

**Received:** May 26, 2015**Revision received:** December 3, 2015**Accepted:** December 7, 2015**OnlineFirst:** December 30, 2015

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DOI 10.16917/sd.2015.2.0033 • December 2015 • 93-120

*Research Article*

# Unconventional Military Advising Mission Conducted by Conventional US Military Forces \*

Remi M. Hajjar<sup>1</sup>  
*US Military Academy*

## Abstract

This article examines how and why many contemporary US mainstream military advisors—as compared to Special Forces advisors—often work from a position of disadvantage when conducting unconventional advising missions. Post-9/11 deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have caused the US military to adapt to myriad complexities, including a renewed need for the widespread execution of the unconventional military advising mission by the Special Forces and conventional units. Although Special Forces typically possessed both the organizational flexibility and historical knowledge and skills to successfully perform military advising, the conventional military experienced some strains as it adapted to this nontraditional mission. This empirical work examines how the US military changed to conduct military advising missions, with a special focus on conventional forces. US military mainstream advisors cultivated a multifaceted “Swiss Army knife” of advisory skills—including warrior, peacekeeper–diplomat, information age technology, leader, and other essential cultural tools—to conduct the unorthodox mission. As soldiers build Swiss Army knives of advisory skills, they produce ripples of cultural change in the armed forces, which indicates the emergence of a more sophisticated, postmodern US military culture.

## Keywords

Military advising • Military advisor • Linguist • Foreign counterpart • Postmodern military culture • Advisory cultural toolkit

\* 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 article draw heavily from this source: Hajjar, R. M. (2014). Military Warriors as Peacekeeper-Diplomats: Building Productive Relationships with Foreign Counterparts in the Contemporary Military Advising Mission. *Armed Forces & Society*, 40(4), 647–672.

1 Correspondence to: Remi M. Hajjar, Academy Professor and Sociology Program Director in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, US Military Academy, West Point, New York. Email: Remi.Hajjar@usma.edu

**Citation:** Hajjar, R. M. (2015). Unconventional military advising mission conducted by conventional US Military Forces. *Turkish Journal of Sociology*, 2015, 77-120.



This article examines how and why many contemporary US mainstream military advisors—as compared to Special Forces advisors—often work from a position of disadvantage when conducting unconventional advising missions. The post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan generated a massive need for advisors, which caused the mainstream US military to undertake a larger role in advising missions—an unconventional charter primarily handled by the Special Forces since the Vietnam War era. Military advisors provide foreign military counterparts with mentorship, teaching, advice, recommendations, and other forms of assistance intended to develop the foreign officer’s competence and unit performance. The more diplomatic and cross-cultural nature of the advising mission constitutes a stark difference from traditional, conventional military missions (e.g., direct action, offensive operations, and defensive operations) that dominated the focus of the mainstream US military shortly after the Vietnam conflict through 9/11. Thus, many contemporary mainstream military advisors experience tensions as they conduct unusual tasks required by the advising mission while operating as part of conventional military organizations—units that sometimes contain rigidity and inflexibility.

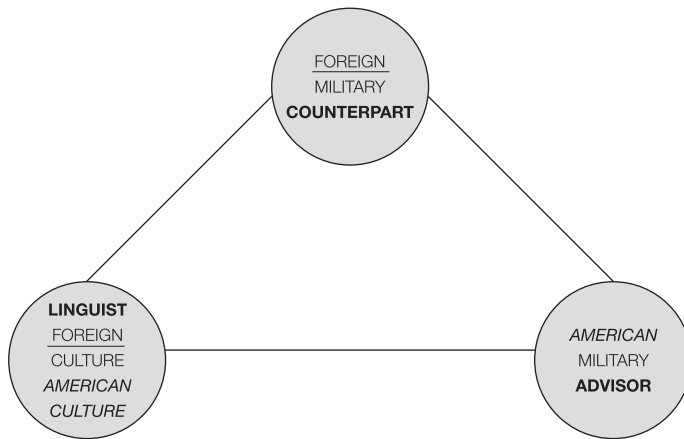
This study reveals some telling differences between the approaches of the Special Forces and conventional military to the advising missions, which provide further understanding of the advisory cultural toolkit and how the mission created ripples of change in the mainstream military. The article examines how the conventional military adapted to conduct the unconventional military advising mission after 9/11, including some of the struggles that ensued. The results reveal that advisors perform an intricate cross-cultural balancing act that requires them to adjust agilely to dynamic and diverse conditions by drawing on a range of cultural toolkits, including those of the warrior, peacekeeper–diplomat, subject matter expert, leader, and innovator to succeed and survive in combat. This study explains the basics of the US military advising mission, summarizes the history of this mission in the US, reviews the literature and puts forward a theoretical framework, explains the multi-method, discusses the major findings, and concludes with theoretical implications and recommendations for continued research in this important area of inquiry.

### **What is the Military Advising Mission?**

The essence of the advising mission constitutes military soldiers providing training, advice, mentorship, and coaching to foreign counterparts to enhance their capabilities and professionalism. Advising missions range from large-scale operations under combat conditions, such as the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, to much smaller peacetime advisory efforts in numerous locations worldwide. Although advising roles are not new for the US military, especially for the Special Forces (Ramsey, 2006; Stoker, 2008), the employment of many mainstream advisors

in Iraq and Afghanistan represents a major adaptation for the conventional armed forces. Advisory relationships can take different forms; however, they involve three principal actors at their core (see Figure 1: The Military Advising Triad). The first actor entails the foreign security force member in an advising relationship, who has the title of counterpart (CP). CPs receive training, suggestions, tutelage, information, and associated support from the military advisor. The second actor constitutes the military advisor,<sup>2</sup> who provides the CP with mentorship, teaching, advice, recommendations, and other forms of assistance intended to develop the CP’s competence and performance. The third actor in the advisory relationship is called the linguist.<sup>3</sup> The linguist, employed by the 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 an advising mission the advisor works with a linguist to provide assistance, suggestions, consultation, and other support to increase the CP’s proficiency.

### The Military Advising Triad: One Example of an Advising Relationship



#### Three Classic Actors in a Military Advising Relationship

**Bold: Actor’s Role**

*Italics = American Culture*

Underline: Counterpart’s Culture

Normal Lettering = Military Culture

Figure 1: The military advisory triad.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This project notes that active duty US military personnel, military reservists, National Guardsmen, government civilians (from numerous organizations), and civilian contractors all serve as contemporary US military advisors.

<sup>3</sup> A vast majority of the cases in this study involved linguists. A very small number of reported cases ensued where the advisor did not utilize a linguist because the foreign counterpart spoke English sufficiently.

<sup>4</sup> In Figure 1, the bold letters in the spheres indicates the roles played by the different actors in the triad. The underlined letters indicate that linguists typically share the national or regional culture of the CP. The italicized letters indicate that advisors and some linguists share US culture (although some local national linguists do not share US culture). The normal letters indicates the shared military culture between CPs and advisors, albeit there are important differences in their national and military cultures

### **A Brief History of the US Military Advising Mission<sup>5</sup>**

This section provides a summary of the history of US military advising mission. In the earliest stage of the existence of the United States, a few but competent and dedicated Prussians (e.g., Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben), French, and other military advisors helped the US armed forces to emerge by increasing their capability and professionalism, which helped the fledgling US nation to successfully fight for and win its independence. Throughout its history, the US has participated in numerous large- and small-scale advising missions for various reasons, including “modernization, nation building, economic penetration or purposes, ideological reasons, and counterinsurgency” (Stoker, 2008, p. 2). As one example, after the end of the Second World War, some US advisors worked with military leaders in Japan and Germany. The nature of those advising relationships reflected the post-Hitlerian landscape in Germany as well as the post-war setting in Japan, which prompted a full acquiescence of defeat by the Japanese Emperor. The establishment of military bases in Germany and Japan provided America with regional and strategic benefits, including the facilitation of work conducted by US advisors and military units with German and Japanese military forces for a prolonged period of time.

As another example, a contingent of US advisors worked with South Korean military forces during the Korean War era (Ramsey, 2006; Stoker, 2008). The US established a permanent military presence in South Korea, which facilitated the US advising mission in South Korea, from the Korean War to the present day. This advising mission not only benefits South Korean security forces but also enables US and South Korean military units to train and prepare together, which supports America’s longstanding pledge to support South Korea in the ongoing conflict on the Korean peninsula.

America’s preliminary covert entrance into the Vietnam War began with the deployment of Special Forces advisors who worked with the South Vietnamese military. As the US officially entered the war by deploying a large force to Vietnam, the advising mission also grew in size and scope beyond the capability of the Special Forces. This led to a significant application of conventional forces in the advising mission (Ramsey, 2006). By the time the US decided to withdraw from Vietnam, the military had acquired numerous lessons and skills in advising. However, for a variety of reasons—including some misunderstandings of and resistance toward the unusual advising mission, as well as an active Cold War context (with threats of large standing communist enemy armed forces worldwide)—the conventional US military did not institutionalize these lessons from Vietnam. Thus, the conventional US military gradually forgot many advising mission lessons (despite some small-scale conventional advising missions that have occurred since the Vietnam War era) (Nagl, 2008). However, as the mainstream US military gradually forgot the advising mission,

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<sup>5</sup> See Hajjar (2014c). This historical subsection draws heavily from this article.

the US Special Forces wholly adopted the unconventional advising mission as one of its core charters. Thus, from the end of the Vietnam War era in the 1970s to 9/11, the Special Forces honed its advising capabilities and deployed advisors to countless regions around the globe—albeit typically in much smaller advisor teams. After 9/11, the US entered two large campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq; however, during the later phases of those operations, the military realized that its Special Forces did not have enough soldiers to accomplish all of the required advising missions. Therefore, the conventional military had to re-learn how to conduct the unconventional advising mission—something that it had not done on a large scale since the Vietnam War.

**Literature Review: An Overarching Framework for Postmodern Military Culture**

The first major relevant literature for this project constitutes the postmodern military theory (Moskos, Williams, & Segal, 2000; Williams, 2008). The postmodern military theory explores a dozen salient variables that help explain the relationship between western armed forces and their societies. The postmodern military theory describes the evolution of the armed forces through four different eras—from 1900 to the present—in which each period ushers in increased sophistication on the basis of 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**



Figure 2: Postmodern military culture.

postmodern military culture framework (see Figure 2) (Hajjar, 2014a; Harvey, 1989; Williams, 2008; Winslow, 2007; Zalmon, 2006). This framework reveals that contemporary military culture possesses tremendous complexity, fragmentation, contradiction and harmony, traditional and contemporary features, and multiple overlapping spheres of influence, including professional and bureaucratic (Abbott, 1988; Hajjar & Ender, 2005; Ritzer, 1975; Segal & Segal, 1983; Sookermany, 2012), institutional and occupational (Kelty & Bierman, 2013; Moskos et al., 2000; Moskos & Wood, 1988), warrior, peacekeeper–diplomat, leadership and followership, multi-role versatility (Montgomery, 1998; Turner, 1988), cross-cultural competence (Hajjar, 2010), power (French & Raven, 1960) and influence (Yukl & Tracey, 1992), and diplomacy and ambassadorship (Perez Jr., 2012). This postmodern culture theory of the military serves as the overarching framework applied in this article, and the following discussion illuminates specific cultural spheres within this design.

This project deploys a theory of the flexible, pragmatic, and advantageous cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986, 2001) that differs from more traditional and unified views of culture (Geertz, 1973; Griswold, 1994; Schein, 2010) that do not adequately account for culture’s ambiguities, fragmentations, internal conflicts, and contradictions. The cultural toolkit provides a more complete comprehension of contemporary military culture. This article defines culture as a contested toolkit filled with orientations, tools, schemas (cognitive structures), frames, codes, narratives, habits, styles, language, symbols, values, beliefs, and assumptions that provide a group, organization, or society with a shared meaning, a collective identity, and strategies of action (DiMaggio, 1997; Ender, 2009; Sewell, 1992; Swidler, 1986, 2001; Winslow, 2007). 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, which includes integration, differentiation, and fragmentation; particularly, the fragmented nature of contemporary wars and armed forces supports the rise of postmodern military culture (Williams, 2008; Zalmon, 2006).

Another fundamental theoretical underpinning of the postmodern military culture framework applied in this article involves the warrior–peacekeeper–diplomat paradigm (Hajjar, 2014a; Perez, 2012) (see Figure 3). The warrior–peacekeeper–diplomat model contains a historical comparison of the traditional warrior-centric and emergent postmodern military cultures, which also includes a nascent peacekeeper–diplomat cultural orientation and associated tools (Segal & Segal, 1993; Segal, Reed, & Rohall, 1998). The sharp contrast between these cultural orientations enhances the comprehension of organizational ambivalence—including pockets of resistance—toward the rise of softer peacekeeper–diplomat cultural developments. The idea of McDonaldization, or hyper-rational, overly bureaucratic, unreasonable,

and extremely controlling systems also applies to the warrior (modern and late modern) aspect of the paradigm (Hajjar & Ender, 2005). Insofar as the military sometimes struggles to adequately change and adapt to new tasks and environments due to overly rigid and conformist rules and cultural influences, it suffers from McDonaldization. In sum, this conceptual snapshot does not imply that military culture boils down to this simplistic model; however, this comparison isolates these two prominent parts of contemporary military culture to illuminate their intriguing contradictory qualities for the purpose of this article.

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

Era	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Modern Culture (1900 – 1990)	Emergent Postmodern Culture (1990 – Present) (New Cultural Toolkit)
Major Identity (Role)	<b>Warrior Identity</b>	<b>Peacekeeper-Diplomat Role, Warrior Identity (&amp; Other Cultural Orientations)</b>
Associated Cultural Orientations and Tools	<p><b>Command Orientations:</b> -Actively Direct, Order, Impose, Tell, Demand, Take Charge</p> <p><b>Traditional Combat Orientations:</b> -Break, Destroy, Kill, Capture, Incapacitate, Dominate -Dehumanize: Systematic “Othering” Process Facilitates Insensitivity and Fighting</p> <p><b>Conformist Orientations:</b> -Rigid Rule Enforcement</p> <p><b>Ethnocentric Orientations:</b> -US-Centric Lens Encouraged: “Our Way or the Highway”</p>	<p><b>Cross-Cultural Competence:</b> -Multicultural Worldview: Sufficient Cultural Relativism -Humanize / Sensitivity: Develop Commonality, Trust, Relationships -Listen to, Follow, Work with, Learn About and From Diverse People</p> <p><b>Build/Teach:</b> -Mentor, Teach, Train, Advise -Build/Preserve/Sustain -Empower Diverse People &amp; Units</p> <p><b>Political Agent:</b> -Diplomat/Ambassador</p> <p><b>Adaptability/Suppleness:</b> -Stretch Rules: Unconventional Tasks -Agency: Invent/Create</p>
Archetype	<b>General George Patton</b>	<b>General David Petraeus</b>

Figure 3: Comparison of two major US military cultural orientations.

An important component of emergent postmodern military culture, the peacekeeper–diplomat cultural orientations and toolset, possessing enormous applicability in the advising mission, consists of cross-cultural competence (Hajjar, 2010).<sup>6</sup> Professional cultural orientations in the US military enable the organization to effectively rise above excessive bureaucratic rigidity (McDonaldization) and resistance to softer skill development to create essential new cultural tools, such as cross-cultural competence. This article defines cross-cultural competence as the knowledge, attitudes, behavioral repertoire, and skill-sets that military personnel (change to: “soldiers”) require to accomplish tasks and missions

<sup>6</sup> The basis for this cross-cultural competence subsection comes from an article on the subject: see Hajjar (2010).



in situations marked by cultural diversity. Cross-cultural competence consists of two major subparts: culture-general factors and culture-specific factors. Culture-general factors constitute the foundation of cross-cultural competence for the military; these consist of the core attitudes, skill-sets, and knowledge basis that facilitate adaptation to multiple culturally diverse contexts over time. Culture-specific factors of cross-cultural competence comprise the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge sets that enable effective performance of missions in a given assignment characterized by significant cultural diversity, such as the case of advising in a specific place. The US military develops components of cross-cultural competence—the culture-general and the both 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 (i.e., 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 and noncombat) of this unconventional operation.

### **Methods**

I applied a three-part multi-method to conduct this research project. The first major part of this study comprises collection and analysis of advisor data gathered 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 from January to February 2010, which included input from 23 participants. Sixteen participants served as advisors and seven served as linguists. Eight participants had previous advisor experience worldwide prior to serving as advisors in Iraq. Although most survey data focused on subjects’ advisory experiences in Iraq, veteran advisor participants also reported relevant data beyond Iraq (e.g., in the global context and under peacetime conditions in different kinds of missions). 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.

This first phase of data collection began during my six-month deployment as an advisor in Iraq. This role granted me access to subjects (who gave consent) and also provided me with a first-hand understanding of the advising mission. I analyzed all data in search of trends and patterns to help address my overall line of inquiry. I recognized that my interpretations of the data may bear the influence of my own background and experience as an advisor in a particular organization in Iraq. Thus, I deliberately collected diverse viewpoints from multiple sources not only while I was in Iraq but especially in the other two data collection efforts in this study. The second phase of this study (document analysis) yielded far broader historical and regional perspectives. The third phase (interviews) also enabled me to capture new perspectives and insights to challenge initial themes emerging from the first two parts of the multi-method.



The second major part of the data collection involved gathering and analyzing military journal articles, monographs, book chapters, US military doctrine, and advisor classes (training). This second grouping of data ( $N = 35$ )<sup>7</sup> provided a broader perspective than the overall dataset, including insights from around the world, different kinds of advisory units (e.g., different military branches and specialties), historic contexts, peacetime and wartime advising situations, diverse types of advisors, and distinctive advising missions. In sum, the breadth and uniqueness from the document data complemented the other two major parts of the method, and it produced a fuller and more intricate overall dataset.

The third major prong of data collection comprised 11 semi-structured interviews conducted from December 2011 to January 2012. I conducted 10 interviews with current and former advisors, and one interview with a former linguist (all informants provided consent). I recorded these interviews, which lasted between 47 and 155 minutes (average length of about 90 minutes), and transcribed each interview. The strength of this third group of interview data comprised the depth of relevant answers provided by the informants. Having conducted the first two portions of the study method and completed some data analysis prior to the interview phase, I felt well-prepared with focused questions and was ready to ask spontaneous follow-up questions to capture fresh insights and new angles, explore pertinent ambiguities, suitably approach potentially controversial topics, and to seek corroboration for or contradiction of existing findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although 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 overall results.

In conclusion, three major subparts of data collection provided a fruitful multi-method 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 advisory document data ( $N = 35$ ), 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, and both contradictory and complementary data. The initial analysis of the Iraq data yielded initial categories, conceptual clusters, and trends, which expanded in complexity during the reiterative analytical processes that occurred throughout the project. The triangulation of the results from these three distinct data sources strengthened the findings' overall validity and reliability.

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7 A majority of the documents focused on post-9/11 advising cases and yielded a final set of 20 applicable documents; however, another group (15 documents) provided a relevant historical context of the US advising mission. See Ramsey (2006).

### **Findings: The Right Stuff, or the Swiss Army Knife of Advisory Skills**

This section discusses the major findings, with a main concentration on the patterns of challenges faced by conventional military advisors as they adjusted to conduct of the advising mission. One informant uses the metaphor of a “Swiss Army knife” of advisory skills, 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 be an appropriate symbol for the military’s historic combat warrior identity, and we can imagine how this large tool evolved into a toolkit including smaller hammers, scalpels, other kinds of knife blades, and new tools needed for different kinds of combat missions of varying intensities. The contemporary “Swiss Army knife” also includes emerging peacekeeper–diplomat, information age technology, soft and hard leader skills, expertise, and other tools required to perform a full spectrum of noncombat and combat operations. Advisors draw from their Swiss Army knives (cultural toolkits) to conduct complex, dangerous, and ambiguous contemporary advising missions.

Although this article primarily explores how conventional forces and advisors adapted to the unconventional nature and requirements of the advising mission, a brief synopsis of the project’s other major findings provides a necessary broader context. One major finding constitutes the importance of advisors building productive relationships with foreign CPs (Hajjar, 2014b). Another finding includes the significance of advisors effectively leading and partnering with linguists (mainly civilian contractors), serving as key intercultural conduits between advisors and CPs. Another key finding revealed advising as a second tier or lower status mission as compared to traditional command roles and combat functions. A major finding constitutes the ambiguities and challenges linked to defining advisory success, including the folly of trying to employ precise objective measures. Advisors created more subjective measures for advisory achievements, including facilitating CP autonomy and establishing enduring and personal advisor–CP relationships. Finally, a mixture of other patterns emerged, including the role of modern information technology, the importance of advisors possessing relevant subject matter expertise, providing various “goodies” (e.g., equipment and shared intelligence) to CPs, special considerations for deploying women as advisors, and the need to successfully interact with myriad other actors in the advisory environment.

### **Unconventional Advising Missions Conducted by Conventional US Military Forces**

The findings presented here highlight some telling differences between the approaches of the Special Forces and conventional military towards the advising missions. The data

presented in this section explain some of the most vivid examples of the major patterns and themes that emerged, and they are representative of the larger data set. The relatively small number of cases discussed in this section are not the only data in the overall study that support these findings; however, this paper deliberately draws on their richness, illuminating level of detail, and nuance to help create *verstehen* (deep understanding and insight) for the reader (Autesserre, 2014). This follows the insight of Max Weber, a sociologist, who explained the value of seeking *verstehen* in studies of the social world. Furthermore, these findings unfold in a manner that allows for greater depth in the examined cases: enlightening, multifaceted, and valuable stories. Sub-themes emerge within these longer narratives, including the importance of cross-culturally competent advisors, purposeful rule breaking, deliberate risk taking, the specialized nature of the advising mission, and the sometimes problematic rigidity of the conventional military. Ultimately, these findings explain how and why many contemporary US mainstream military advisors, as compared to Special Forces advisors, often work from a position of disadvantage when conducting unconventional advising missions.

The first informant, Jason,<sup>8</sup> is a career combat arms officer in the US Army, who spent a year as an advisor in Iraq from 2008 to 2009. As we examine Jason's detailed and pertinent narratives, we learn about numerous complications faced by conventional US advisors, which effectively illustrate different trends in the findings. This informant initially discusses how and why he worked to avoid having his advising team gain a reputation as Special Forces (i.e., as a bit maverick or nonconformist), and instead appear as a normal mainstream staff section in the eyes of its parent conventional US unit. However, the subject also explains how he helped his advisory team to operate as a hybrid Special Forces unit when actually conducting the advising mission with Iraqi CPs; this is a fascinating and revealing contradiction. Jason's vivid narrative enhances understanding of the tensions faced by conventional US military advisors.

Every [advising] team that came in underneath us as our subordinate teams swapped out, we pulled the entire [new] team aside and say, "*you're not a pseudo-ODA [operational detachment alpha – a synonym for Special Forces], don't act like one.*"<sup>9</sup> Because the BCTs [US brigade combat teams – current name for a conventional US brigade] expected us to act and look like ODAs, and then the [US conventional] Sergeant Majors and the admin guys would treat us like shit. "*When we started acting like a [normal] staff, our relationships with the [US] partner units improved.*" From the word go, we integrated ourselves with the BCT [US brigade] staff so that they knew they could call us at any hour of the day and ask us questions. (Interview: Jason, 40, military advisor, Deputy Advisory Team Leader in Iraq)

8 This paper purposefully uses names that cannot be used to actually identify the informants

9 All italicized words in the reported data throughout the findings indicate my emphasis to draw the reader's attention to major themes or ideas.

Later in the interview Jason reports:

When we [met] the [Iraqi] counterparts, the first thing they said, “we hardly ever see these guys [outgoing US military advisors].” So, we were real quick to pull out a crane and lift our building from behind the [US] brigade headquarters and drove off with it “*outside the wire and lived with them [Iraqi CPs].*” We still came back in at night because there was no living accommodations out there and we didn’t want to put them out of space. But we worked out there from basically six in the morning till midnight every night, inside of our own building that was hard-wired into the Iraqi Division headquarters. The [US] brigade tried to make the advisors go out there in up-armored 1151’s and MRAPs<sup>10</sup> [heavily armored vehicles] every day wearing body armor because we were outside the wire of the base. “*We refused to do that*”. I had a couple guys on our team saying, ‘this was dangerous, I don’t want my Mom getting a letter saying that we got shot because we were outside the wire without our armor on.’ My boss and I and the G2 [intelligence] advisor said, ‘*look, suck it up cupcake, this is how you build rapport. You go out there and you put yourself in the same risks that they’re taking every day.*’ We managed to get a number of NTVs [non-tactical vehicles] and we drove out there without armored vehicles. When our counterparts would go places, the [US conventional] Corps orders said you had to go in serials of three vehicles, at least 51’s and MRAPs. We didn’t do that. We just went with our counterparts in unarmored vehicles. We wore our body armor, we took cell phones and MBITRs [handheld tactical radios] with us. “*The rest of the BCT [US brigade] thought we were nuts when they found out that we were doing it,*” but we pointed out [and leveraged some vagueness in the US] Corps order. We didn’t highlight the fact that we were supposed to request permission every time. We just said, “look, the Corps order says we’re allowed to do this so we’re exercising the authority to do it.” (Interview: Jason, 40, military advisor, Deputy Advisory Team Leader in Iraq)

This rich description shows the numerous strains faced by Jason’s advisory team. The informant explained that his team did not want the US conventional brigade’s “Sergeants Major and admin guys to treat his team like shit” based on perceptions of the advising team operating unconventionally, like an “ODA” or a Special Forces team. Therefore, his team initially acted as a normal US “staff” section as it “integrated itself into the BCT (brigade)” and diligently responded to the brigade’s “questions” and requests. Jason’s comments enable us to deduce that some tensions exist between US mainstream and Special Forces units, implying that some conventional units harbor hostilities towards Special Forces (or unorthodox advisory teams placed into a similar cognitive category). This animosity could stem from historical competition between Special Forces and mainstream units, jealousy of conventional units over the elite status of Special Forces, or mainstream unit frustration and impatience with

<sup>10</sup> The 1151 is a new, heavily armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV). The Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle is another new, post-9/11 innovation meant to reduce casualties produced by roadside bombs and other improvised explosive devices.

Special Forces' highly autonomous ways of operating, which some conventional leaders perceive as too outside-the-box or unorthodox. In this case, Jason did not want his advisor team's conventional unit to perceive his team as a negative "ODA" (Special Forces) element and subsequently marginalize and fail to provide his advisory team with necessary resources, logistics, and administrative support. Thus, Jason's advisory team initially acted as a normal, conventional, conformist, responsive, and proximate "staff" section with its parent US brigade in Iraq.

However, after the subject's advisor team met their Iraqi CPs, who complained about rarely seeing the outgoing US advisors, Jason's team moved its building "outside of the wire" and placed it next to their Iraqi CPs. Further, Jason's team drove in "non-tactical vehicles," which contradicted the US "Corps Order" that required US units operating "outside the wire" (outside the US base) to travel in heavily armored "1151" or "MRAP" vehicle convoys. Moreover, the informant's team bent and broke additional US conventional rules—and leveraged ambiguities in US policies—by traveling outside the wire in individual "soft-skinned" vehicles (not in heavily armored convoys) to operate with CP units across various places in Iraq because the advisors determined this advanced the mission. The warrior tools emanating in Jason's narrative emerged in myriad indirect ways, as his team shared the same "risks" as their Iraqi CPs, revealing bravery, courage, and risk-taking. When some teammates balked at the team for not following US policy (e.g., not using armor), speaking of their fear for their personal safety, they were told to "suck it up cupcake" because the team needed to operate like their Iraqi CPs to build rapport and succeed. Jason's team also demonstrated cross-cultural competence by responding to their Iraqi CP's requests for more frequent interaction with the US advisors.

Thus, despite the beginning of the narrative, in which Jason speaks of how his advisory team wished to conform to conventional expectations to gain acceptance by and support from its mainstream parent unit, a majority of his comments reveal substantial contradictions to this conformity, including numerous actions stretching or breaking conventional military rules and norms. His story reveals his advisory team's agency, including moving its building next to the Iraqi CPs, and operating on the battlefield in an unconventional manner, showing similarity to the Special Forces. The participant reported, "the rest of the BCT (conventional US brigade) thought we were nuts when they found out that we were doing it." This comment suggests the US brigade viewed the advisor team's actions as deviant and unorthodox. However, importantly, the interview gave the impression that despite Jason's advisory team's unconventional methods, it was able to continue to be accepted by its conventional US unit as well as by its Iraqi CPs. Indeed, his team's decision to break US military rules to spend more time with its Iraqi CPs reveals sensitivity in listening and responding to the CP requests for more advisory presence, which, we can deduce, helped set the

stage for effective US–Iraqi relationship-building and advising. Jason’s colorful story contributes to the finding that effective US advisors often must diligently work to maintain positive relationships with both US conventional units and CPs.

In another part of the interview, he spoke of his team’s secret use of unauthorized “combat advisor tabs” on their uniforms.

It’s just informal. *“These are high quality, nice tabs [combat advisor tabs].”* They’re on par with the SF [Special Forces] tabs. A lot of us, we would wear “em right underneath the left pocket-sleeved flap, above whatever patch we were wearin.” *“We weren’t allowed to wear ‘em.”* They haven’t authorized them and I doubt they ever will because they don’t want to admit this is a specialized thing. The shitty thing about combat advising is *“the Army thinks anybody can do it.”* Advisors need some kind of special identification. One of the things we noticed with our guys [CPs] was that they identified with the advisors because we were their advisors. There was nothing that distinguished us from anybody else. So it would have helped if we had a tab on that said, ‘combat advisor,’ along the lines of Ranger or Airborne or Sapper [tabs]. (Interview: Jason, 40, military advisor, Deputy Advisory Team Leader in Iraq)

The informant laments the fact that although the US military effectively influences its membership to desire “specialized” and career-enhancing training and qualifications, such as “Ranger, Airborne, Sapper, and Special Forces” (whose graduates wear conspicuous tabs on their uniforms), advisors do not enjoy a similar symbolically distinct tab or higher status. The subject doubts such a combat advisor tab will ever be authorized “because they don’t want to admit this is a specialized thing.” The vague reference to “they” discloses the subject’s frustration with the conventional US military’s leadership and culture, which he perceives as failing to recognize “combat advisors” as professionally special and distinctive.

The informant’s decision to help create a small in-group clique of US advisors who covertly wore an unauthorized “combat advisor tab on par with the Special Forces tab,” completes the paradox in this subject’s accounts. Jason’s narrative begins by explaining how he desired the US brigade to view his advisory team as a normal, mainstream, conformist, and responsive staff section—definitely not as a nonconformist, maverick “ODA” (Special Forces) subunit. However, the preponderance of Jason’s story—the risk-taking, rule-breaking, and efforts taken to create a special in-group clique of advisors—reveal an advisory unit operating outside-the-box, bearing a similarity to the Special Forces. In this analysis of several portions of Jason’s interview, we are not simply presenting findings based merely on one subject; rather, this account brilliantly captures the essence of many similar findings throughout the overall study. Thus, the unconventional nature of the advising mission creates myriad tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, and other puzzles that put pressure on advisors who feel constrained by the conventional military. Jason’s



case illustrates how advisors draw on many advisory tools, including the roles of the warrior (bravery in the face of threats), peacekeeper–diplomat (flexibility and cross-cultural competence), and other skillful roles. The rest of the findings further amplify how and why conventional military advisors face unique stressors while performing the mission, and how they apply and cultivate new cultural tools and skills to succeed.

The next informant, Cade, a Canadian military officer with five advisory deployments including three tours to Afghanistan between 2006 and 2011, brings a diverse and applicable vantage that enriches the findings regarding the unconventional nature of the advising mission. First, I present Cade’s reflections on his decision to break conventional US and coalition military rules, which helped him, as an advisor, to establish a relationship with his Afghan CP. As the story will show, an Afghan CP spontaneously asked his advisor, Cade, to ride along in the CP’s civilian vehicle to “check out” places marked by “robust Taliban activity.”

The town was still experiencing robust activity by the Taliban. He [the Afghan CP] knows the [conventional] coalition rules, coalition people including advisors must ride in MRAP-type vehicles [heavily armored vehicles]. Although the rule, very good from a force protection perspective, works well when you’re in a line [conventional] infantry battalion, or doing a line job. *“The lines certainly are not black and white and are of several shades of grey when you’re dealing in the advisor realm.”* So he showed up in his Ford Ranger and said, “hey, we’re gonna go down the road, we’re gonna check this out, and come back and check out the market.” I knew I would be faced with one of these issues right off the bat, and I could have taken two approaches. One, I could have followed the rules and said, ‘no, I can’t do that because I need to go in my armored vehicle, I’ll go get my vehicle.’ Or, there was a risk frankly, *“but I could use it as a method to build credibility with my”* CP and therefore influence, and develop a really good relationship with him. *“Knowing that in Afghan culture”* trust in another person, i.e. safety, particularly in Pashtunwali, by *“having your well-being placed in the hands of another shows infinite amounts of trust.”* As a result would get me to where I needed to go from an intercultural perspective. I jumped in the vehicle, I jumped in the back with the [Afghan] PKM [machine gun] gunner. We did our driving around, we stopped off at the market, and it was at that time that I could definitively put my finger on a calendar and say, that’s the time when the colonel [Afghan CP] and I got it, in air quotes, so to speak. When we really started the benefitting, and *“I still keep in contact with my guy [Afghan CP].”* [When Cade returned to Afghanistan in a subsequent tour] I went to go visit him. He works in the north, and I went to go visit him. I jumped on an airplane and I went to go visit him just to keep our relationship going. (Interview: Cade, 42, Canadian military officer, 5 worldwide advising tours including 3 in Afghanistan)

Cade deliberately broke the conventional “coalition rules” about only traveling in heavily armored vehicles while in non-secured areas, to build rapport with his Afghan



CP. He views the rules as “very good from a force protection perspective when you’re in a line (conventional) infantry battalion,” but those same rules do not provide the necessary flexibility to negotiate the “several shades of grey” that characterize the unconventional “advisor realm.” Thus, this informant accepted risk (i.e., risk to personal safety and the potential consequences of violating policy) as a “method” to build a relationship with his CP. Cade recognized the Afghan “colonel knew that coalition people must ride in MRAP-type (heavily armored) vehicles” when he invited his advisor to travel with him; thus, the invitation served as a test. Cade applied his cross-cultural tools, especially culture-specific knowledge of “Pashtunwali” culture, when he chose to “jump in the Ford Ranger” with his CP. As the informant explained, by placing his “well-being in the hands of another” he showed his Pashtun Afghan CP “infinite amounts of trust,” which helped the advisor to “get to where he needed to go from an intercultural perspective.” He reflects on that experience as the “definitive” time when he “got it” with his CP, when they “really started the benefitting (in their relationship).” Further, Cade reported that when he returned to Afghanistan in a different tour, he “jumped on an airplane to go visit (his former CP)” to sustain the personal relationship. Cade’s comments about maintaining a long-term advisor–CP relationship link to an overall trend I found in my study, namely the importance of building enduring advisor–CP relationships and friendships that endure beyond a single advisory tour.

The following account provides Cade’s observations of US advisors, which further penetrates and explains the complicated challenges and conundrums faced by mainstream US advisors.

SOF [US Special Operations Forces] guys who are trained to be advisors, no issues at all. Although in the last few years I think that the core competency of SFA [security force assistance – military advising] has taken a second place to direct [combat] actions and SR [special reconnaissance]. More importantly, your conventional guys that have been tasked, or the MiTT team [military transition team – military advising] guys that because of dwell time have been tasked—“*based off of their availability, not their ability.*” As a result one of the big things that I’ve seen is that people are setting the criteria for Afghans at the same level as a BCT [brigade] or battalion in the American Army. So, “they can’t do that, they haven’t achieved the following METL’s [mission essential task list – military skills], they don’t do a decision support template, when they do their battle update briefs in the morning they don’t use Power Point.” So essentially “*the biggest criticism that I have is that a great many [conventional advisors are] trying to build Afghan security forces in the direct image of the US Army.*” Clearly, there’s not a single army in the world that can be built in the same image as the US Army. Trying to develop people in their own image is [the] number one faux pas across the board for anyone in an advisor role whether it’s police, army, special police, director of security. That would be my biggest concern for a conventional US Army green guy who’s been tasked to be an advisor. (Interview: Cade, 42, Canadian military officer, 5 worldwide advising tours including 3 in Afghanistan)

This passage details some problems that Cade observed in US advisors, which receive corroboration from the dataset at large. First, the subject recognizes that after 9/11 the US Special Forces turned their attention mainly to conducting “direct action” and other combat missions; consequently, the Special Forces began to place less focus on the advising mission. This development, coupled with the substantial rise in the need for US advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan, caused conventional forces to fill the void for most advisor positions. This led to some random or involuntary advisor assignments, as the informant suggests, often based on service members’ high “dwell times” (time elapsed since the last deployment). This reveals an advisor selection process in the US military that assumes anyone can advise, one that concerns itself more with personnel “availability” than “ability.” This creates problems insofar as involuntarily selected US military members may not want to advise, and those who get pushed into an advisor role may not be suitable for a variety of reasons.

The informant reports “a great many” conventional US advisors suffer from the “number one faux pas [mistake]” for advisors: trying to influence foreign CP units into becoming a “direct image of the US Army.” Cade’s recognition of the foolishness of US advisors who expect Afghan CPs to use “Power Point” in their “battle update briefings” illustrates their problematic rigidity well, along with the conformist tendencies that demand an application of the latest information technology. Pushing CPs to use Power Point in an Afghan village reveals a lack of culture-specific competence (knowledge of Afghan culture), narrow-mindedness, and an over-reliance on information age technologies. Thus, a powerful insight emanating from Cade’s narrative includes the finding that some ineffective McDonaldised (Ender 2009; Hajjar & Ender, 2005) advisors expect foreign security forces to fully adopt US Army practices. They rigidly and unreasonably try to force foreign CPs to adopt US Army procedures, and fail to flexibly adapt to the realities of their situations. We can deduce that successful advisors possess cognitive flexibility and demonstrate agency as they selectively follow, bend, and break US military protocols, and they also establish cross-culturally suitable performance expectations for CPs. These outside-the-box orientations and skills are at times difficult to find and cultivate in the conventional military; nonetheless, the requirements of the advising mission spawns such organizational changes and advancements.

In the following passage, Cade’s comparison of the flexible nature of US Special Forces culture with the rigidity of conventional military culture yields additional insights.

I was exposed to an ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha – US Special Forces], they’re very unconventional by design. Being unconventional by design, they’re not hampered by the things a person doing an unconventional job within a conventional chain-of-command is caught with. So, the driving issue with your CP. Guys in ODAs [Special Forces] have no

issues with driving around in the same types of vehicles that their CPs are. They do that for a reason and it's fully endorsed. But if a *conventional advisor*, who knows what he needs to do, but because "*they're under that far more regimented chain-of-command, needs to follow the rules*" to the letter or else that person is not going to have a successful career in the US Army. I think that advising is such an ambiguous, nebulous type of initiative that it takes a certain type of person, and one of those certain types of people are guys that are... a bit longer in the tooth, that aren't on the fast track to generalship or brigade commander. Because they're not tugged by that nagging issue of, if I'm an 05 [lieutenant colonel] and I'm working for this 06 [colonel] in a brigade, and if I do things that I know are best for the [advising] mission but are not best [for my career] because it's gonna be viewed by this conventional BCT [brigade] commander as a little bit cowboy-ish or far too risky, then that person would say I'm not going to do that for a 12-month tour here because I want to serve in the Army another 20 years. I think that's a conundrum the US Army is dealing with and our [Canadian] Army certainly is as well. (Interview: Cade, 42, Canadian military officer, 5 worldwide advising tours including 3 in Afghanistan)

The informant's comparison between Special Forces and conventional units reveals the "conundrum" that the mainstream "US Army" faces: how to accomplish an unconventional advising mission within a conventional organizational context. US Special Forces are "unconventional by design" and are therefore not "hampered" by the conventional expectations of a mainstream "chain-of-command." Special Forces advisors possess the necessary structural and cultural tolerance and flexibility to perform their roles; for example, Cade reports the Special Forces "fully endorses" their advisors to ride in unarmored civilian vehicles with their CPs.

In contrast, many mainstream advisors face a dilemma when conducting an advising mission. If they possess conventional military supervisors, advisors often deliberate whether they should work outside the box, bending the rules to best accomplish a frequently "ambiguous" and "nebulous" advising mission. However, if conventional US advisors desire further promotion in their military careers, then they will do what they deem to be professionally safe, not necessarily what is best for the advising mission. The circumstances of some mainstream advisors influence them to conform to McDonaldized, hyper-controlling rules, not to be viewed as "cowboyish," "too risky," or as rule-breakers. For this reason, Cade suggests selecting advisors who are "a bit longer in the tooth" and who "aren't on the fast track to generalship or brigade commander," because such officers may be more willing to adapt and stretch the rules to advise effectively. This highlights the finding that the advisor role may not benefit conventional military careers—especially when compared to traditional command positions.

The final part of Cade's intriguing description provides another example of how an advising mission challenges conventional US military culture. His explanation of

why he wears facial hair in Afghanistan not only reveals a facet of culture-specific competence that benefits the mission, but also further illuminates the incompatibility of the sometimes hyper-conformist conventional military. When I asked Cade if he observed any cases of advisors going native or overly identifying with their CPs, he provided the following response.

If I show up to my Afghan with a beard, I have facial hair, and I'm wearing an Afghan patch of the Afghan unit I belong to, that should not be considered going native by any stretch of the imagination. Going back to our discussions about the conventional military thinking compared to the ambiguity that an advisor finds himself in. Those are things that build rapport with your Afghan. I would always wear an Afghan flag on one of my shoulders, with a Canadian flag on the other. Always. *"We had modified grooming standards as part of our pre-deployment training, which resulted in us arriving in Afghanistan with facial hair already groomed, and already there. Although to the conventional guys, the conventional [US] Army folks, that's not endorsed."* Given the circumstances the advisor finds himself in, *"you need to use every tool in your toolbox to generate rapport as quickly as you can with your CP."* (Interview: Cade, 42, Canadian military officer, 5 worldwide advising tours including 3 in Afghanistan)

In this passage, Cade talks about "showing up" with a full "beard" and wearing "an Afghan patch of the Afghan unit" he "belongs to," which helps him "generate rapport" with his CPs. He also talks about how the "conventional (US) Army folks" do "not endorse" such practices, because their rigid orientations sometimes constrain them from innovatively devising suitable culture-specific "tools." An examination of additional data sources corroborates the tension between the culture-specific relevance of growing facial hair and modifying personal appearance as "tools" advisors should draw on to "generate rapport quickly with CPs," and the conventional US military's strong structural and cultural expectation of clean-cut appearances.

The first additional data source entails current US military doctrine for military advising. The following quote comes from contemporary US military doctrine.

Uniform and Grooming Standards. Advisors should adhere to their [conventional mainstream branch of US military] Services' grooming and uniform standards. This will establish a level of expectation in respect to other standards such as training, maintenance, etc. (US Armed Forces, 2009, p. 34).

This short but deeply revealing conventional US military doctrinal passage states that conformity to routine, regulatory, and culturally expected "grooming and uniform standards will establish a level of expectation" regarding "training," "maintenance," and presumably the duty performance of US military advisors. This divulges the cultural assumption in the conventional US military about the importance of appearances. Oftentimes, US military members and units deemed by leaders to have

sharp appearances gain strong positive reputations and presumed competence across a spectrum of performance requirements (regardless of their actual capabilities). Conventional US military culture, particularly in garrison but also sometimes in field environments, frequently bears an obsessive drive towards hyper-conformity for proper appearances; thus, judgments of appearance can carry substantial weight regarding credibility, reputations, and careers. Thus, unsurprisingly, mainstream US military advising doctrine does not endorse relaxed or altered appearance standards, even in the face of institutional lessons learned (e.g., from the Special Forces) about the potential benefits of allowing modified appearances when conducting the unconventional military advising mission in foreign cultures.

The next passage comes from a 2008 article in *Special Warfare*, the official journal for the US Special Forces. The author, a career Special Forces officer, discusses appropriate appearances for advisors, and also explains other beneficial advising skills.

Rapport is often established more during the informal time spent with a counterpart—while socializing over meals or traveling—than during formal encounters. Advisers need to recognize and seize upon the value of these subtle opportunities. *“Eating the same food, using the same equipment and enduring the same living conditions all contribute to rapport.”* They can demonstrate that the adviser has a genuine interest in the culture, and they can dispel any myths about arrogant Americans. Depending on the circumstances, it may be permissible to soften the distinctive appearance of US personnel and possibly mimic the appearance of the indigenous forces. Small modifications to uniforms or personal appearance can have a huge impact on the perceptions of [counterparts]. They can include simple modifications to normal military grooming standards, such as *growing a mustache*. The same is true for distinctive items, such as *“unit scarves, patches or emblems.”* If advisers are presented such items [from CPs], they should recognize it as an opportunity to demonstrate pride as a member of the [CP] organization and *“wear the items when it is practical.”* In many cases, these seemingly minor gestures are flattering to the counterpart, and the commonality achieved through such acts serves as a building block to rapport. Advisers may want to consider carrying the same weapons and gear as the local soldiers. That will not only gain credibility but also *“prevent the ‘American adviser’ from standing out as a high-value target for the enemy”* and will allow better integration during combat (Grdovic, 2008).

Although this narrative discusses several useful advisory techniques, such as the “informal time spent with a CP,” the essence of the data points to the importance of advisor flexibility in engaging CP culture. Advisers who enter the CP’s world by “eating the same food, using the same equipment, growing a mustache,” and wearing the CP’s “unit scarves, patches, or emblems” are “seizing the opportunity to demonstrate pride as a member of the (CP) organization.” This “commonality serves as a building block to rapport,” which gains the advisor “credibility” and

also “prevents the American adviser from standing out as a high-value target for the enemy.” This description discusses an additional benefit reaped by advisors who modify their appearances a bit to better fit in with their CPs: they blend in and become less conspicuous targets. In sum, cultural flexibility permeates this Special Forces’ perspective on effective advising. This malleable cultural orientation that the Special Forces takes towards the advising mission contrasts with the rigidity that sometimes manifests in the conventional US military, including inflexibility regarding the appearance of service members.

My field notes and reflections prior to and during my deployment as a military advisor in Iraq provide further data contributing to the finding of struggles, contradictions, and challenges experienced by the conventional US military as it conducts the unconventional advising mission. Shortly prior to my deployment, I met a colonel, Colonel Jones, at my conventional US Army post who had recently returned from the specific advisory unit in Iraq that I was about to join, and he agreed to discuss some of my questions and to share insights and suggestions for my forthcoming advisory tour. A noteworthy recommendation from this colonel came in the form of his reflection on how he deliberately broke rules by not wearing his body armor or Kevlar helmet while visiting a particular Iraqi government building to bond in a better way with his Iraqi CP. This colonel talked about how some US military personnel who visited that Iraqi building awkwardly wore their cumbersome body armor and helmets within the building, and he explained that choice was inappropriate and problematic for a few reasons. First, he thought wearing body armor in the building may transmit the message to Iraqi CPs that US advisors did not feel safe in the Iraqis’ building: this would connote a lack of trust in their Iraqi CPs. Second, the colonel said this practice could communicate that US advisors were not willing to face the same risks as their Iraqi CP comrades, which shows a lack of bravery and could subsequently degrade CP’s respect for their advisors (e.g., they would be viewed as weak). Finally, the heavy and conspicuous body armor exacerbated differences in appearance between US military advisors and Iraqi CPs—furthering the alien look of the already culturally distinctive American advisors.

After deploying to Iraq and beginning my tour as an advisor, I frequently met my Iraqi CPs in the very same Iraqi governmental building that Colonel Jones had discussed, and I reflected on the colonel’s sensible advice. Thus, I decided to discuss this issue with my supervisor, a different Army officer, named Colonel Smith. Although Colonel Smith did not state that we should adhere to the standing policy to wear body armor and Kevlar helmets while entering the Iraqi building, he responded by saying our Iraqi CPs understand that Americans wear the gear because we follow our regulations. Further, he reminded me this rule stemmed from a higher US military headquarters and it applied widely to all soldiers in Iraq. I interpreted his response as a disapproval of my



suggestion. Every time we visited that Iraqi building together, we wore the heavy gear inside the building, but then removed it before entering the office of our Iraqi CP. If we were left only with this description, this might seem like a simple case of two senior mainstream US Army officers who differed in their views about whether they should wear heavy gear inside a large Iraqi government building when visiting CPs.

Further reflecting on my observations of the two senior US military advisors (the two colonels), I perceived a different kind of relationship they held with the same principal Iraqi general officer counterpart, who served as the director of the Iraqi unit that my US advisory team advised. On the one hand, I perceived a cooler, more superficial and business-centered type of relationship between my supervisor, Colonel Smith, and the Iraqi CP. A linguist, who worked directly for my supervisor and me, brought this point to my attention on a few occasions as a point of concern.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the army colonel who gave me advice back in the US seemed to build a strong relationship with the same Iraqi CP during his time as an advisor. For example, when I mentioned Colonel Jones' name during my first meeting with the Iraqi CP, the Iraqi general immediately showed excitement when he heard the American's name. The Iraqi general asked me how the colonel was doing, requested the colonel's current contact information, told me he wished to visit that colonel in the US, and said he was considering moving his family to that colonel's state in the US in the future. When I communicated the Iraqi CP's enthusiastic hello via e-mail to Colonel Jones (back in the US), he expressed strong interest in hearing from the Iraqi officer. The colonel thought the Iraqi general would soon visit him and his family in the US.

One blind spot in this stream of personal reflective data is that I never had the chance to observe how Colonel Jones (the one back in the US) actually interacted with the Iraqi CP, and whether as an advisor he succeeded in influencing that Iraqi general towards greater military professionalism and competence. Nonetheless, I can confidently state from the evidence I have that as an advisor he established a warm, positive relationship with the Iraqi general, something the larger study uncovered as a necessary preliminary step for effectively influencing CPs to increase performance and capability. Thus, my reflections about two different senior conventional Army officers support many patterns in the findings, one of which entails the mixture of levels of flexibility and openness among mainstream US military advisors with regard to bending the rules and earnestly engaging new cultures and foreign CPs. The two US Army colonels in this story symbolically represent an illuminating contradiction within the conventional military as it conducts the unconventional advising mission. Some mainstream advisors exhibit a strong degree of agency as they flexibly and innovatively accomplish a mission,

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<sup>11</sup> The linguist wished to influence Colonel Smith to work towards building warmer and more productive relationships with Iraqi CPs. For example, the linguist noted that sometimes Colonel Smith would inappropriately rush meetings with Iraqi CPs, which did not help strengthen Colonel Smith's relationship with his CPs.



including selectively following, stretching, and breaking the rules to succeed. Other conventional advisors approach the advising mission in a conventional “check-the-block” style with an unwillingness to push the organizational boundaries to advance the mission. This second group of advisors do not put forth extraordinary effort or take unique risks to excel as an advisor, which limits their effectiveness.

The next passage comes from a survey response by an officer who served twice as an advisor in Iraq. He laments ineffective advisors who try to command CPs.

The most common ineffective method of advising is being a typical conventional US military leader. In the culture of the US military, a leader is “*strong, decisive, and expects results.*” but this mission doesn’t need an American leader, it needs an American advisor. The ineffective method I am addressing is one in which the advisor “*directs the Iraqi unit/organization to execute an action as if the advisor commanded the unit/organization.*” The objective of this mission is to coach, teach, and mentor Iraqi units/organizations to accomplish their respective missions, not to be duplicates of US units/organizations. The Iraqis will accept US input and develop their own processes. The advisor needs to accept the Iraqi solution and then advise to make the Iraqi solution more effective/efficient, which may not match the US solution. (Survey: Derrick, 39, Military advisor in Second Iraq Advising Tour)

Derrick reflects on US peer advisors who too strongly applied their warrior skills by trying to “direct” or “command” their “Iraqi unit,” and subsequently did not succeed. The passage ends in a way that reveals a key difference between an unconventional view of mission success (e.g., “accept the Iraqi solution”) and an overly rigid, McDonaldised definition of success that too strongly demands the “US solution.” Thus, conventional advisors who are not well-trained, prepared, or suited for the mission sometimes revert back to their preference to command, expecting conformity and subordination. This particular theme reinforces another finding in the overall study (e.g., that the overly commanding, arrogant “Ugly American” advisory approach fails), and it also illustrates the need for advisors to cultivate flexibility and diplomacy.

## **Discussion**

This article examines how and why many US mainstream military advisors, as compared to Special Forces advisors, often work from a position of disadvantage when conducting an unconventional advising mission. Special Forces advisors typically work in units that provide sufficient structural and cultural latitude to conduct an advising mission. Special Forces advisors usually benefit from organizational acceptance, flexibility, agility, relevant training (e.g., peacekeeper-diplomat skills), career progression, resourcing, and useful historical lessons learned about advising, all of which helps them succeed in the mission.

When the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan unleashed a gargantuan need for advisors extending far beyond the Special Forces' capacity, the US military turned to its conventional military organizations to fill the void. Unlike the support and flexibility received by Special Forces advisors, many conventional advisors experienced mixed levels of organizational support, including rigid constraints, which sometimes hampered their ability to conduct missions. Some mainstream advisors negotiate organizational inflexibility, expectations for conformity, and randomly selected or sometimes inappropriate peer advisors. Further, complexities produced by combat conditions heighten the need for US advisors to spontaneously demonstrate agency and create new cultural tools to succeed and survive, which often requires them to bend conventional military policies and cultural norms.

Thus, effective mainstream US advisors created a hybrid conventional–Special Forces advisory niche to successfully navigate the intricacies and challenges of unconventional missions. Successful mainstream advisors must often stretch conventional military rules. Effective conventional advisors span and stretch boundaries to bond with diverse foreign CPs and linguists while serving in a historically ethnocentric (e.g., a US-centric lens) organization. They deliberately assume additional hazards in combat zones to build relationships with foreign CPs to advance a mission, and negotiate misunderstandings about the mission's requirements with conventional units, commands, and at times supervisors (evaluators). These factors illustrate some of the complexity and precariousness faced by conventional US advisors. Advisors who effectively confront these structural and cultural obstacles practice a dynamic form of agency that involves deliberate risk-taking, conjuring flexibility amidst cultural rigidity, rapidly acquiring culture-specific competence, and developing numerous inventive strategies of action and tools that expand their cultural toolkits. These successful military advisors reject the McDonaldised rules and practices that would otherwise restrict them from fluidly operating to accomplish the unconventional military advising mission. Thus, this study reveals that the most successful conventional advisors exhibit agency, sometimes to an extraordinary degree, in order to succeed.

Contemporary US advisors draw on and cultivate a rich, expansive Swiss Army knife of skills to conduct the military advising mission. Advisors draw on suitable warrior tools, sometimes indirectly, such as when advisors deliberately accept added dangers while adapting to ambiguous and fluid advisory situations. Further, advisors cultivate a sophisticated peacekeeper–diplomat cultural toolset, including well-developed cross-cultural competence, adaptation and flexibility, innovation, diplomacy, perspective taking, and other tools. Advisors working from within a conventional US military context tend to especially need to practice agency and creativity to adapt to their circumstances, nudge their organizations to change, and ultimately to succeed.

Finally, as US advisors enrich their cultural toolkits they also influence changes in the military. For example, although my findings showed how conventional advisors sometimes stretched and broke US military policy and rules while conducting missions, this study yielded no accounts of advisors being reprimanded for breaking regulations. Therefore, despite the main focus of this article, showing how advisors who operate in a conventional unit often experience and negotiate numerous frictions while performing their mission, I have also revealed signs of change and acceptance in the larger organization. The US military recognizes that the advising mission, as other unique, softer, noncombat operations, requires a more sophisticated cultural toolset, including warrior and peacekeeper–diplomat skills.

### Theoretical Implications

This project supports the thesis of the emergence of a postmodern military culture (Figure 2), and the similar concept of the advisory cultural toolkit (Figure 4). The advisory toolkit draws heavily on the peacekeeper–diplomat sphere and associated cultural spheres; these tools empower advisors to advance their missions. The military advisor cultural toolkit provides the organization sufficient conceptual space and flexibility for the development and coexistence of seemingly oppositional but vitally necessary cultural spheres, such as the warrior and peacekeeper–diplomat cultural toolsets (Figure 4), in the military’s culture. The advisor cultural toolkit bears a strong resemblance to postmodern military culture, but the



Figure 4: Military advisors’ cultural toolkit.

advisor toolkit more rigorously cultivates peacekeeper\_diplomat, cross-cultural competence, role versatility, soft bases of power and influence, innovation (agency), and sufficiently subdued command, conformist, and other warrior tools. Thus, the advisory cultural toolkit rejects McDonaldized or hyper-controlling, overly rigid orientations and rules that impede progress in unconventional missions arising for the military . Beyond advising, a growing set of contemporary noncombat 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 are producing changes in the organization's culture, which is moving the US and other advanced military's modernist cultures towards nascent postmodern military culture and form (Hajjar, 2014a; Sookermany, 2012). Finally, this work reinforces the need for the theory of the postmodern military to incorporate a culture variable to strengthen its explanatory power (Hajjar, 2014a).

### **Future Research**

This project surfaces the need to conduct future research on the contemporary advising mission. Although this article examined global advisory perspectives, the post-9/11 campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly took center stage. Future research should seek to determine whether other western armed forces experienced similar manifestations and tensions when conventional forces conduct unconventional military advising missions, and how those organizations adapted. Further, given the increasingly multicultural membership of the 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 should commence. For example, do advisors from minority groups (such as women and non-Caucasians) experience additional challenges or benefits? Moreover, 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.

President Barack Obama addressed the graduating class at West Point, New York, on May 28, 2014, on the importance of partnering with and advising foreign security forces. This underscores the significance of the military advising mission and the need for the US and other advanced armed forces to cultivate more sophisticated cultural toolkits and skills.

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