



Peshmerga soldier loads ammunition into magazine in preparation for squad-based training near Erbil, Iraq, October 14, 2015, as part of Combined Joint Task Force—Operation *Inherent Resolve* (U.S. Army/Tristan Bolden)

Sacrifice, Ownership, Legitimacy

Winning Wars By, With, and Through Host-Nation Security Forces

By John B. Richardson IV and John Q. Bolton

Freedom is not free, and it cannot be won by someone else. History is rife with examples of great powers using their strength, military or otherwise, to assist other nations

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fighting civil wars or insurgencies for both the good of that nation and the power's self-interest. The great power's initial efforts often fail, leading to an expanded commitment and eventual quagmire where the power ends up pouring blood and treasure into a losing cause. In short, the great power overestimates its ability to win peace *for* the weaker nation and allows a limited exertion to become a self-serving justification for further sacrifice.¹ When

Soviet troops crossed the Amu Darya into Afghanistan, for instance, a limited expedition eventually became the catalyst that ended an empire. Likewise, when the Athenians invaded Sicily, they thought their massive force guaranteed a quick victory, but the very size of their commitment caused them to reinforce failure, ultimately suffering an irrecoverable setback.²

When assisting host nations, great powers often start small but allow a

pernicious haste to take hold, effectively telling local forces “move out of the way; let us take care of this and you can be in charge after we win.” This is a false narrative; a power that gets both the *ends* and the *means* right can still fail by choosing the wrong *ways* to achieve those ends. Speed and tactical efficiency do not win civil conflict; host-nation legitimacy combined with eventual tactical victory does. These facts necessitate a conditions-based approach.

Transitioning to a BWT Approach

After more than a decade assisting host-nation security forces, the United States has learned from its mistakes. Despite uneven commitment over the years, the Nation has maintained the political will to continue assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan and has made a strategic adjustment in how it does so. American forces are now helping Iraqis and Afghans win *their* fights, build *their* legitimacy, and earn the right to be seen as the defenders of *their* countries. This transition—from U.S. and coalition forces leading the fight—to providing advisory support and assistance by, with, and through (BWT) host-nation security forces allows the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to accelerate recent progress toward their strategic endstates. Specifically, coalition forces seek to train and build host-nation security forces that are capable, competent, sustainable, and seen as legitimate by the population.

This *way* allows the United States to resume its traditional strategic posture to what political scientist John Mearsheimer calls an “offshore balancer” in the Middle East, which allows its combat formations to prepare for other global requirements.³ If by, with, and through is the way to achieve strategic ends, it also requires particular means and conditions—namely, political will (strategic patience), viable host-nation partners, and realistic goals aligned with the host nation. Importantly, it also necessitates a unique military capability: troops trained and equipped to advise host-nation forces rather than to conduct combat

operations. A BWT approach requires the discipline to leverage traditional American competencies, namely firepower, technology, and excellent logistics, into *advisory efforts* that create local solutions rather than mirror-imaging American methods because the American way of war is rarely right for partnered forces.⁴

The critical question for the great power is determining how it will assist host nations: What ways and means will it apply? Before answering this question, certain conditions must exist. The host-nation government and its national security forces must be willing to own the fight and sacrifice in order to be seen as legitimate by the population. They must have skin in the game. Only once the great power has viable partners who are willing to fight, minimize corruption, and maintain minimum transparency can it determine the scope and scale of its commitment. No amount of foreign support can create these conditions.

The lifeblood of an insurgency is popular support, so the insurgent must delegitimize the government, particularly its security forces, in the eyes of the people. To defeat an insurgency, the government must prove itself legitimate by providing security, good governance, and essential services. Security provided by the host-nation forces promotes national loyalty, stemming from pride in having their fellow citizens fight and win their freedom. The population cannot perceive that their rights, freedom, or livelihood were won by foreign forces and then given to the host-nation government. Sacrifice leads to host-nation ownership and national pride, paving the way to legitimacy. Legitimacy leads to popular support for the government, and then disavowal of the armed opposition, insurgent, or oppressor, and eventual reconciliation between the government and the insurgent. Legitimacy is, therefore, the strategic linchpin to defeating an insurgency.

BWT and the American Revolution

Viewed through a modern lens, the American Revolution illustrates how a BWT approach can work. General

George Washington understood that *Americans* would have to fight, bleed, and die for freedom and independence. Consequently, the Revolution depended more on the mere existence of the Continental Army than battlefield victory.⁵ Washington knew foreign troops, even mercenaries, could have won tactically, but would fail to achieve the overall strategic goal—an independent America—because victories won by foreign allies would not legitimize the Revolution. He declined early French offers for troops to fight on American soil.⁶ A victory provided by foreign troops would have undermined the Continental Congress’s claim to legitimacy. Americans had to make the sacrifices and earn the legitimacy required to win the postwar peace, even at the cost of a longer war. At the same time, Washington understood his Army needed resources, training, and assistance to defeat the British. His officers were not educated or trained in the art of war and needed expert advice, coaching, and mentorship.

Washington embraced a BWT approach as a *way* to utilize French support. He wisely understood that France’s strategic goal in the New World, weakening Great Britain, aligned with America’s goal of independence. While some Americans are familiar with advisors such as France’s Marquis de Lafayette, Poland’s Thaddeus Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski, and Prussia’s Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, all Americans know it was Washington, Nathanael Greene, and Henry Knox who led the fight for their independence. Americans *own* Valley Forge, Americans *own* Bunker Hill, and, in the end, Americans *own* their freedom. Though French assistance was critical, *Americans* won the war.

Assisting partners is a critical component of by, with, and through, though commanders, strategists, and policymakers frequently debate its meaning when defining the advisory mission. Assistance comes in many forms ranging from equipment to enabler support (intelligence, fires), and, when operationally imperative, close combat. BWT support is scalable, but the commitment



Iraqi federal police attached to 1st Battalion conduct class on squad tactics at Besmaya Range Complex, Iraq, February 8, 2018 (U.S Army/Antonio Lewis)

of host-nation forces cannot be questionable. Though the American Revolution would likely have failed without French support, even at the final American victory at Yorktown, the vital enabler—the French navy—remained largely out of sight. It was an American victory. To American eyes the Continental Army, acting as the tool of a viable government, won independence through its sacrifices during the hard years from Valley Forge to Yorktown. Having earned the public’s trust, the Continental Army and militias helped legitimize the nascent American Government.

Host-Nation Forces Own the Fight

Much the same as France assisted the Americans over 200 years ago, American forces find themselves assisting host-nation forces today. Throughout 2017, we had the unique experience to see the BWT paradigm work in both

Iraq and Afghanistan, albeit using different subsets of the approach. Employing the BWT construct, our forces enabled success without becoming decisively engaged. Could the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have defeated the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Mosul without coalition support? No. Can the Afghan government win without coalition advisors and enablers in 2017–2018? Probably not. Nevertheless, our efforts have fostered achievement while not undermining host-nation legitimacy.

An examination of previous security assistance efforts underscores the importance of this change in methodology. During earlier phases of these conflicts, we failed to appreciate the importance of legitimate host-nation forces and the requirement to promote their ownership of the fight. From 2008–2009, I commanded an armored cavalry squadron that was “partnered” with the 54th Iraqi Army Brigade. As an Army Armored

Brigade Combat Team (BCT), we were manned, trained, and equipped for combat, not advising. We conducted daily combat operations, achieving good combined tactical effects with our ISF partners, but did little to build their legitimacy. While the ISF improved tactically over 12 months of combined operations, they were no more legitimate in the eyes of the population who saw them as American underlings.

Even after years of experience, we did not understand the importance of a viable host-nation partner who *owns* the fight. Our shortsighted desire for tactical success came at the expense of strategic gains. We developed plans and brought a token Iraqi element along during execution, calling our actions “partnered.” We were first through the door on the objective, we led evidence collection and site exploitation, we led the tactical questioning, and we planned the next target. With reflection and experience, I now



Member of Iraqi federal police holds discarded ISIS headband during offensive to liberate and secure West Mosul, March 2, 2017 (U.S. Army/Jason Hull)

ask myself, “How did our actions look to the population?” and “Who did the Iraqi people see as winning their fight for freedom and peace?” When the United States departed Iraq in 2011, the ISF were trained but did not own the victory. The Nouri al-Maliki regime’s sectarianism further affected legitimacy and left Iraq without the viable government required for long-term success. The IS invasion in 2014 verified our shortsighted approach.

In January 2017, I returned to Erbil to lead the Coalition Strike Cell and manage the enabler contribution to the Iraqi fight for Mosul. By this point, the

combination of a viable Iraqi government, rebuilt ISF, limits on our own force and tactics, as well as lessons learned, enabled us to implement a BWT approach to aid the ISF fight against IS. The BWT construct proved more effective than our previous hands-on method of partnered combat operations with coalition forces in the lead.

A BWT approach comes in many forms and is scalable based on mission and local factors, but the common thread is the location and role of combat advisors. To support Iraqi counter-IS efforts, American forces consisted of a

BCT’s leadership and various special operations units serving as advisors. U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) aligned these combat advisors with ISF counterparts to conduct advise, assist, accompany, and enable (A3E), an aggressive subset of BWT with advisors pushed to the division and brigade levels. Some advisors worked in ISF headquarters, some supported Iraqi artillery, and some were forward bringing close air support and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance enablers to the fight.

Regardless of the scale of advising efforts, the Iraqis owned the tactical fight—leading, planning, and fighting the enemy. They were bleeding and dying for their country during intense urban combat against a fanatical enemy. Had you told me in 2008 that over 1,000 Iraqi soldiers would die for their country during a single battle, I would have been incredulous; I never saw that level of sacrifice or ownership during previous tours. However, in 2017, I witnessed Iraqi sacrifice as they won *their* victory and solidified *their* legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi people.

Importantly, the Iraqi government was a viable partner. Government officials and the ISF worked with the coalition to achieve measured goals to improve overall governance rather than to enrich elites or a powerful minority. Moreover, the limited *means* we employed were sustainable with the political will available. We provided expert advice, enabled Iraqi maneuver with coalition precision fires, assisted their logistics and intelligence processes, and assured them with our presence and counsel as casualties mounted. When the fight was over, the ISF had defeated IS’s most determined fighters, and the Iraqi people saw the ISF as a legitimate security force that liberated the country.

In August 2017, I took command of Train Advise Assist Command–East (TAAC-E) in Afghanistan. Our mission was to advise and enable Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF). We partnered with the Afghan National Army’s (ANA) 201st Corps and Afghan National Police 202nd Zone. NATO’s Operation *Resolute Support* and

USCENTCOM had fully transitioned to a BWT approach of train advise assist (TAA), another tailorable subset of BWT that places advisors at army corps and ministerial levels. As in Iraq, the host nation led the tactical fight, while our TAA efforts helped build capability and capacity by improving Afghan institutional processes. All efforts, both military and civilian, focused on fostering the strategic linchpin of legitimacy. At the tactical level, however, there remained a requirement for combat advisors to conduct warfighting function-based training and staff advising at the brigade and battalion levels.

Specialized Combat Advisors

To meet this need, USCENTCOM will employ the Army's newly created Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) this spring—not to fight the Afghans' fight but to advise ANA brigades and battalions. The SFAB provides the Army the means to more effectively accomplish the way of BWT.⁷ In the fight against IS in Iraq, we pulled the leaders out of Army combat formations to serve as improvised advisors. Likewise, special operations forces acted as conventional warfare advisors rather than performing their foreign internal defense (FID) and unconventional warfare (UW) missions. While generally successful, these stopgap solutions did not always generate advisors with the unique skills required to advise most effectively. The most effective BWT approach requires the *right* leaders with the *right* skills for advising, employed in the *right* context.⁸ The SFAB will bring this capability to Afghanistan.

SFAB advisors will partner with the ANA at the tactical level, bringing experience, knowledge, and enablers to facilitate advising. By developing a unit specifically manned and trained for advising, the Army is wisely mirroring the Green Berets' FID mission. FID, A3E, and TAA are all tailorable subsets of the BWT approach; while FID focuses on UW, the SFAB will conduct A3E with their conventional counterparts, advising them in combined arms maneuver.⁹ The SFAB allows the Army to stop eroding readiness of its BCTs and divisions each

time it deploys BCTs as makeshift advisor teams. This approach will not only enhance advisor capacity but also allow Army BCTs to focus on mission essential tasks required to win the Nation's high-end and hybrid wars.

The SFAB is manned, trained, and equipped with the unique skills and attributes that a BWT approach requires. Making the SFAB a permanent organization means the Army has codified the hard lessons learned over a decade at war. BWT takes patience and acceptance of local solutions. It can be frustrating—the temptation to take the wheel and drive is constant, but combat advisors must have the strategic understanding that the Afghans must win for the Afghans. A good combat advisor understands that his or her contribution comes through advising counterparts by teaching, coaching, mentoring, and assisting when necessary. Combat advisors provide the expertise needed to build viable, legitimate, and sustainable security forces. At the tactical level, Afghans can fight; they need institutional experience and training in logistics, mission command, and staff processes.

Strategic Patience

As the United States enters the 17th year of forces deployed to Afghanistan, stability in the country remains important to American strategic goals. Afghanistan provides an enduring counterterrorism platform and a source for critical resources.¹⁰ The BWT way addresses the critical aspects of ownership and legitimacy and supports an offshore balancing strategy because by, with, and through reduces the U.S. footprint. Consequently, a BWT approach allows the military to focus on other threats while minimizing risk to force and mission. Additionally, conditions in Afghanistan have changed. We have a viable partner in a unified Afghan government and ANDSF willing to fight for their country. In 2015–2016, ANDSF suffered heavy losses demonstrating their willingness to sacrifice—in 2017 they took ownership of the fight.¹¹ In 2018, they will demonstrate their legitimacy by keeping pressure on the Taliban and securing national elections.

Employing a BWT approach requires strategic patience. Resolving civil strife, ending a rebellion, or defeating an insurgency are not quick endeavors. Excessive foreign troops and external money, coupled with a rush to leave, have the potential to exacerbate the situation by delegitimizing the host-nation forces and inflaming local antipathies.¹² The pernicious desire to “let us do it and leave” can cause assisting forces to overcommit and inadvertently disincentivizes host-nation forces from fighting their fight. We end up believing we are winning, when, in truth, we are losing or merely perpetuating a stalemate. To create strategic victory, tactical actions must nest with a broad, sustainable approach.¹³ Previously, U.S. forces failed to create this situation in Iraq or Afghanistan; frustrated American and coalition civilian leaders saw 16 1-year wars won at the tactical level, while strategic victory remained elusive.

The past should be a guide. American forces lost few tactical fights against the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army, but still lost the war in Vietnam. Early in the war, policymakers felt Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam—the BWT command of that war—was taking too long. They were promised a relatively easy victory if America deployed its divisions and took over the fight. After quick success, everyone believed America would withdraw, transitioning control to the Vietnamese.¹⁴ Of course, the government of South Vietnam never achieved legitimacy and the American strategy failed.

By, with, through is a long-term investment. At the same time, the BWT approach can sustain limited political will by reducing the U.S. footprint in the region, forcing local governments to own the fight rather than executing an American-led war. It takes commitment, patience, and time to help man, train, and equip host-nation security forces. It requires discipline on the part of combat advisors to allow host-nation forces to fight at their tempo and within their tactical limitations without taking over. By, with, and through means Afghan or Iraqi ways may not mimic American solutions. Paradoxically, the tactically slower BWT approach is more likely to

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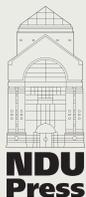
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*China's Future SSBN Command and
Control Structure*

by David C. Logan



China is developing its first credible sea-based nuclear forces. This emergent nuclear ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) force will pose unique challenges to a country that has favored tightly centralized control over its nuclear deterrent. The choices China makes about SSBN command and control will have important implications for strategic stability. China's decisions about SSBN command and control will be mediated by operational, bureaucratic, and political considerations. A hybrid approach to command and control, with authority divided between the navy and the Rocket Force, would be most conducive to supporting strategic stability.



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achieve an enduring strategic victory because it avoids the trap of rushing to overcommit to a faulty strategy.¹⁵ Pursuing a “let us do it for you” approach produces immediate tactical success but may create an endless, open-ended search for a strategic endstate.¹⁶

Conclusion

When a U.S. Senator visiting TAAC-E recently asked, “What do I tell the American people when they ask, if we couldn’t win this thing with 150,000 troops on the ground, how is increasing troop strength to 15,000 (from 8,000) going to change the outcome?” My answer was simple, “We couldn’t win with 150,000 troops on the ground here *because* we had 150,000 troops on the ground here.” I went on and explained that thousands of American Soldiers and Marines fighting for Afghan freedom will not win this war, but 15,000 properly trained combat advisors with enabling assets and backed by political will can train, advise, assist, and enable the ANDSF to secure their fellow citizens and legitimize their national government.

What combat advisors, combatant commands, and policymakers must remember is that legitimacy is the desired endstate. Legitimacy is strategic in nature, and not always linked to immediate tactical success. The Continental Army’s battlefield record was initially poor, but they endured and improved; the disasters of Bunker Hill and Brooklyn Heights were followed by victories in Trenton and, eventually, Yorktown.¹⁷ America won because Americans sacrificed and owned the fight, enabled by training, specialized advice, and assistance from our allies. In turn, those allies displayed the requisite strategic patience, political will, and commitment to the BWT approach necessary to demonstrate American ownership, achieve American legitimacy, and secure a strategic victory. With a viable partner in the Afghan National Unity Government and increasingly capable ANDSF, enabled by our advising and assistance and assured by the coalition’s collective political will, BWT can work in Afghanistan if given the time and resources. JFQ

Notes

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⁴ Colin S. Gray, “The American Way of War: Critique and Implications,” in *Rethinking the Principles of War*, ed. Anthony D. McIvor (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 22–24; Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1972), 1, available at <www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R967.html>.

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¹¹ Maija Liuhto, “The Walking Dead,” *Foreign Policy*, December 12, 2017, available at <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/12/the-walking-dead-afghanistan-war-united-states-combat>>.

¹² Komer, 8.

¹³ Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 42–132.

¹⁴ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 398.

¹⁵ White.

¹⁶ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 1999), 3.

¹⁷ McCullough.