Ambivalence in the Ranks about the Military Advising Mission: A Case of Organizational Decoupling in the United States Military

By Remi M. Hajjar

On 21 April 2008, the US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates illuminated the significance of the contemporary military advising mission in an address at the US Military Academy at West Point.

From the standpoint of America’s national security, the most important assignment in your military career may not necessarily be commanding US soldiers, but advising or mentoring the troops of other nations as they battle the forces of terror and instability within their own borders. (Robert M. Gates, Speech at the US Military Academy, West Point, April 21, 2008)

Secretary of Defense Gates made similar speeches at different widely attended events including an address to the Association of the US Army on October 10, 2007, and his timely thoughts link to a major focus of this article. Gates advises the audience at West Point that the “most important assignment in your military career may not” involve “commanding US soldiers, but advising or mentoring the troops of other nations”. The tremendous growth of the advising mission in coalition militaries after 9/11 based on the demands of two major campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan influenced Gates’ comments, which spark a relevant question: how did the US military, especially conventional forces, adapt to “advise and mentor troops of other nations”?

This article reports on the findings and insights from a study that answers this significant question about the contemporary US advising mission. This article explores US advisors through a three-pronged empirical examination, including data collected in Iraq, an analysis of pertinent advising documents, and interviews with contemporary advisors. The results reveal that advisors traverse a tightrope and perform an intricate cross-cultural balancing act where they adjust to numerous dynamic and diverse conditions by drawing on a range of cultural tools including warrior, peacekeeper-diplomat, leadership, subject-matter expertise, innovation, and other tools to succeed – and in combat to survive. The non-traditional nature of the military advising mission results in its second-tier treatment in the US conventional forces, despite high-ranking leaders’ public pronouncements of the mission’s significance. This article explains the basics of the military advising mission, reviews the literature and forwards a theoretical framework, explains the method, discusses the major finding of ambivalence towards the advising mission, and concludes with theoretical implications and recommendations for future research.

* The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the United States Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense. Many sections of this piece draw heavily from Hajjar, 2014.

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What is the Military Advising Mission?

The essence of the advising mission constitutes military members providing training, advice, mentorship, coaching, and other related activities to foreign counterparts to enhance their capabilities and professionalism. Advising missions range from large-scale operations during combat conditions, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, to much smaller peacetime advisory efforts in numerous locations worldwide. Although advising is not a new role for the US military (particularly for the Special Forces) (Ramsey, 2006; Stoker, 2008), the employment of many thousands of mainstream advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan represents a monumental adaptation in the conventional armed forces. Advising relationships can take the form of different kinds of structures, but at their core they involve three principal actors (see Fig. 1 below). The first actor entails the foreign security force member in the advising relationship who bears the title of counterpart (CP). CPs receive training, suggestions, tutelage, information, and associated support from the advisor. The second actor entails the military advisor who provides the CP with tutoring, teaching, advice, recommendations, and other forms of assistance intended to develop the CP’s competence and performance. A third actor plays a role in the advising relationship, and this person bears the title of linguist. The linguist, employed by the US military, possesses sufficient cross-cultural competence and language skills (e.g., English and the CP’s language) to facilitate effective communication between the advisor and CP. In sum, in the advising relationship the advisor works with a linguist to provide assistance, suggestions, consultation, and other support to increase the CP’s proficiency.

Figure 1

1 This project reveals that active duty US military members, military reservists, National Guardsmen, government civilians (from numerous organizations), and civilian contractors all serve as contemporary US military advisors.
2 The vast majority of cases in this study involve linguists. A very small number of reported cases ensued where the advisor did not utilize a linguist because the foreign counterpart spoke English sufficiently.
3 Linguists typically share the national or regional culture of the CP. Advisors and some linguists share US culture (although some local national linguists do not). CPs and advisors share the same military culture, albeit there are important differences in their national and military cultures.
Literature Review: Building an Overarching Framework for Postmodern Military Culture

The first major relevant literature for this project constitutes the postmodern military theory (Williams, 2008; Moskos, Segal & Williams 2000). The postmodern military theory explores a dozen salient variables that help to explain the relationship between western armed forces and their societies. The postmodern military theory describes the armed forces’ evolution across four different eras from 1900 to the present in which each period ushers in increased sophistication based on new missions, threats, service members, and other factors. Although the model indirectly discusses culture and associated developments, it problematically lacks a culture variable. A recent report establishes the case for the necessary inclusion of a new culture variable in the postmodern military theory, and also forwards a postmodern military culture framework (see Fig.2) (Hajjar, 2014; Williams, 2008; Winslow, 2007; Zalmon, 2006; Harvey, 1989). This framework reveals that contemporary military culture possesses tremendous complexity, fragmentation, contradiction and harmony, traditional and current features, and multiple overlapping spheres of influence including professional and bureaucratic (Segal & Segal, 1983; Ritzer, 1975; Abbott, 1988; Hajjar & Ender, 2005; Sookermany, 2012), institutional and occupational (Moskos & Wood, 1988; Moskos, Williams & Segal, 2000; Kelty & Bierman, 2013), warrior, peacekeeper-diplomat, leadership and followership, role versatility (Miles, 2012; Montgomery, 1998; Turner, 1988), cross-cultural competence (Hajjar, 2010), power (French & Raven, 1960) and influence (Yukl & Tracey, 1992), diplomacy (Perez, 2012), ambassadorship, and other cultural spheres. This postmodern military culture theory serves as the overarching framework applied in this article, and the following discussion illuminates specific cultural spheres within this design.

![Postmodern Military Culture Diagram](image)

Figure 2

This project deploys a flexible, pragmatic, and advantageous cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986; Swidler, 2001) theory that differs from more traditional and unified views of culture (Schein, 2010; Geertz, 1973; Griswold, 1994) that do not adequately account for
culture’s ambiguities, fragmentations and conflicts; this supple toolkit provides a more complete comprehension of contemporary military culture. This article defines culture (Swidler, 1986; Swidler, 2001; Winslow, 2007; DiMaggio, 1997; Ender, 2005; Sewell, 1992) as a contested toolkit filled with orientations, tools, schemas (cognitive structures), frames, codes, narratives, assumptions, habits, styles, language, symbols, values, and beliefs, and that provide a group, organization, or society with shared meaning, a collective identity, and strategies of action. This adaptively applies Swidler’s cultural toolkit, which malleably allows the existence of oppositional cultural tools, such as interdependence and autonomy in intimate relationships (Swidler, 2001). This conception of culture also utilizes Winslow’s (2007) suitable military culture theory that includes integration, differentiation, and fragmentation; in particular, the fragmented nature of contemporary wars and armed forces supports the rise of postmodern military culture (Zalmon, 2006; Williams, 2008).

Another fundamental theoretical underpinning of the postmodern military culture framework applied in this article involves the warrior—peacekeeper-diplomat paradigm (Hajjar, 2014; Perez, 2012) (see Fig. 3). The warrior-peacekeeper-diplomat model shows a historical comparison of traditional warrior-centric and emergent postmodern military cultures that also include nascent peacekeeper-diplomat cultural orientations and tools. The sharp contrast between these cultural orientations enhances comprehension of the organizational ambivalence – including pockets of resistance – towards the rise of softer peacekeeper-diplomat cultural developments. This conceptual snapshot does not imply that military culture boils down to this simplistic model, but rather this comparison isolates these two prominent facets of contemporary military culture to illuminate their intriguing contradictory qualities for this article.

Figure 3

Comparison of Two Major US Military Cultural Orientations and Sets of Tools: Warrior and Peacekeeper-Diplomat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>20th Century Modern Culture (1900 – 1990)</th>
<th>Emergent Postmodern Culture (1990 – Present) (New Cultural Toolkit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Identity (Role)</td>
<td>Warrior Identity</td>
<td>Peacekeeper-Diplomat Role, Warrior Identity (Or Other Cultural Orientations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Cultural Orientations and Tools</td>
<td>Command Orientations:  - Actively Direct, Order, Impose, Tell, Demand, Take Charge</td>
<td>Cross-Cultural Competence:  - Multicultural Worldview: Sufficient Cultural Relativism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conformist Orientations:  - Rigid Rule Enforcement</td>
<td>- Listen, Follow, Work with, Learn About and From Diverse People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnocentric Orientations:  - US-Centric Lens Encouraged: “Our Way or the Highway”</td>
<td>Build/Teach:  - Mentor, Teach, Train, Advise  - Build/Preserve/Sustain  - Empower Diverse People and Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archetype</td>
<td>General George Patton</td>
<td>General David Petraeus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3
An important component of emergent postmodern military culture and especially the peacekeeper-diplomat cultural orientations and toolset that possesses enormous applicability in the advising mission consists of cross-cultural competence (Hajjar, 2010). Professional cultural orientations in the US military enable the organization to effectively rise above bureaucratic rigidity and resistance towards softer skill development (linked to a defence of the traditional warrior cultural core) to create essential new cultural tools such as cross-cultural competence. This article defines cross-cultural competence as the knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural repertoire and skill-sets that military members require to accomplish all given tasks and missions in situations marked by cultural diversity. Cross-cultural competence consists of two major subparts: culture-general factors and culture-specific factors. The culture-general factors constitute the foundation of cross-cultural competence for the military, consisting of the core attitudes, skill-sets, and knowledge basis that facilitate adaptation to multiple culturally diverse contexts over time. The culture-specific factors of cross-cultural competence consist of the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge sets that enable effective mission performance in a given assignment characterized by significant cultural diversity, such as the case of advising in a specific place. The military works to develop both components of cross-cultural competence, including the culture-general and the culture-specific factors, to successfully carry out its requirements in the contemporary landscape. In sum, these pertinent sources of interdisciplinary literature coalesce to form an overarching theoretical framework (e.g., postmodern military culture with a primary focus on the warrior-peacekeeper-diplomat and cross-cultural competence spheres) to launch this project’s investigation of the contemporary advising mission, which presents a rich and ideal case to study given the hybrid nature (aspects of combat/noncombat) of this unconventional operation.

Method

I applied a three-part multi-method to conduct this research project. The first major part of the study consisted of collection and analysis of advisor data gathered in extremis in Iraq from September 2009 to March 2010. The most substantial data collected in Iraq comes from a survey conducted in a US advisory unit in January to February 2010, which included input from 23 participants (of whom 16 subjects served as advisors and 7 served as linguists). Eight participants had previous advisor experiences worldwide prior to serving as an advisor in Iraq. Although most of the survey data focused on the subjects’ advising experiences in Iraq, veteran advisor participants also reported relevant data beyond Iraq (e.g., global context; peacetime conditions; different kinds of missions; etc.). While in Iraq I also collected a study of Iraqi CPs conducted by an Iraqi scholar, advisor training materials, and field notes, all of which yielded applicable data.

The second major part of the method involved gathering and analyzing military journal articles, monographs, book chapters, US military doctrine, and advisor classes (training). This second group of data provided a broader perspective to the overall dataset,

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4 The basis for this cross-cultural competence subsection comes from Hajjar, 2010.
including insights from around the world, different kinds of advising units (e.g., different military branches and specialties), a historic context, \(^5\) peacetime and wartime advising situations, diverse types of advisors, distinctive advising missions, and other variations. In sum, the breadth and uniqueness from the document data well complemented the other two major parts of the method, which produced a fuller and more intricate overall dataset.

The third major prong of the method constituted 11 semi-structured interviews conducted in December 2011-January 2012. I conducted 10 interviews with current or former advisors, and one interview with a former linguist. I recorded these interviews that lasted between 47 and 155 minutes (average length of about 90 minutes), and transcribed every interview. The strength of this third group of interview data consists of the depth of relevant answers provided by the informants. Having conducted the first two portions of the method and some data analysis prior to the interview phase, I felt well-prepared with focused questions and ready to spontaneously ask pointed follow-on questions to capture fresh insights and new angles, explore pertinent ambiguities, suitably approach potentially controversial topics, and to seek corroboration for or contradictory insights regarding forming findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although the interview data provided triangulation for most of the findings emanating from the Iraq and document data, some noteworthy new insights produced greater richness and sophistication in the project’s results.

In conclusion, three major subparts of the research multi-method provided a fruitful dataset. The first prong yielded different forms of data collected in Iraq, particularly the useful Iraq survey data (N=23 subjects). The second part of the method produced germane and broadening advising document data (N=20), including journal articles, monographs, military doctrine, and book chapters. The third aspect of the method yielded 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews with advisors and a linguist, which provided salient, distinctive, contradictory and complementary data. The initial analysis of the Iraq data yielded categories, conceptual clusters, and trends, which expanded in complexity during the reiterative analytical processes that occurred throughout the project. Triangulation of the results from these three distinct data sources strengthened the findings’ overall validity and reliability.

**Findings: The Right Stuff – the Swiss Army Knife of Advisory Skills**

This section discusses the major findings, with a main concentration on the finding of military advising as a second-tier mission. An informant uses the metaphor of a “Swiss Army knife”, which serves as a fitting symbol for the cultural toolkit deployed by contemporary advisors to conduct their mission. Switzerland’s reputation for neutrality and peace makes the combination of the word “Swiss” (peacekeeper-diplomat) with the words “Army knife” (warrior) extremely suitable for this article’s conceptual design and argument. A sledgehammer would symbolize the military’s historic combat warrior identity, which evolved to include smaller hammers, scalpels, other kinds of knife blades, and new tools needed for different kinds of combat missions of varying intensities. The

\(^5\) The majority of the documents focused on post-9/11 advising cases and yielded a final set of 20 applicable documents, but another group (15 documents) provided a relevant historical context of the US advising mission. See Ramsey, 2006 and Stoker, 2008.
contemporary “Swiss Army knife” also includes emerging peacekeeper-diplomat, soft and hard leader skills, information age technology, expertise, and other tools required to perform a full spectrum of noncombat and combat operations. Advisors draw from their Swiss Army knives to traverse numerous complexities, balancing acts, dangers, and ambiguities that characterize the contemporary advising tightrope.

Although this article primarily discusses the study’s finding of advising as a second-tier mission, a brief synopsis of the project’s other major findings provides a necessary broader context. A major finding constitutes the importance of advisors building productive relationships with foreign CPs. Another finding includes the significance of advisors effectively leading and partnering with linguists (mainly civilian contractors), who serve as a key intercultural conduit between advisors and CPs. Two other larger intertwined findings disclosed advising as an unconventional and second tier mission given the task’s unusual in-depth cross-cultural requirements and the mission’s lower status compared to traditional command roles and combat functions. As the mainstream military adapted to conduct the unconventional advising mission in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, many advisors practiced tremendous creativity and agency by stretching boundaries (and in turn causing ripples of cultural change) in the conventional military to spend sufficient time with, operate alongside, and at times live on CP bases.

Yet another major finding constitutes the ambiguities and challenges linked to defining advisory success, including the folly of trying to employ precise objective measures of success and how subjective measures for advisory achievements manifested, such as facilitating CP autonomy and establishing enduring advisor-CP relationships and friendships. Finally, an amalgamation of other patterns emerged, including the role of information age technology, the importance of relevant subject matter expertise, providing various “goodies” (e.g., equipment, shared intelligence, and so on) to CPs, considerations for deploying women advisors, and the need to successfully interact with myriad other actors in the advising environment.

**Military Advising: a Second-Tier Mission**

This section begins with US military doctrine (2009) that reflects parts of speeches made by the former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, which underscores the importance of the contemporary military advising mission.

As the Secretary of Defense has stated, *standing up and mentoring indigenous armies and police – once the province of Special Forces – is now a key mission for the whole military*. Advisors are being drawn from Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard units. Conventional forces will continue to take on more of the advisor tasks [historically] performed by Special Forces. Conventional forces must understand foreign cultures and societies.7

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6 See Sookermany, 2012. The findings about the importance of subjectivity in defining advisory success and the folly of over-emphasizing objective or precise measures of effectiveness links to Sookermany’s discussion of similar assessment processes in the contextualist perspective, which breaks with universalist notions that demand absolutes, rules, and total objectivity.

7 Department of the Army, 2009, p.2. *Italics mine.*
This doctrinal passage draws on Secretary of Defense Gates’ call for a change in the US military where “conventional forces” must undertake the “standing up and mentoring of indigenous armies and police” as a ‘key mission’. The US military now expects service members from all of its branches to perform the advisory role. Further, “conventional forces must also understand foreign cultures and societies” to accomplish the advising mission. Similar to the sentiments of Secretary of Defense Gates and current US military doctrine, this study reveals that senior US military leaders also espouse the significance of the contemporary advising mission.

However, the project uncovers the finding that although the US military publicly and doctrinally recognizes the importance of the advising mission, the actual organizational treatment of the mission remains mixed and contradictory. The data divulge a case of organizational decoupling (Winslow, 2007; Martin, 2002) whereby senior US political and military leaders advocate the value of the mission, but the actual on-the-ground experiences in the military show varying levels of acceptance of the mission, including its second-tier status and some cases of resistance towards and marginalization of the mission. Further, this study reveals uncertainty regarding whether serving as an advisor benefits service members’ careers; one finding discloses that serving as a conventional advisor reduces the advisors’ chances for promotion compared to peers who serve in more traditionally bureaucratically well-rewarded roles – especially command positions.

Additionally, the US military uses an inconsistent advisor selection process, which reinforces the mission’s second-tier status. In some cases, the military solicits volunteers with strong and relevant performance records, particularly for senior officers assigned as advisors and advisor team leaders. In other cases, the military haphazardly and involuntarily assigns advisors and disregards service members’ skills, motivation towards the mission, and potential to advise well; this is sometimes the case for junior officers and non-commissioned officers assigned as advisors. Further, the study divulges that sometimes the military deliberately sends poor performers or “problem soldiers” to advisory units. Thus, on the whole, the data unveil an organizational ambivalence towards the advising mission, with public pronouncements of support for the mission by senior political and military leaders at the macro-level, and mixed levels of acceptance of the mission on the ground at the micro-level, including some resistance towards and marginalization of the mission. This section explores these themes in the findings, which tell the story of the second tier contemporary US military advising mission.

The first informant provided highly detailed and relevant insights about the US Army’s treatment of the advising mission. Fifty-year-old Ted’s background includes advising experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and at the time of the interview, he held the position of a top senior advisor and supervisor of all advisors in an Army brigade deployed in Afghanistan in 2011-2012. In this narrative, Ted’s rich story reveals several germane points that contribute to trends in the study.

The way that it is cast, being an advisor, it’s a lesser role. The Army is schizophrenic on this, because at one point in time the Chief of Staff, General
**Casey, said that he wanted A-list players as advisors in Afghanistan.** He said I want the best, and I want these guys to be selected off the CSL [centralized selection list⁸]. He conveyed that as his intent, [but] his intent was not executed. It was executed to the extent that [some of] these guys [a few advisors in the informant’s unit] went to PCC [Pre-Command Course – a course for military officers preparing to assume command]. Now I’ve heard this from one other brigade that’s in theatre with us, [that brigade] has a very similar situation. While the Chief believed very much in this, and he was at PCC talkin’ to the guys, in fact, two of my guys went to the same PCC class and heard him say this. “You guys are critical to the mission, you will help your careers [being advisors]”. The fact is that they [advisors] never assumed command. Our legal guys looked at this. These guys are not commanders. So there is no command. So some of these guys were disappointed. They get the consolation prize and realize it’s not a prize [serving as an advisor team leader]. That’s how a couple of them viewed it. They were bitter about it. They’re professionals, they’ve moved on and without a doubt they’ve done a great job. It is reality that SFA [security force assistance – military advising] takes a back seat to more traditional command. [Italics mine].

Ted’s account explains how the conventional US military – in this case an Army infantry brigade – struggles in making adaptations linked to the unconventional advising mission. Ted served as a colonel charged with advising and supervising a group of lieutenant-colonels who led their own advisory teams in Afghanistan, and his comments reflect his team’s frustrations about the structural and cultural contradictions in the Army regarding the advisor role. Ted explains the decoupling between the Chief of Staff, who publicly stated he wanted the Army to select “the best” officers to serve as advisors, and who stated the advising role would “help [their] careers”. Ted reports that the Army even sent some of his advisors to a “PCC” (Pre-Command Course) under the assumption they would assume “command” when they took over advising teams. But once these officers arrived in Afghanistan, the rigid conventional Army system did not adapt to create new commands for these advisor team leaders, a fact which robbed the team leaders of certain functions and authorities bestowed only to commanders, and that also decreased the advisors’ chances for career progression and promotion.

Ted explains how his unit’s advisors initially perceived they got “the consolation prize (of being selected as an advisory team leader instead of a battalion commander – the top prize) and then realized it’s not a prize”. Despite some of the advisors’ frustrations, Ted reported his advisory team leaders’ motivation, performance, and call to fulfil their duties was still “great” – indicative of their “professional” duty concept. Importantly, Ted uses the word “schizophrenic” to characterize the tensions, messiness, incongruities, and ambiguities about the advising mission “being cast as a lesser role” despite the “Chief’s intent” to the contrary. The subject provides an insight into the nature of emergent postmodern US military culture given the jumbled and confused organizational attempts to superimpose new cultural codes over traditional codes (Williams, 2008; Harvey, 1989).

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⁸ In a centralized selection list process, the US Army selects members competing for particular jobs deemed as special and career-enhancing. Selection for battalion and higher level commands is a classic example.
Another subject, Mike, 51, a retired Special Forces officer with advisor experiences worldwide, responds to a question about whether he or other advisors took pride in the advising mission, and whether the mission was viewed as equally important as traditional combat operations.

I don’t think that the folks [advisors] I worked with would be as proud or feel like they’re as important doing the soft operations as opposed to kinetic [combat operations]. There’s a cultural lean in the Army, in any military, towards that [combat]. That’s your raison d’être. Our primary mission is to defend, fight, win, defeat the enemy on the battlefield. Everything else is secondary. If guys had a choice between getting the Medal of Honour or the Nobel Peace Prize most folks would rather have the Medal of Honour for bravery in combat. Special Forces, in that cult of machismo with a bunch of type-A personalities, they would much rather do direct action [kinetic combat operations] and SR [special reconnaissance] missions. I recall our [Special Forces] group commander having a discussion with senior [sergeants], and someone grousing, “hey, we’re not doing enough shooting. We’re not doing enough demo [explosives] training”. Colonel says, “OK, if that’s what you want to do, go join the Rangers or get into Delta. You’re Green Berets and your mission is to interact with indigenous forces and co-opt them to perform missions on behalf of the United States”. So there was always that friction in SF [Special Forces]. That’s an interesting topic, how they reconcile the kinetic skills with the softer skills. It’s schizophrenic at times. If you’re in [conventional] combat arms – be it armour, infantry – your focus is on defence and offense. It has to be. You’re familiar with FSO [full spectrum operations]. How do you maintain a blend of skills? I don’t think it can be done. You’re gonna dilute the effectiveness in your offensive and defensive capability. What’s the cost of that? [Italics mine].

Similar to Ted, Mike uses the term “schizophrenic” to describe the cultural and structural balancing act – replete with inherent contradictions, ambiguities, and challenges – within the US military regarding trying to stay capable of performing “direct action” and “kinetic” (“offensive and defensive”) combat operations, and also “soft missions” including advising. His comment that advisors “co-opt indigenous forces to perform missions on behalf of the US” also possesses postmodern incongruity because of its anomalous characterization of the advising mission’s purpose based on the findings. The preponderance of data paint advisors as seeking to influence CPs to develop better and more autonomous military capabilities to fulfil the host nation’s security requirements – not to create “co-opted” US satellite or quasi-subordinate CP units.

Mike’s passage reinforces the warrior identity’s primacy in military culture, not least the “cultural lean towards” action-oriented combat operations. Mike’s description of some Special Forces senior sergeants who complained about not doing enough “shooting” and “demo training” shows the magnetic pull of the dominant warrior cultural identity, even in the US Special Forces where a more sophisticated cultural toolkit is available, complete with warrior and peacekeeper-diplomat tools based on conducting advising and other soft missions for several decades. Mike shared how his Special Forces’ group commander negotiated the mild resistance and complaints by reminding his sergeants of
their particular “Green Beret” unit’s mission to work with “indigenous” security “forces” – unlike the “Rangers” or “Delta”. Despite the US military’s cultivation of peacekeeper-diplomat cultural orientations, in the final analysis, Mike reports that most service members would rather earn the “Medal of Honour for bravery in combat” than the “Nobel Peace Prize”. Thus, in spite of the Special Forces’ proficiency in advising and the associated cultivated cultural tools (developed since the Vietnam War), advising remains a second-tier and less desirable role as compared to the more warrior-centric combat operations such as “direct action” and “special reconnaissance” in the Special Forces.

Peter, 48, a National Guard officer who served as an advisor in Afghanistan three times between 2003 and 2011, reflects on how the US military approached the advising mission after 9/11.

Our SF [Special Forces] are busy doing direct action, so there wasn’t anybody [available] and SF really didn’t want to do that [advising]. It isn’t as cool as doing direct action. The regular army, the line units, they don’t want do that [advise], so they’re like we’ll pawn it off on the National Guard. At the time, the attitude from a National Guard point of view [was], “hey, we wanna get in on this quote-unquote war, so we’ll take any mission you give us”. Hence that’s how our [National Guard] infantry brigade managed [to deploy]. The Army has sort of half-assed this whole mentoring effort [advising mission] the whole time (subject laughs). Which has then led to the debate of, do they need an advisory brigade permanent structure within the organization instead of ad hoc-ing it every time? I think it’s partly true that the regular [conventional] Army career path, it [advisor role] doesn’t look that good – unless it is its own branch. That’s why SF has its own branch, because if you were SF as a lieutenant-colonel you’re not commandin a quote-unquote real battalion. [Italics mine].

Peter’s account provides further evidence for the second-tier nature of the contemporary advising mission. He explains how his National Guard brigade initially volunteered for any mission to “get in on the ‘war’” in Afghanistan; thus, his unit accepted the advising mission, which he reports the “Special Forces” and conventional military “line” units did not want because it was not as “cool” as doing “direct action (normal combat operations)”. His statement that the Army has “half-assed” the “whole mentoring effort” (advising mission) bears added relevance given Peter’s experiences in Afghanistan entailed advising Afghan police units, which this study reveals was largely an ignored advising mission until 2008 (after the US government’s strategic focus began to shift from Iraq to Afghanistan). Peter surfaces a salient question about whether the military should establish a separate advisory command (Nagl, 2008), similar to the separate Special Forces “branch” that possesses unconventional leadership assignments where it is commonplace for “lieutenant-colonels” to “command” units that are “not real battalions” (e.g., different size, equipment, and mission as compared to conventional “line” battalions). Finally, Peter also supports the theme that the advisor role has uncertain career value when he states “it (serving as a conventional unit advisor) doesn’t necessarily look that good”.
Todd, 39, another informant with two advising tours in Iraq, talks about the mixed acceptance of the advising mission, but also discusses the pride that he felt about serving as an advisor.

It is very important to recognize the importance of the advisory mission, especially publicly. But I don’t know how many people internalize the criticality of it – as compared to command and stuff like that. [Promotion is] still heavily weighted towards the traditional military career glide path. *I think people realize it’s important, but I think that most people would really rather do without it [the advising mission] if they could.* I keep hearing about out-of-hide MiTTs [military transition teams – military advisors]. Those guys [would say], “we’re doing this bullshit out-of-hide MiTT mission”. But a large preponderance of those that have been combat advisors, the ones that sat there and operated day in, day out, shared the blood, sweat, and tears [with CPs], I would say the majority of them have an immense pride in what they did. I do, and most of my peers that had the same mud on their boots, same type of thing as I did, most of them do. When I was in Iraq in ’09, the first time I saw him [a friend and peer US advisor] in Iraq, first thing he did, he picked up the pocket on the sleeves of my ACUs [army combat uniform] and he slapped a combat advisor tab on there, and took the pocket down, and he’s like, “keep it man, you earned it”. That was special. So I think there’s a camaraderie and a brotherhood amongst guys that truly did combat advising. [*Italics mine.*]

Todd’s account reinforces the decoupling and incongruence between the “publicly” espoused “important advisory mission”, and the organization’s in-use values bearing ambivalence towards the mission where “most people would really rather do without [advising]”. The subject reinforces the theme that serving as an advisor possesses uncertain career value given the “heavy weight” placed on the “traditional military career glide path” of command selection for advancement. Todd also compares the “proud” and motivated combat advisors with the potentially questionably motivated “MiTT out-of-hide advisors”. His comments imply that the more random and involuntary selection of some MiTT advisors resulted in less commitment among some of the MiTT advisors who harboured animosity towards the “bullshit” mission. The dataset corroborates the finding that volunteer advisors possess a more positive outlook and stronger motivation to conduct the mission as compared to mandatorily and randomly assigned military advisors. The informant discusses the pride felt by combat advisors who wanted to advise and who effectively “shared in the blood, sweat, and tears” with CPs.

The final point regarding Todd’s narrative entails the fascinating secret issuing of an unofficial combat advisor tab (see Fig.4 below) among peer US advisors who formed an advising clique in Iraq. The US Army issues only a few official tabs, which carry connotations of a warrior, specialized, and elite nature – most notably for completing Ranger and Special Forces training. Todd’s account reveals that at least a few advisors covertly created and wore an unauthorized “combat advisor” tab to signify the value, importance, and special nature of the advising mission within their own clique. This secret use of a combat advisor tab helped this handful of advisors to create a mildly maverick in-group and space for acceptance, meaning, and pride within the larger perceived out-group
of advisors in relation to conventional military units. Thus, some contemporary US military advisors, including Todd and his peers who formed a special advisory in-group and clique in Iraq, possessed “immense pride” in the unconventional mission.

**Figure 4:** US Army Tabs and the Unofficial “Combat Advisor” Tab

Can Anybody Succeed as a Military Advisor?

Findings reveal the US military applies inconsistent processes for selecting and training service members for the advisor role, which support the controversial theme that anybody can succeed as an advisor. The US military employs a mixed advisor selection process, which includes volunteers (typically the case for career military officers who fill senior advisor roles) and other randomly assigned advisors (generally junior officers and non-commissioned officers). Further, the data shows varied findings regarding the formal advisor training received by advisors; some advisors received at least a few weeks of advisor training, while others received little (e.g., a course lasting a few days) to no formal training prior to serving as advisors. A root issue that helps to explain these mixed findings regarding the selection and training of advisors entails the contestable cultural organizational assumption that anyone can serve as an advisor. Given the primacy of the warrior identity and second-tier status of the advising mission in the US military, a logical consequence includes an organizational deduction that any military member can successfully advise. The following data illustrate contradictory views about this theme.

Bruce, a 44-year-old US Navy SEAL officer with global advising experiences, talks about the inherent challenges of trying to sustain competence in both combat and the military advising mission.

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9 The first three tabs listed above are official US Army tabs awarded for the completion of the given training: Ranger School, Sapper School, or Special Forces qualifications. The fourth item pictured, the “combat advisor” tab, is an unofficial and unauthorized tab. A subject from the study shared this illustration of the “combat advisor” tab. Two informants and former military advisors who served together in Iraq reported they covertly wore this combat advisor tab on their Army Combat Uniform (camouflage uniform).
Where do we focus our energies, on fighting the boat and winning our wars [or] on becoming better advisors? I’ve heard general officers say the US military’s gonna remain focused on direct action, fighting, and winning our nation’s wars because you can be a direct action guy and then advise. But the opposite is not true. You can’t be a full-time advisor and then do direct action. So you can put a bullet in Osama Bin Laden’s head and then do FID [advising], but you can’t do FID full-time and then be the guy to get on an airplane and go put bullets in people’s heads. I think you can’t argue that point because it’s absolutely right. You need a high-end tier one combat force to do your nation’s bidding. You can’t be a full-time advise guy and then be rolled into a [combat role]. It’s a perishable skill, right? Can’t sustain both. So do you have two different organizations? Which some people argue I think that you need two different organizations. Or do you have one organization that flip-flops back and forth? So it is a balance. But I definitely agree with those general officers that you can do combat and then do FID, but you can’t do FID and then do combat. [Italics mine].

Bruce agrees with general officers who think that the US military can take combat-proficient service members and create competent advisors, “but the opposite is not true”. Military members who specialize in advising cannot become effective “direct action” combat operators. He invokes a timely international news event [Bin Laden’s abrupt end] that involved his organization, the US Navy SEALs, to provide an example for his argument. Further, the subject talks about the US military’s ongoing struggle to strike the right “balance of the force” between traditional combat and other softer capabilities including military advising. The informant’s discussion of possibly having “two different military organizations”, with one specializing in combat and the other agency focused on advising and other noncombat missions, provides an acknowledgement that the sophistication of each mission may merit the development of separate units. But on the whole the informant makes his view about the primacy of the warrior identity and combat missions crystal clear: the military needs to focus on the “perishable” combat skills first and foremost. When the need surfaces, the US military can “flip-flop back and forth” between combat and softer missions, implying the military can rapidly learn the advising mission. This narrative implies that anyone can advise, and that service members with proficiency in combat operations can also advise successfully. Bruce’s input illuminates some strong underlying cultural assumptions linked to the US military’s dominant warrior cultural identity: the military must zealously guard and maintain its warrior identity and cultural toolset, and when necessary the military will adapt to accomplish emergent missions requiring new, different tools. This aspect of US military culture helps explain the second-tier status of the unconventional advising mission that draws heavily on peacekeeper-diplomat cultural tools.

The other side of the coin reveals a stronger pattern in the study that not everyone can advise successfully. Given the data collected from former and current military advisors (and some linguists who worked with advisors), it is reasonable to deduce their pro-advising mission attitudes may not reflect the wider US military’s views about whether any military member can succeed as an advisor, especially leaders and members of the “tip-of-
the-spear” combat organizations. The following insights come from three different subjects: Ted, Peter, both previously seen, and Ron, 31, military advisor in Afghanistan.

**Ted**: *Not everybody can be a good advisor*. There are certain personality traits that are essential, such as the ability to be *empathetic, patient, and flexible*, some facility with foreign language, certain level of tolerance for different cultures, different religious beliefs. In general, somebody who can get along with pretty much with anybody, I think that’s essential.

**Peter**: *Not everybody is suited to be a mentor or advisor* just by their personality. *Some people can’t cross that bridge*. A lot of people can’t cross the cultural bridge because they have this *ethnocentric viewpoint*, they don’t even realize it, but they do.

**Ron**: *Our NCOIC* [non-commissioned officer in charge – a master sergeant], as far as advising, *he didn’t want any part of interacting with these guys [Afghans]*. So he’d hang out every day with the [US military] gunners. *He didn’t advise or mentor any of the [Afghan] NCOs [sergeants]*. I don’t think he wanted to be there. He didn’t like the Afghan people at all. His focus was taking care of us [US advisors] as a team. If he could improve our quality of life, that’s what he did. He would go to the DFAC [dining facility] and bring American food out there to cook [when the advisors stayed with the Afghan CPs]. He did not like the fact that we were living out there. He would get very frustrated when our major [the advisor team chief] would take on a mission that he [the master sergeant] thought put too much risk on us. When he knew the major was taking us into an area where we knew danger was imminent, they got into a lot of heated arguments about that. Ya, that NCOIC could not see beyond his own lens. If we had more folks like him on the team, we probably wouldn’t have got anything done.

**Interviewer**: Did you ever hear any of the members of your advisory team say derogatory things about Afghanistan, about the people of Afghanistan?

**Ron**: Oh, ya, all the time. He [the master sergeant] *openly said that he hated them*. But he was careful where he said this stuff. He wouldn’t say this in front of the Afghans. He would say it mostly where we were staying, in our quarters where the interpreters really weren’t listening to us. If they did hear it he would say it in a joking way so they would have an idea that it wasn’t a serious opinion, but we [Americans] all knew his feelings. *[Italics mine]*.

The first two informants discussed how their advising experiences and exposed that not everyone in the US military can advise successfully. Their insights explain different facets of cross-cultural competence, including the ability to “cross cultural bridges” and get along well with diverse people. Ted talks about “empathy”, “patience”, “tolerance”, and “flexibility”, all of which constitute important parts of cross-cultural competence. Ted states an advisor needs to be “*somebody who can get along with pretty much anybody*”, which seems to align with Peter’s thoughts that “*not everybody is suited to be a mentor or advisor just by their personality*” and “*ethnocentric viewpoints*”. This implies that durable personality traits prevent some military members from having the potential to succeed as an advisor. Since the military generally does not screen for advisor compatibility and
frequently applies a random advisor assignment process, sometimes inappropriate soldiers wind up as advisors, as the third subject’s story illuminates.

The third informant, Ron, discusses a member of his advisor team – a master sergeant (MSG) that “hated” the Afghan people and who refused to advise them. The MSG supported his US advisory team by getting them ready for missions, acquiring food from the US “DFAC” (dining facility), trying to “improve” the advisors’ “quality of life”, and showing concern for the team’s safety. Although the subject reports this support from the MSG benefitted the advisory team, we can deduce that the MSG’s insular approach and attitude also hindered the advising mission.

The first critical pitfall the MSG brought to his advisory team constituted his “open hatred of the Afghans”. Given the rising number of Afghan CP attacks on US advisors, the MSG’s negative comments about the Afghan people reduced his advising team’s survivability. When the MSG made derogatory statements about Afghans within earshot of the team’s Afghan local national linguists, he jeopardized his advisory team’s safety. Secondly, eating food from the US dining facility while staying on an Afghan base could have transmitted the message to CPs that advisors viewed Afghan food as inferior, and eating away from the Afghans during some meals (implied from Ron’s narrative and our interview) decreased the interactions between advisors and CPs, which also potentially robbed the advisors of chances to strengthen relationships with CPs. Further, when the team leader (“the major”) decided the advisor team needed to accompany their Afghan CPs in dangerous places to perform their mission, the MSG’s public debates with the major about conducting those missions also detracted from the mission. Those arguments might have created apprehension in the advisors or reduced the team’s trust in their team leader’s decisions. Additionally, it seems reasonable to speculate the MSG’s strong anti-Afghan attitude negatively affected some of the other advisors on the team. Although the subject did not say the MSG’s hostility towards Afghans spread to other teammates, in our interview he mentioned another advisor (a sergeant first class – a direct subordinate of the MSG) who privately shared some mixed and at times negative feelings about the Afghans. Finally, when the MSG refused to work with Afghans, the CPs lost the needed expertise and knowledge about how to serve as a senior sergeant, which constitutes a sorely needed organizational adaptation in the Afghan, Iraqi, and other CP security forces worldwide that suffer from poorly developed non-commissioned officer corps (e.g., many CP militaries lack effective and empowered sergeant ranks). In sum, this subsection discusses the data surrounding the question of whether anyone can advise, and on the whole the data more strongly support the finding that not every military service member can succeed as a military advisor.

**Talented Professionals, or the Land of Broken Toys?**

Another sub-theme linked to the second-tier status of the advising mission consists of mixed findings about the quality of service members whom the military assigns to advisor roles. In some cases, the military fills advisor positions with talented military professionals who have successful careers, aspirations to perform very well as advisors,
and desires for continued advancement in the US military. In other cases, the military fills advisor billets with service members who have been passed over for promotion, troops of questionable quality based on subpar records of performance, and sometimes with people labelled as trouble-makers or “problem soldiers”.

My field notes and recollections from serving as an advisor and a deputy advisor team leader in Iraq (2009-2010) provide relevant insights. One of the senior advisors and leaders on the advising team coined the phrase “the land of broken toys”, to discreetly describe the personnel in the advising unit, which reveals the scepticism he harboured about the quality of the unit’s active-duty military members, government civilians, and contractors. Having spent significant time with this senior advisor, I hold the impression that this officer’s unit assessment included a more nuanced and mixed overall evaluation of the team’s personnel – including positive views of some team members’ abilities, attitudes, and performance – than the overt cynicism that underlies his blanket statement of working in a “land of broken toys”. Although I noted a bit more interpersonal strife than what I recall in other units I’ve served in during my military career, my own assessment of the advisory unit’s membership did not match the senior advisor’s degree of critical pessimism. From my view, I observed some “problem soldiers” (e.g., members with tendencies to get embroiled in interpersonal conflicts, or who broke key protocols), some mediocre to weak performers, but also many talented, creative, and effective members on the team, including a senior sergeant and a few career field grade officers who were selected for promotions. Nonetheless, the senior US advisor and leader in Iraq who devised the phrase “the land of broken toys” left a lasting impression of how he generally assessed the quality of the advising unit’s personnel, which meshes with a few cases in the study.

Todd (see p.12) reflects on how in Iraq his advisory unit received a younger soldier labelled as a “problem child” who ended up benefitting his team.

In Samarra [Iraq], I got a medic that was kind of a problem child to the unit that he was [originally] with. But he was perfect for my team. He was awesome. But his unit probably didn’t miss him. He was an invaluable member of the team as a specialist [enlisted rank of E-4 – typically a young soldier with little military service]. I don’t think you can tie who’s gonna make a good advisor to a rank structure, [but] there’s certain requirements for technical and tactical competence. I’ve worked with specialists before that I would have on an advisor team in a heartbeat sooner than I would an airborne ranger infantry lieutenant-colonel, based on my gut feeling on their ability to navigate that sometimes ambiguous, tough, multicultural environment. That airborne ranger infantry guy who’s done nothing but train to the spirit of the bayonet for 20 years – that’s the guy you want next to you in a foxhole in a linear conventional conflict. His personality fits for that type of thing, [but] maybe not so conducive to advising foreign security forces.

I must acknowledge that comparing my experiences in a military advising organization (with a sizeable population of civilian members) in a combat theatre in Iraq to other military units I have served in, especially those during peacetime conditions, constitutes a questionably valid and reliable comparison.
The informant’s recollection of receiving a “problem child” in his advising unit in Iraq contributes to that sub-theme in the findings. Todd’s positive assessment of his “problem child medic specialist” inextricably links to that soldier’s cross-cultural competence. The subject states he would rather have younger inexperienced soldiers who might lack some “technical and tactical competence” but who can successfully “navigate the ambiguous, tough, multicultural environment” that advisors regularly confront, as opposed to having potentially narrow-minded “airborne ranger infantry lieutenant-colonels” on his advisory team. This comparison accentuates the importance the subject places on cross-cultural competence and the ability to “navigate” the fluid, uncertain conditions that characterize the advising mission. Although the study at large does not corroborate the thought that very junior military members tend to possess excellent advising potential, the findings do reinforce the idea that peacekeeper-diplomat cultural tools (e.g., cross-cultural competence, adaptability, diplomacy, perspective taking, flexibility, and so on) trump military subject-matter expertise in importance for advisors.

The informant’s poignant comments where he acknowledges “that airborne ranger infantry guy who’s done nothing but train to the spirit of the bayonet for 20 years, that’s the guy you want next to you in a foxhole in a linear conventional type of conflict”, reveals the traditional combat warrior identity prototype in US military culture. But Todd reports the combat warrior “personality” may “not be conducive to advising foreign security forces”. Thus, the subject supports the theme that not anyone can advise by citing the example of a senior military member with strong warrior and traditional combat skills (“airborne ranger infantry lieutenant-colonel”) who would fail as an advisor if he lacked the necessary peacekeeper-diplomat cultural tools. Comparing Todd’s input with the strong ideas espoused by Bruce, the Navy SEAL who stated the US military can turn proficient combat warriors into successful advisors (but not vice versa), yields a noteworthy contradiction and telling insight about the constraints of military culture. Longstanding traditional warrior cultural orientations (combat, command, conformity, rigidity, etc.) create irrational organizational assumptions about the warrior prototype’s ability to flexibly and rapidly build profoundly contrasting cultural tools – especially the peacekeeper-diplomat tools required to succeed in the military advising mission.

Discussion

This section reports the finding that the US military places the advising mission in a second-tier status compared to traditional combat missions. Publicly, high-ranking politicians and military leaders espouse the importance of the advising mission. But on the ground in military units, many advisors confront and negotiate the advising mission’s second-tier status and some resistance towards the mission. The debate of whether any service member can successfully advise surfaces in the study, and the project reveals a faulty cultural assumption that persists in some pockets of the military: that all competent warriors and combat soldiers can become effective advisors. Further, the military applies a random selection process to assign a sizeable portion of its field advisor requirements, which often forces ill-suited or unmotivated service members to serve as advisors.
addition, sometimes military members deemed as trouble-makers or weak performers get assigned to advisory teams; the study reveals signs that at times these castaways-turned-advisors benefit the unconventional mission. In sum, the study shines light on the decoupling between the publicly stated significance of advising and the actual second-tier status of advising in the field. The military’s second-class treatment of the advising mission often creates suboptimal conditions for advisors to learn and perform their complicated charter.

These findings bear numerous implications for contemporary military culture and the advising mission. This study divulges how fragmentation and contradiction manifest in US military culture. The project explains how the military works to keep advising (and all softer non-combat missions) at arm’s length from its historically dominant warrior identity. The encroachment of an emergent peacekeeper-diplomat cultural toolset onto the military’s core warrior cultural sphere generates some resistance, marginalization, and attempts to keep advising and associated softer cultural orientations on the periphery of military culture. This reinforces and transmits the narrative of the primacy of the warrior across the mainstream military: the warrior identity and cultural toolset remain the dominant and most highly valued orientations in the organization.

Furthermore, this section’s findings reveal important implications regarding the development of a Swiss Army knife of advisory skills necessary to conduct the advising mission. Contemporary advisors transcend conventional military reluctance towards their mission, and cultivate essential cultural tools required to succeed and survive, especially the peacekeeper-diplomat cultural toolset. Exacerbating the challenges of crossing numerous cultural bridges to effectively bond with and influence diverse counterparts and linguists, advisor team leaders must also contend with and lead randomly selected teammates who may not possess suitable dispositions or skills, including some service members who resist the mission. Further, in an organization that values promotion, advisors draw on a well-developed sense of humility, selfless service, and maturity to proceed full steam ahead in a role marked by uncertainty regarding career progression. Recalling the concealed deployment of combat advisor tabs\(^\text{11}\) provides a fitting symbolic end to this section insofar as this innovative development explains how a handful of advisors carved out their own special clique to rise above the second tier status of their mission. The pride, commitment, and motivation of dedicated advisors who cultivate cultural toolkits filled with warrior, peacekeeper-diplomat, and numerous other tools will continue to reverberate, impact, and change the military’s culture. Thus, advisors’ defence of new, distinctive, and softer cultural orientations constitutes evidence for the rise of postmodern US military culture (Hajjar, 2014; Williams, 2008).

\(^{11}\) Interestingly, an illustration of a combat advisor tab (an unauthorized tab) appears on the cover page of an article published in the US Army’s official journal, *Military Review*, written by Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret.) John Nagl, a well-known, touted, intellectual maverick US Army officer who recommended the mainstream military should create a formal military advisory command or branch (Nagl, 2008). Additionally, General (Ret.) David Petraeus, previously hired Nagl to join the think tank that authored the US military’s landmark “Counterinsurgency” Field Manual 3-24 (December 2006), which forwards contemporary doctrine about the advising mission.
Conclusion

Theoretical Implications

This project reinforces the emergence of postmodern military culture (Fig.2), and especially the similar advisory cultural toolkit (Fig.5, below) that draws heavily from the peacekeeper-diplomat and associated cultural spheres to enable advisors to advance the mission.

![Military Advisors' Cultural Toolkit](image)

**Figure 5**

The military advisory cultural toolkit provides the organization sufficient conceptual space and flexibility for the development and coexistence in the military’s culture of seemingly oppositional but vitally necessary cultural spheres, such as the warrior and peacekeeper-diplomat cultural toolsets (Fig.3: see p.4). The advisory cultural toolkit bears strong resemblance to postmodern military culture, though it more rigorously cultivates peacekeeper-diplomat, cross-cultural competence, role versatility, soft bases of power and influence, and innovativeness (agency). Yet, military advisors are also required to maintain the ability to command, membership in a conformist organizational culture, and a variety of other warrior tools, even if use of such tools is softened or held back during advising missions. Beyond the case of advising, the growing set of contemporary non-combat missions (e.g., a range of peace-oriented operations, infrastructure building, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and so on) requiring more intricate and softer cultural orientations produces changes in the organization’s culture, which moves the modernist cultures of the US and other advanced militaries towards nascent post-modern military culture and form.\(^\text{12}\)

Future Research

This project surfaces the need to conduct future research on the contemporary advising mission. Although this article presents global perspectives, the post-9/11

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\(^\text{12}\) See Sookermany (2012), who discusses how contemporary militaries transform towards a postmodern form by incorporating a constructionist perspective that includes more intricate and flexible soldier skill-sets, which supports this project’s argument for the rise of sophisticated cultural tools in emergent postmodern Western armed forces.
campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly take centre stage. Future research should seek to
determine whether other Western armed forces experienced similar manifestations of a
second-tier advising mission, and how those organizations adapted to include this important
charter. Further, given the increasingly multicultural membership of the emergent
postmodern US military, more focus on diverse advisors merits study. Although the
project’s overall dataset includes government civilians, civilian contractors, members of
different military branches, a few women and even a Canadian advisor, further in-depth
research on the unique people who serve as advisors must commence. For example, do
minority group advisors (such as women, non-Caucasians, etc.) experience additional
challenges? Further, future studies focused primarily on contemporary military linguists –
including linguists who work with advisors – would also enhance understanding not only
of the distinctive linguist role but also of nascent postmodern military culture.

The advisor role deserves full consideration not only in doctrine and research but
also in practice (not least in the allocation of status and talent). In case anyone doubted the
seriousness and significance of the topic, President Obama himself, as he addressed the
graduating class at West Point terms on 28 May 2014, hammered the point home in no
uncertain terms when he stressed the importance of partnering with and advising foreign
security forces, and the US military’s need to continue cultivating the necessary skills to
succeed in this complex operation.

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