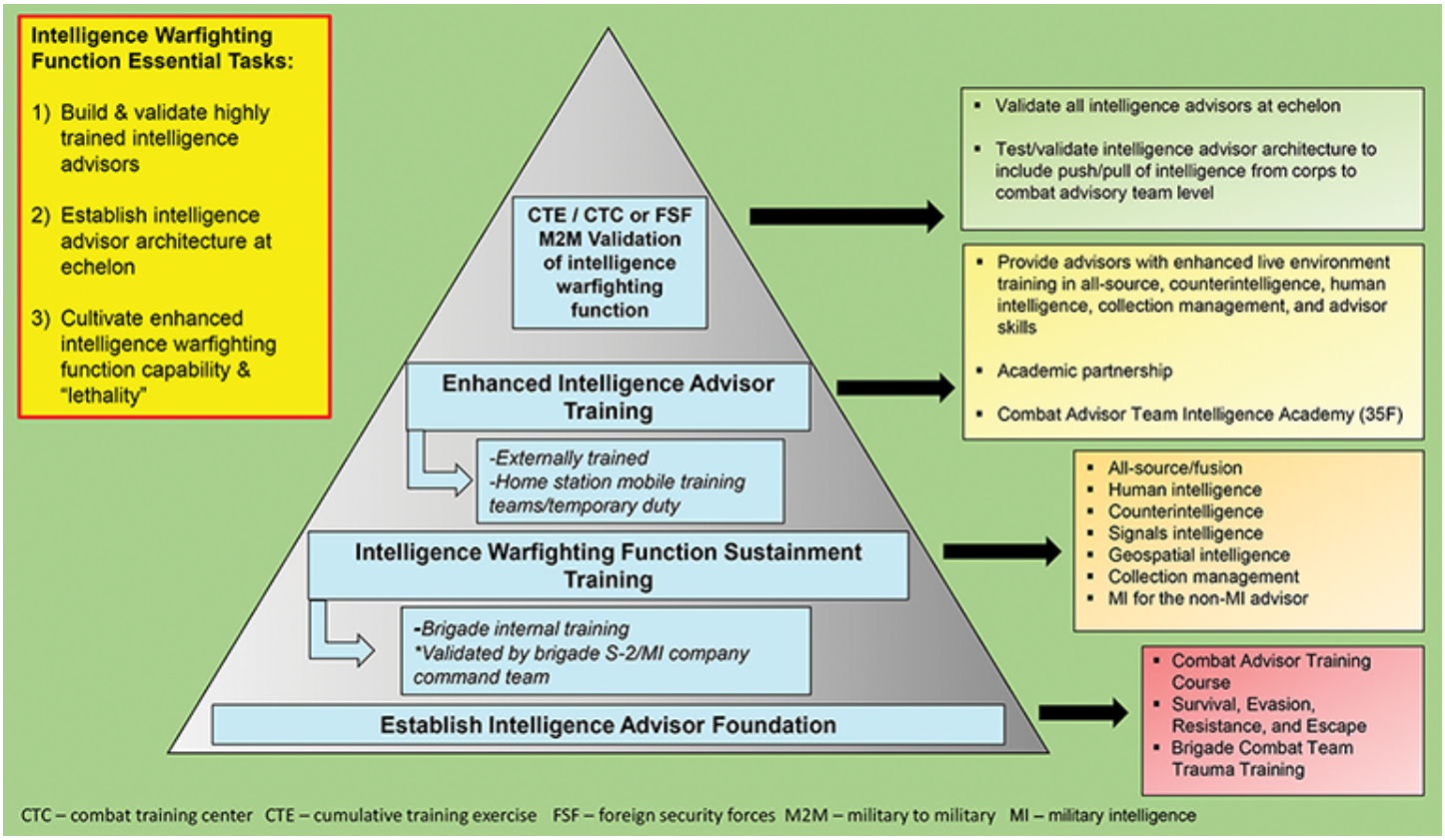

Figure 1. Building an Intelligence Warfighting Function Advisor

The revamped program has drawn heavily from 1st SFAB lessons learned and has increased in scope and duration. Unfortunately, modifications to the SFAB intelligence warfighting function MTOE in 2018 stripped the brigade S-2 and MI company of advisor billets. Now, coding of all positions except the brigade S-2 officer in charge is in operations support roles. This was likely a cost-saving decision due to the expense of the advanced communications kit and sidearm required for advisors as well as the availability of school billets at the advisor academy. The unintended consequence of this decision is that nearly all brigade S-2 and MI company personnel are not authorized to attend the Combat Advisor Training Course although they are the most experienced intelligence subject matter experts (SMEs) in the brigade and are the best suited to execute intelligence advising. 1st SFAB is in the process of requesting a readjustment to advisor coding because the Combat Advisor Training Course is the bedrock starting point on which an advisor is built.

Intelligence Advising Sustainment Training

The next step in building an intelligence advisor is intelligence warfighting function sustainment training, an evolution of the MI skills refresher training the brigade executed before its deployment in 2018. As the 1st SFAB intelligence warfighting function came together in the summer of 2017, it was clear that many personnel, particularly junior 35Fs at the combat advisor team level, had a limited understanding of intelligence disciplines outside of their unique skillsets. Led by SMEs in the brigade S-2 and MI company, the unit executed a series of brown-bag lunch sessions to "re-green" intelligence personnel on the totality of intelligence disciplines. As with a majority of our predeployment intelligence training, these sessions were abbreviated in scope, yet set a framework for the future.

SFAB intelligence warfighting function sustainment training, shown in Figure 2, reviews the various intelligence disciplines from the "Intelligence 101" level and is designed to baseline attendees with common terms of reference while also covering intelligence warfighting function lessons learned from Afghanistan.

Led by SMEs from the brigade S-2 and MI company, these blocks of instruction are "scalable, scopeable, and repeatable" as the 1st SFAB reconstitutes the intelligence warfighting function of the organization. They also afford

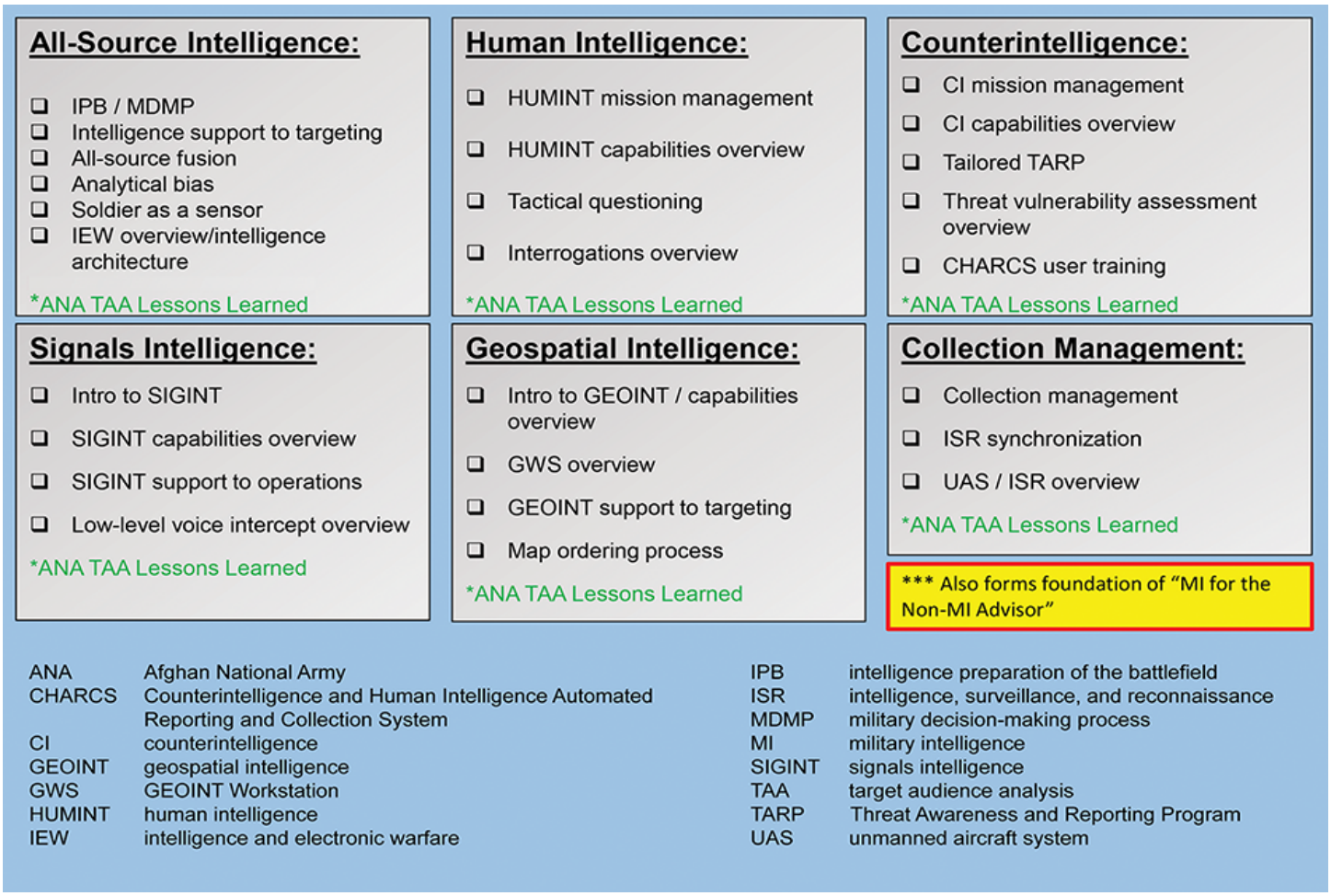

Figure 2. SFAB Intelligence Warfighting Function Sustainment Training

opportunities for brigade S-2 and MI company personnel to complete mission essential task list tasks through actual instruction based on programs of instruction they develop.

An added benefit of this instruction is that it forms an exceptional introduction for non-35 series personnel 1st SFAB is currently cross-training to perform intelligence advising/mission command functions at the combat advisor team level until actual 35Fs are recruited. Just this year, 19 x non-35 series personnel have completed a multiday program of instruction titled "MI for the Non-MI Advisor" that provides the organization flexibility in future training and team readiness for deployments. These personnel include 11B (Infantryman), 12B (Combat Engineer), 13F (Joint Fire Support Specialist), 19D (Cavalry Scout), 25U (Signal Support Systems Specialist), 68W (Combat Medic Specialist), 89D (Explosive Ordnance Disposal Specialist), and 91B (Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic).

Enhanced Intelligence Advisor Training Focus

The next level of intelligence advisor training consists of six focus areas, shown in Figure 3, identified as training shortfalls and opportunities during the unit's deployment to Afghanistan. Key to this training is leveraging the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) Foundry program's mobile training teams, theater intelligence brigade live environment training, and other temporary duty (TDY) or mobile training team opportunities to meet our training end state.

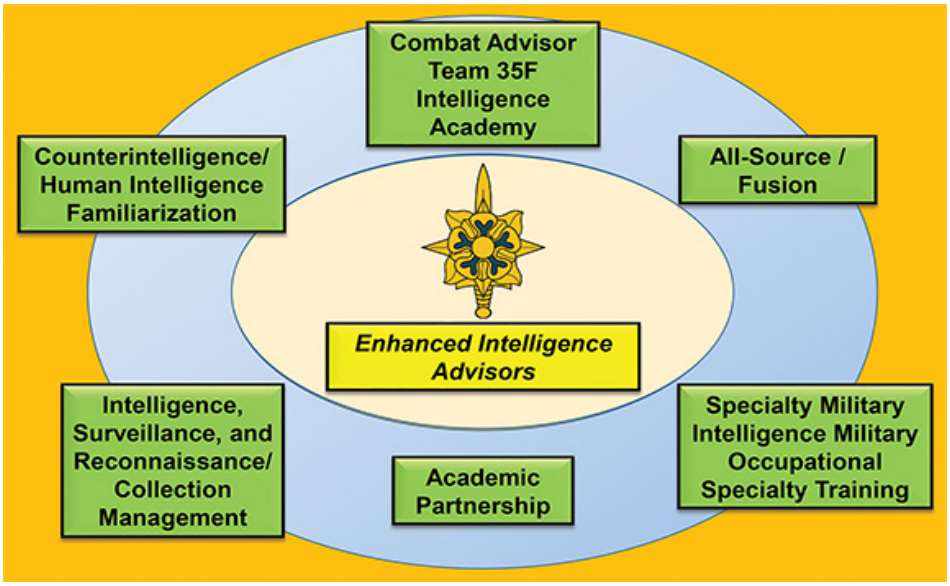

Figure 3. Enhanced Intelligence Advisor Training Focus

Focus Area: Combat Advisor Team 35F Intelligence Academy. This training currently occurs in the aforementioned intelligence warfighting function sustainment training and receives additional augmentation from the Foundry program's mobile training teams. The 1st SFAB is also looking at options to send several SMEs to an executive session of the Intelligence Advisor Training Course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Considering the 1st SFAB's current intelligence personnel manning and timeline, it is not feasible to send more than 50 personnel TDY to attend this training; however, leveraging brigade S-2 and MI company personnel in a "train the trainer" capacity is an outstanding way to both standardize and mobilize the program of instruction currently taught at the Intelligence Advisor Training Course.

Focus Area: All-Source and Fusion. Advanced training in all-source analysis and fusion is another focus area. This training was executed recently, leveraging a modified version of the Foundry program's AS301 and AS302 (All-Source Production) mobile training team courses that focus on the fundamentals of all-source analysis, fusion, targeting, and production but without an emphasis on DCGS–A. The 1st SFAB is also standing up a COCOM analytic initiative using brigade S-2 and MI company all-source personnel to begin establishing contacts and intelligence read books on the various COCOMs in which the SFAB may be employed. Once assigned to a particular COCOM, the COCOM teams will form the foundation of intelligence advising packages and enablers to support forward-deployed advising packages. They will also serve as SMEs to provide predeployment training to deploying combat advisor teams.

Focus Area: CI and Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Familiarization. Based on feedback from intelligence advisors in Afghanistan, the next recommended training focus area is CI and HUMINT familiarization. The 1st SFAB was fortunate to host modified versions of the HU103 and HU303 courses from the INSCOM Foundry program, which train interpersonal skills for collectors. Although intelligence advisors are obviously not HUMINT collectors, the interpersonal skillsets taught to HUMINT personnel are incredibly relevant to intelligence advisors attempting to establish relationships with foreign security forces. The 1st SFAB is also leveraging CI personnel from the MI company to build out an advanced insider threat exercise and associated training designed to teach combat advisor teams how to properly leverage CI resources and identify potential insider threats. An additional focus area discussed in detail at the end of this article is the need to train intelligence advisors on report writing skills and the need to provide SFABs with a modified "Defense Strategic Debriefer Course-Lite."

Focus Area: Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and Collection Management. Regardless of COCOM employment, ISR and collection management are areas in which intelligence advisors will always be able to partner with foreign security forces. With recent MTOE adjustments designating several billets at the combat advisor team level with the additional skill identifier Q7 (ISR Manager), which requires attendance at the Information Collection Planners Course, ensuring intelligence advisors at all levels understand ISR and collection management is key. As with the Intelligence Advisor Training Course, it is not feasible for an SFAB to send nearly 50 personnel to the Information Collection Planners Course. A potential mitigation strategy is to again use the Foundry program. The ISR303 Information Collection (ISR) Integration mobile training team can provide instruction on information collection capabilities and staff integration tailored to the SFAB mission. This course of action would not replace attending the Information Collection Planners Course, but would provide some of the knowledge intelligence advisors need to be successful while waiting for formal school attendance.

Focus Area: Specialty Military Intelligence MOS Training. This focus area encompasses niche training such as Joint Counterintelligence Training Academy courses for CI personnel, HUMINT Training-Joint Center of Excellence for HUMINT personnel, and Digital Intelligence Systems Master Gunners Course for 35Ts (Military Intelligence Systems Maintainer/Integrator). One specialty area of training that the 1st SFAB is resourcing, based on lessons learned from Afghanistan, is document and media exploitation. Later in the training cycle, 1st SFAB is also receiving training on open-source intelligence, which is an invaluable tool to maintain situational awareness on multiple areas of responsibility as well as emerging security issues that may negatively affect operations.

Focus Area: Academic Partnership. Facilitated via a partnership with the Military Advisor Training Academy S-2 team at Fort Benning, the 1st SFAB is in the nascent stages of establishing a permanent academic partnership with Auburn University. This partnership will allow the 1st SFAB to tap into the knowledge base of academia to resource COCOM security symposiums while also allowing 1st SFAB members to participate in educational opportunities locally at Fort Benning and via resident opportunities on campus. The 1st SFAB is excited about this emerging partnership and the unique perspective academia can provide to intelligence advisors as they prepare to enter countries in COCOMs with diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and security issues.

SFAB Intelligence Warfighting Function Way Ahead

Although extremely successful thus far, several areas within the SFAB intelligence warfighting function require additional attention and modification. Aside from the aforementioned intelligence architecture concerns, the intelligence warfighting function MTOE and billet coding are a work in progress.

USAICoE's Position on TOE/MTOE Authorizations

Historically, USAICoE maximizes the use of intelligence authorizations within MI units (e.g., the MI company) rather than the G-2/S-2 section of another proponent's headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) table of organization and equipment (TOE)/MTOE. The personnel assigned to those MI units can always support the G-2/S-2 in an operational control relationship. When the authorizations reside within another proponent's HHC TOE/MTOE, they are more at risk to become bill payers during force reductions.

Author's Rebuttal

While both positions have merit, SFABs are simply different from traditional brigade combat teams and the aforementioned conventional wisdom does not apply. Based on lessons learned and conversations with fellow SFAB S-2s, the author strongly recommends further modifying the MTOE to move the senior warrant officer SMEs for CI, HUMINT, intelligence and electronic warfare, and all-source intelligence from the MI company to the brigade S-2 section. These individuals should be at the center of planning and resourcing MOS-specific training for the SFAB intelligence warfighting function as a whole. They should also function as SME advisors to the brigade S-2, who is the senior intelligence officer for the brigade, as well as advisors to the brigade commander. Finally, as SFABs face a future in which simultaneous employment in multiple COCOMs is a fast approaching reality, these SMEs have a key liaison function with theater intelligence brigades, Army Service component commands, CI coordinating authorities, and HUMINT operations cells. Keeping these individuals in the MI company introduces unnecessary friction/bifurcation of efforts that can easily be solved with MTOE-neutral adjustments.

While highlighted as a success, the cross-training of non-35 series personnel as intelligence advisors represents a slippery slope. Courses of action that rely on cross-trained non-35 series personnel or direct recruiting of non-35 series noncommissioned officers to fill the intelligence advisor billets for the duration of a 3-year assignment will dilute the role and quality of intelligence advisors at the combat advisor team level. Going down this path will inevitably negatively affect the recruitment of 35F personnel, which is already a significant challenge. Ultimately, the foreign security force partners and COCOMs that SFABs support will suffer from a lack of actual intelligence advisors.

As alluded to earlier, the intelligence community needs to explore options to authorize SFAB intelligence personnel to draft their own intelligence information reports (IIRs) as a means to capture advisor debriefs. In Afghanistan, the 1st SFAB benefited from significant HUMINT uplift that will not always be available and has only two HUMINT billets organic to the organization. Modifying the Defense Strategic Debriefer Course into a mobile training team course and achieving consensus within the HUMINT community will allow intelligence advisors to standardize IIRs as the vehicle for capturing key observations from advising operations. This will also allow intelligence advisors to draft IIRs that operational management teams ultimately review and correct for distribution to the greater intelligence community. Such a course of action is a major paradigm shift but presents a unique opportunity for SFABs moving forward.

Finally, the MI Corps must look at how we recruit intelligence professionals, particularly 35Fs. The experience of the 1st SFAB in Afghanistan was not perfect and for some was far from what they envisioned when they volunteered in 2017. However, that is changing, and it is important to get that message out to prospective candidates. On a positive note, right now members of the 1st SFAB intelligence warfighting function are attending unique training such as Air Assault, Pathfinder, and Airborne school. Partnerships with academia, live environment training, and integration into Army Service component command intelligence warfighting function military-to-military events will present opportunities for intelligence analysts to literally see the world. Eventual COCOM alignment will provide stability and certainty to deployment rotations while also affording MI professionals numerous opportunities to advise foreign security force personnel on the intelligence warfighting function. Advertising these facts to potential volunteers is vital to improving the recruitment of future intelligence advisors at all levels.

Conclusion

Serving as the brigade S-2 of the Army's first purpose-built SFAB has been the experience of a lifetime. Although fraught with long hours, a good deal of frustration, and endless complex challenges, the opportunity to stand up the intelligence warfighting function of 1st SFAB has been exceptionally rewarding. The author is forever indebted to the exceptional sacrifice of the officers, warrant officers, and noncommissioned officers who form the intelligence warfighting function of 1st SFAB and helped make the impossible possible. The mission of advising foreign partners is truly a worthy undertaking and vital to our Nation's security objectives. Advising the intelligence warfighting function will always be a vital component of these efforts and it must continue to grow and evolve in the years to come. What the 1st SFAB accomplished is just the beginning of what will hopefully become one of the MI Corps' greatest accomplishments as senior leaders continue to leverage the SFAB's intelligence warfighting function to meet the requirements of our great Nation.

Endnote

1. Title 10 of the United States Code outlines the role of armed forces in the United States Code. It provides the legal basis for the roles, missions, and organization of each of the services as well as the Department of Defense. "Title 10 of the United States Code," Wikipedia Foundation, last modified 24 March 2019, 23:51, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title_10_of_the_United_States_Code.

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