



JCISFA

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FEMALE ADVISOR PRIMER

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Introduction

Recent lessons learned, reports, articles and interviews from OEF and OIF addressing counterinsurgency (COIN), stability, and foreign internal defense (FID) operations have served to highlight the importance of many aspects of security force assistance (SFA), most notably the “advisor” mission. While this dialogue has served to enhance the understanding of SFA efforts broadly, they fail to specifically address the important role that female advisors serve in these efforts. The intent of this primer is to address this shortcoming and begin to examine some of the unique challenges female advisors face when serving as an advisor to a Foreign Security Force (FSF).

Is gender an important consideration for personnel assigned to an advisor mission? Yes. There are fundamental differences in how different cultures view the role of women in society. In order to function effectively, a female advisor must therefore understand the role of women within the host society. An advisor should refrain from directing their FSF counterpart to select a particular course of action, but can by building a relationship based on understanding, respect, and trust, an advisor may influence their counterpart to elect a course that supports commonly held goals and objectives. In order to realize this effectiveness, a female advisor requires a greater appreciation of the host nation (HN) culture and a highly attuned sense of situational awareness – perhaps more so than her male peer.



To serve as an effective advisor to a foreign nation’s military, a female advisor must first understand the role of women in U.S. society and our military – the lens thru which she views the world. She must then understand her role as an advisor – how to build rapport, trust and understanding, and finally, she must possess a keen appreciation of the role of women in the HN culture. This primer is intended to make every advisor more effective in their mission by raising questions about the cultural context in which they will be operating.

Role of Women in the U.S.

Role in U. S. Society. The women’s rights movement in the U.S. has addressed issues such as suffrage, education, equal wages and legal rights, and female roles in the military and public service. The U.S. government continues to advance the social and professional roles of women via legislation such as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the establishment of a White House Council on Women and Girls and through high-level positions of women in the administration. On average, 87% of American women graduate high school and 26.5% earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately 59% of women 16 or older were employed in the work force in 2005; of these, 37% worked in management, professional and related occupations. Currently, more American women are serving in Congress, in presidential cabinets, as state governors, as heads of major philanthropies and as university professors than ever before. The U.S. has made great strides in ensuring that gender, age, and race are no longer a basis for discrimination for

employment and job assignment. It has taken our country many decades, however, to reach this point in political and social sophistication. In many other countries, however, gender and age are still important considerations in assessing professional merit, career field or job competency.

On a personal level, women in the U.S. view themselves as functioning in many roles: professional, wife, mother, and mentor. How they are viewed by foreign cultures varies as well: out-spoken, out-going, kind, aggressive, overt, unsophisticated, and even promiscuous. It is critical for the female military advisor to understand how she may be perceived in order to be most effective. Understanding how permissive the environment will be, and how big an influence she could be in relation to her FSF counterpart and the host nation population will be a great benefit.

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Role in U.S. Military. The current Department of Defense policy restricting women from direct ground combat assignments is contained in a Secretary of Defense Memo dated January 13, 1994. This memo, which is still in effect, states that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. Direct ground combat is defined as “engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force’s personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward of the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.”

In recent combat environments however, the concept of a front line is often unclear. The contemporary operating environment features indirect fire on forward operating bases, attacks on convoys with Improvised Explosive Devices and terror attacks in public places and on support bases. These tactics have brought the front lines to almost all military mem-



bers, female and male alike. Women are conducting foot patrols, driving and operating as gunners in convoys, and advising FSF on strategic-level decisions. Understanding the evolving role of female and male advisors will allow the U.S. military to effectively influence FSF counterparts.

The Role of an Advisor

Advisor Imperatives. There are a number of imperatives that any advisor, regardless of location, gender or primary role, must understand and adhere to in order to succeed. They must understand the operational environment, recognize the political implications of their actions and consider long-term effects. They should understand HN language, culture and values, local FSF organization and ethos. They should understand their counterparts’ motivations, capabilities and limitations. They should develop cross cultural communication and negotiation skills, build legitimacy and confidence and develop team building abilities. Finally, they should embrace diversity, apply their capabilities indirectly and ensure long-term sustainment of the capabilities they are providing.

The role of the advisor can be broken down into three broad tasks: teach, coach and advise. “Teaching” is to provide instruction and/or education to develop skills or knowledge necessary to do a particular job. “Coaching” is to assist a counterpart to reach the next level of knowledge or skill by practicing those skills and building on previous teaching. The distinctive feature of coaching is that the recipient assumes

more responsibility for success while the advisor gives assistance as necessary. “Advising” is to provide the advisor’s counterpart with expert opinions, advice or counsel; to assist them in making a decision based on applying knowledge and through a mutually developed bond of trust. The distinctive feature of advising is that the recipient is responsible for making the decision while the advisor provides only advice. Depending on their role, female military advisors may perform any of these tasks, and may interface with FSF counterparts at the strategic, operational or tactical level.

Advisors require a variety of individual skills in order to effectively perform their assigned mission. Advisors may be selected on subject matter expertise, but that does not necessarily equate to proficiency as an advisor. Modern-day military advisors must be able to teach, coach and advise FSF. They must be knowledgeable in their career field, have the skills to impart this knowledge, and be able to operate effectively within cultural settings that could be very different from their home environment. Advisors also require proficiency in basic combat skills, advisor skills and situational specific skills. The figure below illustrates the subsets of individual skills.

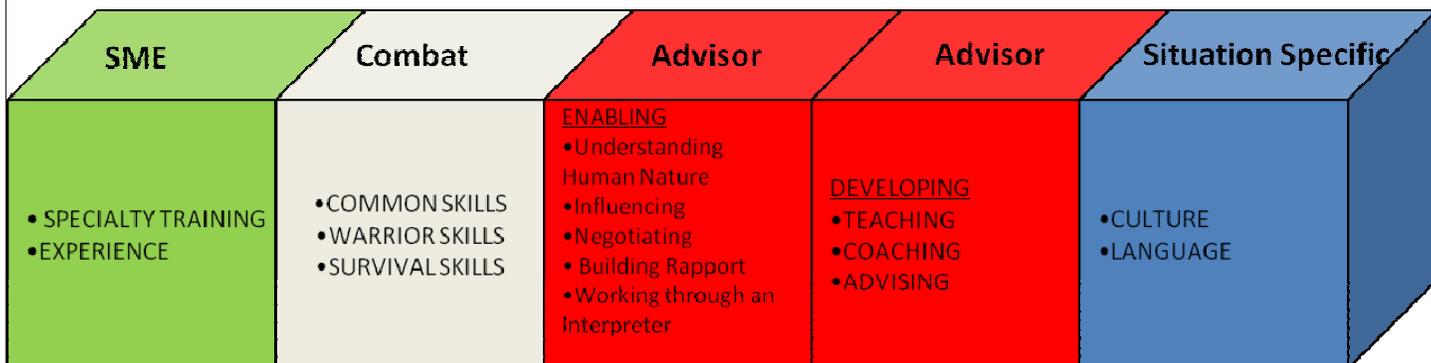


Figure 1. Individual Advisor Skills: SME = Subject Matter Expert

Source: JCISFA Working Files

A female advisor wearing a U.S. military uniform will generally be treated with respect and be given an assumption of competence by her FSF counterpart. She must also be treated expressly with respect and confidence by her own chain of command and team if there is to be any hope of being treated in a similar manner by foreign counterparts. Every advisor is always “on stage;” their actions and reactions are monitored closely by their FSF audience. While female advisors will usually be treated with respect and equality, some safety precautions, such as a buddy concept, may be prudent.

Depending on the host nation culture, female military advisors can have a high degree of influence that is not always inherent in their male counterparts. Females bring a gender perspective which uniquely positions them to relate to the female population and perform duties that might be considered offensive if performed by males. This role could be invaluable to a team who is trying to impact a HN population that practices gender segregation. Figure 2 is illustrative

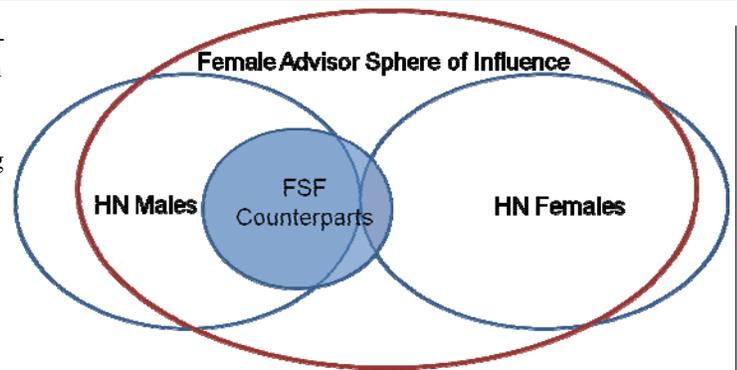


Figure 2. Female Advisor Sphere of Influence

Source: Maj Athanasia Austin, JCISFA and Dr Kimberly Metcalf, Army Research Institute, 2009

of the female advisor’s sphere of influence in a representative culture.

Use of Interpreters. Understanding how to employ and manage interpreters is another key to success as an advisor. Females can benefit from use of both male and female interpreters, as long as one remains cognizant of the HN cultural context. In some areas, male interpreters may filter what is translated to a female advisor if he feels it is inappropriate or embarrassing. In some circumstances, such as interaction with local females, a female interpreter may serve better, but female advisors should not depend solely on female interpreters, especially in cultures that do not recognize women in professional or military roles. If a female advisor is employing a male interpreter, she must ensure that she is perceived as the one speaking and not he; she can facilitate this by looking directly at her counterpart when communicating and not at the interpreter.

Regardless of gender, know your interpreter’s agenda, connections and biases; ensure they have a clear understanding that you want to hear exactly what your counterpart is saying without a “filter.” Use interpreters’ cultural background; ask about the cultural context of interactions, about players’ roles and about possible perceptions. Establishing rapport and a relationship with your interpreters may be just as important as the one you develop with your counterpart.



Host Nation Cultural Considerations

Role of Women in HN Society. No matter the geographic location, the societal or operational context under which the advisor is operating, women’s roles in the HN culture may be drastically different from what it may initially appear to the advisor. The cultural and religious norms of the HN may indicate that women live in a controlled, restricted environment. However, even in cultures where there is significant role asymmetry or segregation of females, HN women could in fact have a good deal more power and social influence than is apparent.

When preparing for assignment to a foreign culture, female advisors in particular must learn and clearly understand how they may be perceived in order to be effective. One must understand the role (both real and perceived) of females in the HN culture. What are their traditional roles in and out of the home? What roles do they serve in the foreign government, ministries or security forces? Do these roles and perceptions differ in the urban and rural areas? It is important to understand the cultural reality that exists in the area of operations, including the civil liberties of the population in general, but especially those of women. In some developing regions, women’s desired liberties may include freedom of movement, protection from harassment, and better access to water resources, fields and the market place to provide for their daily needs. Working to enable these liberties may help to establish stability and improve the likelihood of success for the HN FSF.

Some countries have quotas for female participation in the government, while in others they are excluded. In some cultures, despite the role of their own women, male FSF members may view the U.S. female advisor as a military member first and woman second. An advisor must be aware of existing sensitivities. Women’s roles (both real and perceived) will vary greatly throughout the world. The more information an advisor gains before deploying, the greater their chance of success.

Role of Women in HN Security Forces. While an increasing number of countries include women in their ministries, armed forces, police and other security forces, there are still countries that do not allow females to serve in these roles. In some countries, females are considered equal to male counterparts in their roles and responsibilities, while in other countries they may be tokens or serve solely in support roles. The females that do serve may have real or perceived limits to what they can achieve based on their unique cultural framework. This may make for a particularly challenging environment in which to advise, but one in which a female advisor may do especially well. Whether in leadership roles or participating in house and female body searches, female FSF's could prove invaluable to stability efforts.



Building Understanding, Respect and Trust. A female advisor, just as her male counterpart, must first and foremost build rapport in order to influence a FSF counterpart. Rapport is a relationship based on understanding, respect and trust. Studying the culture and language begins prior to the deployment and continues during the operation as the advisor attempts to develop an intimate understanding of the FSF counterpart. Respect is earned both personally and professionally; in many cultures respect is gained through demonstrating character, professional knowledge and performance. While professional respect is generally inherent in the uniform (and the authority and resources that uniform reflects), personal respect must be developed through shared experiences and through consistent actions that reflect an advisor's sincere interest, belief in the counterpart's cause and competence. Trust grows only over time. An advisor should never promise anything they cannot deliver, and should remain calm and consistent in their physical and emotional response to events.

In many societies, non-verbal communication is essential in order to understand the message that is being conveyed. In this regard, a woman's inherent perceptiveness and intuition may prove equally essential to understand and be understood. In many cultures, personal relationships, not business relationships, take precedence in getting things accomplished. In their cultures, women typically provide the societal glue that cultivates informal relationships important to building trust.

Careful consideration should be given to appropriate roles for female advisors assigned to any advisor team. Their per-

sonalities, individual strengths and experience should be evaluated with the rest of the team. Understanding the cultural context in which the FSF counterparts operate will help guide the effective employment of female military advisors. Recent studies in cross-cultural negotiations indicate that women in many cultures may be perceived as more trustworthy. Some psychologists also believe that women are better at empathizing and communicating than their male counterparts. Gender studies have also shown that a man is more likely to be influenced by a woman when her ideas can help him achieve his goal. Female advisers should keep these traits and perceptions in mind as they develop the relationships that will make them effective advisors, and as teams seek to leverage every team member's strength.

Local Customs. Female advisors must be acutely aware of local cultural customs. They must carefully walk a fine line between respecting those local customs and maintaining personal standards of behavior. Whether it is a matter of local dress, hospitality or participation in cultural activities, female advisors must be especially tactful in their response, and a conservative approach will usually work best. Effective pre-deployment training can go a long way, but in the absence of relevant cultural knowledge, it is best to rely on intuition to assess what is offensive in a particular circumstance. A female advisor may be more effective or influential in certain situations, without compromising their professionalism. By wearing a headscarf or another piece of local clothing, women may find it easier to develop relationships with both males and females in the local culture.

Female advisors may prove to be very effective in transitioning from the role of professional advisor to confidant. Perhaps most obviously and importantly, female advisors can capitalize on their access and empathy to local women and children, who may share vital information that the men won't. Some women in other cultures may be taken aback or awed by a female advisor that participates in men's discussions and decisions. One should take time to make eye contact, smile and acknowledge them if the culture allows. The role of a female advisor is that of a professional military member. In this capacity, she can indirectly but effectively influence how other women are perceived and treated by her example.





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References

I am actively seeking further ideas and experiences in female military advising. Please contact Major Athanasia Austin at:

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Find this publication electronically at <https://jcisfa.jcs.mil>

Resources. If you are headed to an operating environment as a female advisor, here are some resources to access in advance that can help answers some of the questions raised in this primer.

United States Air Force
Language and Culture
Center

<http://www.culture.af.edu/>

US Army Combat Studies
Institute Press, Fort
Leavenworth Kansas

<http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/CSI/>

Peace Corps Culture
Training

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/publications/culture/>

University of the Pacific
Culture Training

<http://www.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>

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Illustrations

Cover: USAF Lt Col Jeri Harvey discusses upcoming projects with Iraqi army staff Brig. Gen. Abdul Mahady Sharaque Sabah in Nov 2008 at Taji Military Base, Iraq. Colonel Harvey was the senior adviser for the logistics military advisory team and General Sabah's advisor. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Paul Villanueva II)

Page 2: Lance Cpl. Taylor Fleischmann, an intelligence analyst with 1st Marine Logistics Group, looks on as a guardian angel during a makeshift entry control point exercise during Lioness training at the Advanced Infantry Training Center here May 28. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by: Cpl. Jessica Aranda)

Page 3: USAF Maj. Lisa Ahaesy, a public affairs officer with Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, interviews a family in front of their burned home in the Boulas commune of Djibouti City in Aug 2009. (Photo by MC2 Jesse B. Awalt)

Page 4: Kurdish female security forces graduation, courtesy of Iraqslogger at <http://iraqslogger.powweb.com/>

Page 4: USAF SrA Felicita Torres-Perkins distributes Strong Food in Zabul Province, Afghanistan in 2008. Photo courtesy of USAF Lt Col Bryce Brakman

Special thanks to Ms. Lynn Holland, Female Peacekeeper and Law Enforcement Security Consultant; Dr Kim Metcalf, Army Research Institute; USAF Lt Col Jean Havens, former 521st Air Expeditionary Advisory Squadron Commander, Kirkuk, Iraq; USAF Maj Erin Cluff, former Senior Logistics Mentor, Afghan National Army and USAF Maj Gloria Ensser, Advanced Mainte-