



# NATO SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE



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Dear readers,

it's my pleasure to present the newsletter n.10/2025 of the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence.

In this edition, we gather contributions from various contexts to highlight the significance of Advising, Mentoring, and Training in Security Force Assistance (SFA) developmental activities aimed at enhancing security and stability in host nations.

We begin by examining two active SFA operations: the European Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM-S) and the Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon (MIBIL). Additionally, we feature firsthand accounts from an officer who shares insights from his military deployments abroad, with a particular emphasis on lessons learned from courses at the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence.



The first article examines the European Training Mission – Somalia (EUTM-S) and its role in enhancing the capabilities of Somali defence institutions. It emphasizes the mission's focus on training, mentoring, and advising, highlighting the development of a sustainable Somali-Owned Training System (SOTS). The article also underscores the importance of coordination among international partners and the need for tailored approaches that respect local contexts. Ultimately, it highlights the commitment of this operation to empowering Somali authorities to effectively assume their own security responsibilities.

The second article delves into the Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon (MIBIL), established in 2015 in response to regional instability arising from the Syrian conflict. Over nearly a decade of operations, MIBIL has successfully carried out Security Force Assistance activities designed to develop essential capabilities, fostering a sustainable force that can effectively address threats to stability and maintain security within the country.

In the final article, the author shares personal experiences from various deployments, highlighting the crucial role of soft skills in advising, mentoring, and training. Key themes include the effectiveness of small teams, the necessity of coordination, and the balance between tactical and strategic approaches. This piece emphasizes the importance of building genuine relationships and the potential for positive change, even in a complex operational environment.

*Director*  
NATO Security Force Assistance  
Centre of Excellence  
Col. Matteo LUCIANI

## EUROPEAN UNION TRAINING MISSION SOMALIA (EUTM-S): UNDER THE SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE LENS

Operating as a European non-combat, non-executive mission, European Training Mission – Somalia (EUTM-S) is dedicated to fortifying the Somali Federal Defence Institutions through training, mentoring, and advising. It is committed to ensuring that its efforts are aligned with the needs of the Somali Defence Institutions and are coordinated with other international partners. The mission prioritizes enhancing the proficiency, effectiveness, credibility, and accountability of the Somali defence sector. This initiative aims to equip Somali authorities with the capacity to progressively assume security responsibilities. A critical component of this strategy involves EUTM-S's support for the development of a sustainable Somali-Owned Training System (SOTS). This system is designed to equip the SNA with the necessary policies, procedures, expertise, and experience to autonomously manage its force generation.

### EUTM-S Mission Pillars

The Security Force Assistance (SFA) approach of the EUTM-S Mission is based upon its three-pillar concerted action, represented by the Advising.

Mentoring and Training activities, each of which is closely related to the others.

The interconnectedness of these three crucial aspects of the mission is perfectly represented by the SOTS process, a complex and systematic way of proceeding that permits each of the Advising, Mentoring and Training efforts to reinforce the impact of the others.

The instruments we are talking about regard all the aspects implied in a reliable



defense system, from the recruitment to the procurement of material, from the development of an effective training plan to the delivery of functional lessons.

The EUTM-S specialists base their training delivery on publications and procedures derived from the NATO doctrine. Obviously, as the Somali Army is in a developing phase, the western doctrine has to be tailored to the Somali Army's capacities and requirements. This step-by-step application of the doctrine perfectly reflects the SOTS process, which represents a progressive way of proceeding in the formation of Somali independent security institutions.

### The SOTS process

The SOTS is a methodology for military capability development (adapted and



Figure 1. Train the Trainer activity (©EUTM-S FB)



Figure 2. Advising meeting with SNA authorities.  
(©EUTM-S FB)

simplified for the circumstances) by which the EUTM-S can best achieve its mission to enhance SNA General Staff (GS) capacity and generate a Somali Training System which is completely autonomous.

The centrality of this concept is represented by the SOTS involvement in all the Advising, Mentoring and Training activities, regardless of the level of the target organization and the beneficiary of the Advising engagement. The following figure demonstrates how the SOTS process constitutes the central focus for all the Advising activities: it is followed both by the Advisors/Mentors on one side and the trainers on the other side.

At first, as illustrated in the figure 3, we represent how the SOTS is reflected in the Advising and Mentoring activities within a three-step process, where the recipient is the SNA GS:

1. Assisted by Advisors and Mentors in accordance to military doctrines, training doctrines and training directives, SNA must plan what kind of specific needs they have to satisfy, in order to fulfill their tasks in the operational field. These needs can con-

cern both the specific courses required and the kind of troops that should be formed, in order to shape SNA units which are more suitable for the environment in which they will have to operate.

2. After the first step, EUTM-S can start to plan, together with all international actors, what kind of skills it can provide to the SNA through the delivery of courses and specific training. The annual training plan is the main product of this second step, showing how international actors, together with EUTM-S, can support SNA to achieve their goal and fill their gaps. During this phase there is a continuous cooperation between SNA and EUTM-S, with the latter studying how to implement working groups, meetings, courses and generally managing the employment of resources to be dedicated to the Somali Army.

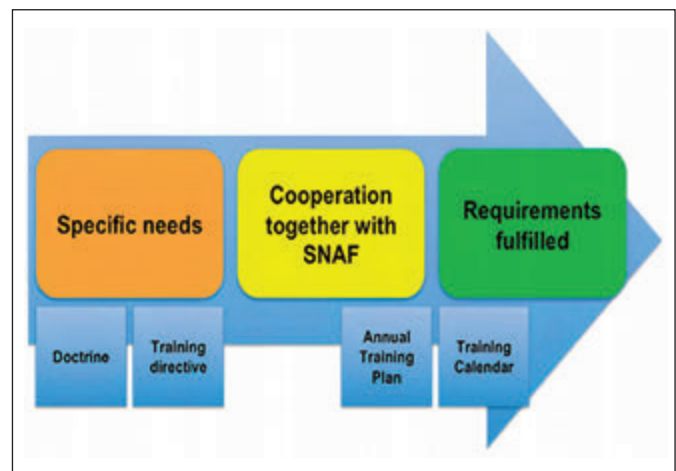


Figure 3. SOTS Process

3. After the annual training plan is compiled with the competences that all international actors should provide to the Somalis and the specific instructions concerning the courses that have to be delivered, we move to the third step. This final phase is reached after the provision of all the planned courses and exercises, according to the training calendar, combining the efforts with other international actors.

Even at the training level, where the beneficiaries are the Somali trainees, we can breakdown the SOTS procedure in three more detailed timelines, each of which is finalized towards the accomplishment of one precise task:

1. At first, the EUTM-S trainers will provide the Somali trainees, already in possession of basic skills, with specific lessons that differ according to the aim of the course. During this part the European trainers are completely in charge of the training, and the aim is to make the Somali soldiers acquire as much knowledge as possible about that specific subject.



Figure 4. Combat Engineer course (©EUTM-S FB)

2. Secondly, the most skilled and capable Somali trainees are selected according to the results they have reached at the end of the course they have attended. The aim is to identify those who are considered to be competent enough to deliver lessons to other Somali trainees, and therefore to become trainers. During this phase, EUTM-S trainers mentor the Somali trainers during the planning and the preparation of the course and they supervise them during the delivering of the lectures and the appropriate teaching method.

3. Lastly, the Somali trainers are deemed capable of directing courses without any help or assistance from the part of the EUTM-S. During this phase, EUTM-S trainers are not expected to play any part in the lecturing of the course. Therefore, the SOTS process regarding that specific course has come to the desired end.

It goes without saying that the results every department (Advisor Team, Training Team and Mentors) and activity can achieve in its specific working environment is closely linked to the results reached by the other departments. It is easy to understand how the purpose and principles of the Security Force Assistance are perfectly mirrored by the SOTS process, a way of proceeding that accompanies all the parties of the SNA from the first steps to the realization of a self-sustainable military system.

### Advising and Enabling

EUTM Somalia provides, through its 8<sup>th</sup> mandate remains focused on supporting the SNA through advisory, mentoring, “train the trainers” and specialized training in order to develop its Defence Institutions.

The EUTM-S Advisory Team (AT) is tasked



Figure 5. Infantry Training (©EUTM-S FB)

to provide strategic and operational advice to the Somali MoD and SNA GS, supporting the establishment of MoD oversight of Security Sector Forces (SSF), contributing to build an effective SNA GS able to plan its Somalia Transition Plan with the International Partners in the implementation of their respective mandates and aligned with the EU's values, principles and aims.

The shaping phase is focused on the training domain by reaching the SOTS and being independent from external support. Nonetheless, the training must be supported by the delivery of materiel and equipment to the military units. This enabling phase is assured by the European Peace Facility (EPF) Funds, established in 2021, an instrument aimed at enhancing the EU's ability to: prevent conflicts; build and preserve peace; and strengthen international security and stability. These measures may include the supply of Military and defense-related equipment, Infrastructure and Technical support.

Specifically, in favor of SSF, the EU effort is focused on the deliveries of non-lethal equipment and works concerning infrastructure for facilities and buildings (e.g. Training Centre), as well as, since the end of the arms embargo, on the con-

struction of a fire range and an ammunition depot. In this framework, the EU HQ offices and EUDEL define priorities and guidelines, whereas EUTM-S ensures the execution and the concrete achievement of ground-tactical level objectives in compliance with strategic objectives.

Once Somali forces will reach a SOTS Full Operational Capability they will get the conditions for own defence capabilities, which are both effective and accountable, operating upon the respect of Human Rights (HR) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and complying with the principles of the rule of law and civilian oversight. For this purpose, EUTM-S is promoting various courses to strengthen the awareness of HR/IHL and the capacity of gender related personnel in the MOD and SNA GS to train gender perspective implementation and to enable an increase in the existing gender structure within SNA.

The achievement of the above mentioned conditions will free EUTM-S from responsibilities prevalently focussed on training and shift its effort to the Advisory pillar and to contribute to a comprehensive and sustainable development of the Somali Security Institutions. In this context the EU is supporting the Somali



Figure 6. Equipment delivery (©EUDEL-S FB)

ministries through The “Security and Justice Governance and Accountability Project (SJGAP)”, a 4-years EU-funded project (started in November 2022), which aims to promote more affordable, accountable and fair policing and justice systems. The project is centred on strengthening governance, efficiency, transparency and accountability in security and justice institutions, promoting coordination between the central state and the federal level. Finally, this project addresses the improvement of the defence sector from an institutional point of view, which implies the involvement of EUTM-S Advisors in monitoring the measures and initiatives that are put in place, as they could have an impact on the EUTM mission.

### Way forward

The SNA has demonstrated progress in planning and executing military operations. However, significant challenges remain in areas such as intelligence gathering, operational planning, and coordination with other security forces. Enhanced training and improved support in these domains could substantially improve the SNA’s operational effectiveness.

Command and control structures within the SNA have evolved positively over

the years, yet difficulties with interoperability, communication, and coordination among different units and branches continue to impede optimal performance. Strengthening these command and control structures is imperative to enhance the army’s effectiveness and responsiveness.

Leadership development within the SNA also presents ongoing challenges at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Although there are capable leaders within the ranks, a continuous commitment to leadership development is essential. Programs focused on developing a skilled cadre of officers and warrant officers who can effectively lead in complex security situations are needed. Establishing a professional military culture is equally crucial, requiring reforms that include rigorous training in ethics and human rights, the implementation of robust accountability measures, and fostering transparency and integrity within the ranks.

The European Union’s support should focus on capacity building in pivotal sectors such as security, governance, and economic development to meaningfully influence Somalia’s stabilization efforts. This support could encompass targeted training programs, initiatives aimed at institution building, and bolstering local governance structures.



Figure 7. Infantry Training (©EUTM-S FB)





Figure 8. Somali Cadet Course (©EUTM-S FB)

Engaging more deeply with local communities and stakeholders is essential to building trust and legitimacy for the EU's military and civilian initiatives, fostering long-term stability and prosperity in the region. This approach should include enhanced collaboration with other EU entities, international partners, and local stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive and unified approach to security sector reform and capacity building.

Finally, all the above achievements can be effectively pursued when Advisors, Mentors and Trainers, called to operate in a very complex and dynamic area of operation, receive a specific pre-deployment preparation or possess deep expertise in engagement and advising tasks. In particular, key elements of the EUTM-S mission need to increase their Pre-Deployment Training (PDT) with specific educational courses and activities focused on:

- understanding the local context and the human factor, since awareness of the internal dynamics is essential for the success of the mission;
- the importance of analysing the gap between existing local capacities and the optimal capacities to be achieved,

in order to promote real reforms in the security sector that also influence social and economic issues;

- the development of useful tools and procedures which, although aimed at Defense Capacity Building, contribute to facilitating European programs for the implementation of the rule of law and good governance.

In this regard, member states participating in the mission should create joint pools for the designation of Advisors, Mentors, Trainers with proven experience in top commands and in possession of a specific aptitude profile. In addition, it is advisable to integrate the pre-deployment preparation of EUTM-S Trainers, Mentors and Advisors with specific courses on Security Force Assistance, Stability Policing and institutional advising provided by the European Security and Defence College or EU/NATO Centers of Excellence (e.g. NATO SFA COE, NATO SP COE, NATO CIMIC COE, NATO CIE-D COE etc.) in order to improve their skills in working as part of a comprehensive and integrated approach.

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## COMMITMENT AND COOPERATION: THE ITALIAN BILATERAL MILITARY MISSION IN LEBANON SUPPORTING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AMIDST CRISIS AND BEYOND

The Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon (MIBIL) was established in 2015 in response to regional instability stemming from the Syrian conflict. Over its nearly decade-long mandate, the MIBIL has effectively conducted Security Force Assistance (SFA) activities, aiming at developing a sustainable force that should enable Lebanon's defence against threats to stability and maintain security without international assistance. This objective is particularly significant for a country that has endured a long history of systemic conflicts, hardships, wars, foreign occupations, and widespread infrastructure destruction.

Lebanon, a nation covering 10,452 square kilometers, stands as a testament to resilience. Despite a relentless series of multifaceted crises that have threatened the security of its people, the stability of the country, and its sovereignty—including the Civil War, the 2019 revolution, a prolonged economic and social collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, the devastat-



Figure 1. Soldier of the Lebanese Army.  
Approved by MIBIL PAO



ing Beirut port explosion, and most recently, the war of 2024-Lebanon continues to confront these challenges with remarkable strength.

Lebanon's geopolitical and geographical location renders it highly vulnerable to recurring conflicts, while its multi-religious and multi-sectarian composition is a double-edged sword. While it embodies diversity and unity, it simultaneously compromises internal stability and perpetuates the constant fear of civil strife—fears often exacerbated by international actors, as exemplified in the 1975–1990 Civil War. A more recent example of this vulnerability is the September atrocious war, which erupted between Hezbollah and Israel. The war of 2024 devastated the nation's infrastructure, claimed thousands of lives, displaced millions, and shattered the dreams, heritage, and livelihoods of countless individuals. Homes, communities, families, and years of hard work were obliterated. The nation witnessed the destruction of its history, culture, and future before its very eyes. Yet, despite these enduring heinousness, Lebanon continues to rise against all odds. This remarkable resilience is rooted in the indomitable spirit of its people, their profound love for their heritage, and their collective sense of belonging to their vibrant homeland.

Lebanon's ability to persevere has also been bolstered by robust international support, which has played over the years a significant role in its recovery and reconstruction efforts across various fronts.

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) remain the only trusted institution, neutral, and capable of ensuring the country's sovereignty. To overcome the ongoing deadlock, the LAF must expand their presence and exercise authority throughout Lebanese territory.

After years of debilitating crises, it is crucial to intensify all defence and security capacity building efforts to strengthen the LAF, transforming it into Lebanon's sole guarantor of its security, safety, and stability. MIBIL has been one of the most important missions deployed since 2015, working closely with the LAF to achieve these objectives.

## PRE-WAR: A DECADE-LONG COMMITMENT

### SFA IMPERATIVES

MIBIL conducts Security Force Assistance activities aimed at building the capacity



Figure 2. Sharpshooter advanced- train on trainers.  
Edited by MIBIL PAO

of Lebanon's legitimate authorities, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces, DGSG<sup>1</sup>, and DGSE<sup>2</sup>. These activities are guided by doctrinal principles that provide a framework for planning, conducting, and assessing SFA initiatives. Key SFA imperatives are carefully considered by the MIBIL's core team and personnel involved in the delivery of SFA activities to ensure effectiveness and alignment with strategic objectives.

Since 2015, MIBIL has prioritized securing the support of the highest national oversight bodies and allocate adequate and sufficient resources to effectively plan and execute its SFA activities, thereby fostering long-term institutional development and stability through political primacy.

As part of its contribution to a comprehensive approach, MIBIL combines training and educational opportunities with allied armed force, including those of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Additionally, it maintains strategic relationships with international organizations, governmental and non-governmental entities, local leaders, and business executives.

As MIBIL approaches the tenth year of its mandate, its effective implementation of Security Force Assistance activities in the country is grounded in a deep understanding of the cultural, social, operational, political, and geopolitical contexts. This, underpinned by the development and maintenance of trust with Lebanon's legitimate authorities, and coupled with strong leadership, nurtures and strengthens the Host Nation commitment of actors at all levels. MIBIL's in-depth understanding is promoted by the long-standing proximity between the two countries, marked by cultural affinities shared by their people,

<sup>1</sup> Direction Générale de la Sûreté Générale.

<sup>2</sup> Direction Générale de la Sûreté de l'Etat Libanais.

Italian influence in Lebanon's education, architecture, and arts, consistent diplomatic and political relations and cooperation, economic collaboration, humanitarian aid particularly through NGOs and international organizations, as well as military and security cooperation, tourism, and deep-rooted historical ties. MIBIL's efforts have garnered significant appreciation, not only from the Lebanese Armed Forces but also from the broader public. Its presence in Lebanon is deeply felt, with overwhelmingly positive feedback reflecting the gratitude and acknowledgment of its contributions.



*Figure 3. Urban Operations Advanced- Cesano Infantry School.  
Edited by MIBIL PAO*

The Lebanese people recognize MIBIL's daily commitment to addressing their country's extremely delicate circumstances, reinforcing its role as a trusted and valued partner in fostering stability and development. Strong leadership characterizes this effort, as the core team regularly meets with their counterpart to encourage decision-making and identify the best strategies to address the assessed gaps in their units.

Tutors and instructors, who lead by ex-

ample, assist LAF personnel in reaching their highest potential through various E&T activities.

Drawing on Lebanon's historical and contextual realities, MIBIL promotes Host Nation ownership by delivering tailored training courses designed based on gap analyses conducted with the Lebanese Armed Forces and Lebanese Security Forces, ensuring alignment with their specific needs, priorities, and fundamental security concerns. In response to the Host Nation's concerns, particularly amid critical circumstances stemming from the economic and financial challenges faced by the public sector, MIBIL, demonstrating its unwavering commitment to supporting the LAF and its broader community, launched a Healthcare Support initiative to address the acute shortage of healthcare personnel, particularly in the Emergency Department. This shortage has raised significant safety concerns since military personnel and their families rely on the Central Military Hospital for medical care. Ensuring access to adequate healthcare is a critical priority and necessity for both the LAF institution and MIBIL. The Italian medical support team, accompanied by an interpreter, operates in the Emergency Room, providing care to eligible patients from across Lebanon. While Lebanese doctors frequently assist the MIBIL team, their availability is not always guaranteed, leading to challenges in providing care, which occasionally hinders the effective delivery of healthcare.

The effects of SFA must be sustainable beyond MIBIL's eventual departure from the Host Nation. Therefore, the planning and implementation of SFA activities must account for Lebanon's long-term capabilities, including a strategic review of the procurement of appropriate equipment. Within this con-

text, the broader framework of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) plays a pivotal role. MIBIL actively contributes to sustainability through CIMIC by engaging in the strategic procurement and donation of essential medical equipment to enhance the LAF's healthcare system. Additionally, MIBIL extends its support to the local population through targeted donations across various sectors, such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and assistance for vulnerable groups. These initiatives not only address immediate humanitarian needs but also foster the long-term development of political, economic, and cultural relations.



Figure 4. Donation of Medical Equipment and Supplies for the Central Military Hospital of Badaro, Beirut. Edited by MIBIL PAO

By pursuing these objectives, MIBIL acts as a catalyst for a successful and enduring partnership between Lebanon and Italy, promoting mutual growth and stability while reinforcing the foundation for sustained collaboration.

### GOTEAM ACTIVITIES

Within the framework of GOTEAM<sup>3</sup> activities, MIBIL, through its core team, devel-

<sup>3</sup> Generate, Organize, Train, Enable, Advise, Mentor.

ops an Extensive Annual Training Plan aimed at ensuring a consistent footprint, strengthening and expanding its network of contacts, and systematically addressing the needs of the LAF and related institutions. This process involves planning, preparing, supervising, and evaluating training and education programs, as well as commanding and overseeing Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) embedded within LAF units. The courses tackle full spectrum of military operations, tactical and operational level courses, cover military and law enforcement fields. MIBIL ensures administrative and logistical support to these teams, monitors events and training activities, and reports all developments to its chain of command. Since 2015, MIBIL has delivered over 350 courses, supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces, DGSG, and DGSE. MIBIL has successfully trained approximately 8,000 soldiers.

This process is crucial in enhancing the deployment of the LAF, particularly in southern Lebanon, while strengthening its strategic, operational and tactical capacity.

## AMIDST THE STORM

### WAR FACTS

Israel and Hezbollah have been embroiled in a protracted conflict for several decades. In October 2023, this confrontation intensified into cross-border exchanges of missile and drone strikes, displacing tens of thousands of civilians on both sides of the frontier. A significant escalation occurred in September 2024, with attacks bringing both parties to the brink of a large-scale war, their first since the 34-day conflict in 2006.

According to Lebanese authorities, the hostilities have led to the loss of over 3,800 lives in Lebanon and the displacement of approximately one million indi-



Figure 5. Rangers Summer Special Mountain Warfare Course to the Air Assault Regiment, 2024. Edited by MIBIL PAO

viduals. These developments underscored the urgent need for a resolution, which culminated in a ceasefire agreement in November 2024, effectively ending 13 months of sustained conflict.

## MIBIL OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

In August 2024, following the assassination of the Hamas political leader, MIBIL experienced a significant reduction and downsizing of its training and healthcare support activities. The MTTs were recalled to Italy due to operational constraints. These conditions continued to deteriorate until mid-September, which marked the official escalation of the conflict. At that point, the possibility of redeploying the MTTs was definitively ruled out, as training activities were deemed unfeasible.

Despite these challenges, MIBIL successfully maintained its operations, demonstrating inherent flexibility and sustaining active communication and collaboration with all its partners. It also participated in the voluntary repatriation of Italian citizens from Beirut, organized by the Italian Embassy as part of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs' activities, ensuring their safe and orderly departure from the airport during the peak of the conflict.

During the suspension of training activities, the mission prioritized humanitarian assistance and continued its Civil-Military Cooperation initiatives, focusing on donations to address the urgent needs of the local population amidst an extremely severe crisis. This effort, highly appreciated by both the population and the authorities, involved the distribution of large quantities of food, medical kits, and other essential supplies.

By mid-November, the Italian Ministry of Defense authorized the resumption of the medical support initiative at Badaro Hospital, even before the official conclusion of the conflict.

## THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah includes several critical provisions aimed at ensuring lasting stability in the region and reinforcing the principles of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. The agreement mandates a cessation of land, air, and sea offensive actions by both parties, stipulating that only Lebanon's official military and security forces, along with the United Nations peacekeeping contingent, are authorized to carry weapons, deploy troops, and operate within the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River. Lebanese army and security forces will assume control of vacated positions, all borders, and crossing points.

The United States and France, along with several other NATO member countries, will work through the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L), in coordination with UNIFIL, to facilitate the deployment of 10,000 LAF personnel to southern Lebanon as swiftly as possible. The LAF are tasked with dismantling unau-

thorized weapons production facilities and confiscating unauthorized arms. Israel will commit to a phased withdrawal of its forces south of the Blue Line over a 60-day period, with a possible extension in case the conditions weren't respected.

A Mechanism, hosted by UNIFIL, chaired by the United States, and including France, has been established to monitor the implementation of these measures and oversee their enforcement.

## RENEWING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

### AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

MIBIL will continue to conduct a wide range of tactical and operational specialized training across the air, land, maritime, and amphibious domains in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, including urban operations, sharpshooting and sniping, combative, reconnaissance and patrol, artillery, PSY-OPS<sup>4</sup>, CBRN<sup>5</sup>, CIMIC, policing techniques, and counter-organized crime operations.

The Extensive Annual Training Plan for 2024–2025 comprises 71 courses, representing an increase from the 54 courses offered in the previous year. This expansion underscores a sustained commitment to enhancing collaboration with the LAF and ISF, strengthening their defense capabilities to address threats to stability and security, and enabling them to independently maintain security without external assistance. This focus on supporting the LAF is particularly crucial at this time and essential for promoting regional stability and security.

Alongside MIBIL, a new and independent coordination body, the MTC4L, was established to enhance cooperation among various military entities involved in supporting Lebanon's defense and

<sup>4</sup> Psychological Operations

<sup>5</sup> Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear.



*Figure 6. Fostering Hope: Toy Donation for the Orphans of the LAF Martyrs. Edited by MIBIL PAO*

security efforts. Led by Italy, the mandate of the MTC4L is to oversee the preparation and recruitment of soldiers for deployment in southern Lebanon, with a particular focus on basic and foundational training, as well as capacity building.

Despite operating as two separate entities, MIBIL and MTC4L will collaborate closely, with MIBIL continuing to focus on its three core pillars: training through MTTs, health-care support, and CIMIC activities.

In conclusion, the Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening the path to peace and security in Lebanon. Through its unwavering commitment to supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, MIBIL is laying the groundwork for long-term stability. The collaboration with international partners, along with its multifaceted approach to training, operational support, and humanitarian efforts, demonstrates MIBIL's critical role in reinforcing Lebanon's resilience in the face of adversity. As the country moves toward recovery, MIBIL's continued support remains essential in fostering hope and ensuring a secure and stable future for Lebanon and the broader region.

## KNOWLEDGE OR WISDOM?

In May 2023 I was lucky enough to attend the SFA Advisor Enhancement Seminar at the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (SFACOE) in Cesano, Italy. At that stage I was eight months into a twelve-month tour on the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) in Baghdad and undertaking my third deployment in either a Peacekeeping or Capacity Building role since 2017. I am currently writing this article mid-way through another twelve-month deployment, this time in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. An excellent seminar, replete with insights from facilitators Howard Chaganis and Duncan Greenhalgh provided (and continues to provide) really useful opportunities for professional reflection. One of the initial sessions during the Seminar was entitled 'Knowledge or Wisdom' and essentially was a *cri de coeur* to not forget the soft skills required to successfully advise, mentor and train. This article attempts to reflect on my recent experience, using this session as a tool for light analysis.



### **Bigger does not equal better (Small can be beautiful).**

In 2017 I was deployed on MONUSCO, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and at the time the largest UN Mission with a troop ceiling of something over 19000 military. Similar to the NATO Mission Iraq, there was a very strong multi-national ethos. The size of the country and the mission set presented to the Commander perhaps justified the troop numbers. However, large



Figure 1. Peace Support in the DRC in 2017 – many troops, but lacking the strategic reach to redeploy rapidly over a vast geographical area.



numbers tend to attract bureaucratic processes, which stifle initiative and embed risk aversion into organizations. On the several occasions when major troop re-deployments were required to deal with dynamic threats across the country, bureaucratic procedures often introduced unnecessary time delays, increasing the overall risk. While small numbers come with their own disadvantages, you are forced to plan flexibly and actively look for opportunities to deliver. Currently in charge of a team of three, I am fairly confident that I have achieved more in terms of SFA outputs than when part of much larger missions.

### Coordination of Efforts.

Linked to the above point (and raised during the Seminar as a common failing in SFA Missions), is coordination of efforts. This can reflect the need to cooperate with external actors outside of the mission, which is understandable; equally common, but less understandable and more frustrating is lack of coordination internal to

a mission. Within NMI I often felt that the three 'operating divisions' (Ministerial Advisory Division, Professional Security Education Division and Training Development Division) were almost set up in competition with each other, each with a 1\* Head but without an overall coordinating function sitting above, synchronizing and prioritizing mission activities. This often resulted in frustration and confusion as different parts of the mission played for the same space. This coordination can be even more challenging when there are several multinational players, all conducting SFA with the same target audience. Where there are no ties of command and control, goodwill and ability to build relationships for the common good must prevail.

### Don't ignore the tactical.

There is sometimes a tendency for NATO/Western Advisors to disparage the tactical in favor of the so-called 'strategic' and often a mismatch between what the Host Nation thinks they want and what the assisting force wishes to provide. Good use of advisors in this context is to manage/ influence the dialogue so that what is provided is mutually beneficial and, where necessary, eyes are opened.

The access and influence 'bought' by providing high quality tactical training is very useful. We should not worry (within reason) what that tactical training is in, or whether we are delivering the same thing repeatedly – its purpose is to buy us influence, goodwill and to demonstrate 'what good looks like'. More importantly it sets the scene for sustainable and meaningful institutional development to be introduced. However, without the tactical currency we may find that we can't buy our place at the table to 'sell' what we know the Host Nation should be buying. Looking down our collective noses because an activity seems not to be strategic enough is often counterproductive.



Figure 2 – Don't ignore the tactical – mentoring Iraqi OCdts on the orders process, Besmayah 2023.

## Professionalize the Advisory Force.

It should not be automatically assumed that proficiency in major combat operations automatically translates to proficiency in security force assistance. The skill sets seem to me to be quite different and whilst Armies necessarily preference the former, this does not mean that we should not train the latter. The existence of the NATO SFA COE means that we as an Alliance at least recognize this, but it would be optimistic to suggest that this always translates into selecting, training and deploying consistently the right people into advisory missions. This issue is exacerbated by short tour lengths; six months is not enough to develop an advisory relationship with a serious interlocutor and limits the ability of the advisor to invest sufficient personal and professional equity to develop trust, upon which success will always hinge. These subject merits an article in its own right, but we should really think of ways of doing this differently.

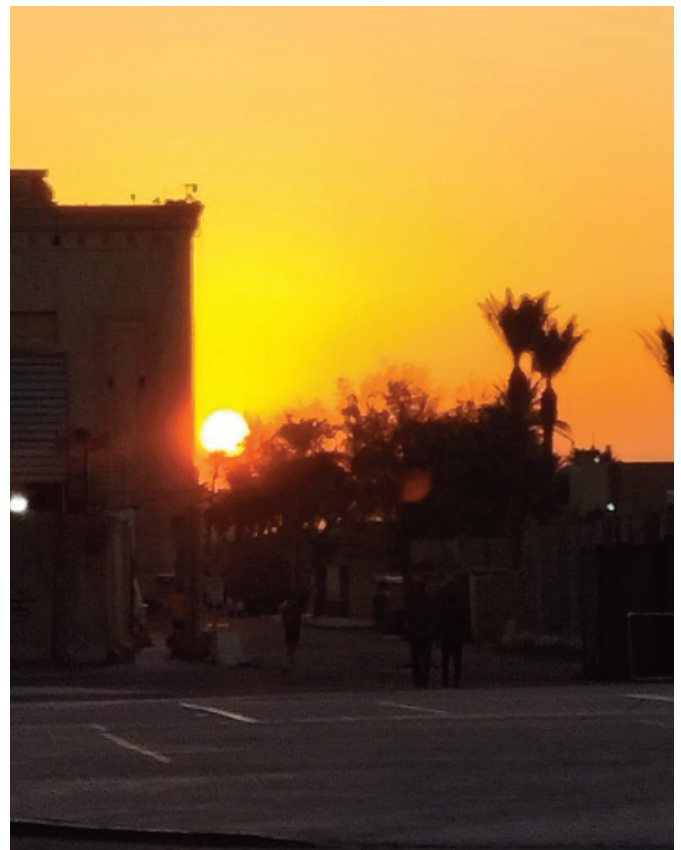
## Unrealistic Timescales – Plan for the Long Term.

In 2011 the NATO Training Mission in Iraq folded and everybody went home. It was clear to anyone paying attention that the security situation was worsening, but despite this, the Host Nation felt ready and able to face and deal with future threats. Fourteen years later (almost to the day) I am sitting here in Baghdad reminiscing on our arguably premature exit. In the run up to that withdrawal I found myself spending a lot of time at the shredder, ensuring hard copies of the previous four (or so) years of plans were effectively disposed of. It struck me then how similar those plans were to each other, and made me question, actually, how effective we had been as a mission over that quite lengthy period. The plans I was shredding did not seem

to have survived contact with the relentless rotation of individual augmentee advisors and seemed decidedly cyclical. On the occasions I have had the privilege to deliver NMI Pre-Deployment Training I have labored the point that advisors should NOT try and 'make their mark'; more, they should understand the big picture/ narrative arc of the long-term plan and waste no time in slotting into that plan to do their bit. Dramatic and early changes of direction from newly appointed colonels should definitely be treated with suspicion!

## Money Talks.

During a Capacity Building mission in Nigeria, I was working in the same Theatre as the US, who were in the process of providing a significant number of Super Tucano aircraft, along with all the training and sustainment that this capability would require. With a small and cash-poor team of Brits how could we possibly compete with that? It is tricky



*Figure 3. Plan for the long term. Expect many sunsets in your host nation.*



Figure 4 – Dohuk Infantry Training Centre, 2024 – scene of coordinated multi-national SFA.

but often new equipment comes with a whole new set of unforeseen problems. Whilst the British thing is often to focus on more conceptual level advice (for example how to run an effective training/ education model), it is extremely difficult to have useful effect without spending appropriate sums of cash. The commitment this requires also buys you significantly more influence than you would otherwise have. I always felt a little bashful as a NATO advisor to an Iraqi 3\* when all I could bring to the table was my team's good ideas, time and energy. Whilst these were always appreciated, my pockets were bare. Interestingly, recently found out that 2 years down the line, a Defence Capacity Building (DCB) bid that my NMI team had applied for has been approved and is about to be implemented. Anything that can be done to accelerate this process and cut through some of the bureaucracy will increase our SFA capabilities. Money talks.

### Flash to Bang.

The value of being able to discuss a requirement, make an offer and deliver quickly on that offer cannot be over-

stated. Any mission that has process 'baked in' to prevent rapid delivery of effect is destined for, at best, only partial success; more likely, failure over time. There is a depressing logic that appears to prevail in that the larger the mission, the more laborious the process associated with making things happen. It took the best part of a year to convene a small Mobile Advisory Training Team to deliver Urban Training in Baghdad. This is the opposite of where we need to be. Currently, leading a team of 2-3 Military Advisors elsewhere in Iraq, I am able to deliver SFA effect in a fraction of that time, thus boosting credibility and remaining responsive to the somewhat unpredictable nature of Host Nation requirements.

### Focus on the Conceptual and Moral Components as well as the Physical.

Sadly, the States in which we seem to find ourselves operating are littered with poorly maintained and ageing equipment often of Western or Soviet Bloc origin. This is a result of a range of issues, but we should aim to not compound this problem by focusing unduly on providing equipment and logistics

without effective capability integration. Conversely, it is not uncommon to find Host Nations struggling with updating or rewriting doctrine, defining approaches to leadership, conducting effective curriculum development for Professional Military Education programmes or, last but not least, integrating Women Peace and Security or International Humanitarian Law into their practices. None of these topics are as glamorous as providing 'hardware' but are likely to prove critical in providing the lasting change required in militaries that aspire to build their capabilities. The Moral (will to fight) and the Conceptual (the intellectual underpinnings of how to fight) must be developed in tandem with the Physical (the means with which to fight). Focusing on the latter at the expense of the former is not progress.

### **Reform the things that need reforming.**

A real highlight of my recent time in Nigeria was my team facilitating some maritime training with the Nigerian Navy Special Forces. The focus was on Vessel Boarding Search and Seizure and the training was focused on the piracy threat within the Gulf of Guinea. It was excellent and relevant training; well delivered by the visiting training team and enthusiastically received by the Host Nation. Everyone was pleased, certificates were presented all round and capability was improved as a result. Meanwhile, up in the North-East of Nigeria, the Army was valiantly struggling to organize itself and operate against the Boko Haram and ISIS in West Africa. At the 'base' of the pyramid of an Army lies administration, logistics, organizing ability, management, financial competence and other such unglamorous subjects. But competence in these things (the J1/4 of an operation) will move an organization to success much more ef-

fectively than developing refined excellence at the very top of the pyramid. Reform activities should start at that base level – getting the basics right – before moving up the pyramid to develop the elite. The problem is, developing elite/ special capabilities is often the first thing the Host Nation will ask for, and perhaps also the first thing an SFA provider will wish to get involved in.

### **Conclusion**

Going back to my introduction, the aim of this was to reflect on presentation content from an excellent seminar based on a few years deployed in broadly relevant positions. Those looking for academically sound, watertight and evidenced arguments will have been disappointed. The Knowledge or Wisdom session focused on common failings in SFA missions, as noted by the African Union, the United Nations and the SIGAR Report and were listed as: a lack of effective monitoring; continuity and staff turnover; corruption; political interference and patronage; coordination of efforts; relying on Western technology (sustainability); failure to understand the local context and culture and unrealistic timescales. My experience as described above bears many of these out, and hopefully adds a couple of other maybe useful observations. Finally, despite the frictions and frustrations often felt on SFA missions, there is room for optimism. Progress is difficult to measure and resources scarce. However, investment of the right sort – our willingness to commit personally to help those organizations we find ourselves working alongside and build genuine relationships with our interlocutors – will most often prevail over conflict.

Finally, go on an SFA COE Seminar – you won't regret it!

# MAIN EVENTS

## ADVANCED SEMINAR FOR SFA STRATEGIC ADVISING WITHIN SSR



From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2024, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) hosted the first edition of the Advanced Seminar for SFA Strategic Advising within SSR at the Italian Air Force's "Casa dell' Aviatore" in Rome.

The aim of the Seminar is to enhance the capabilities of both civilian and military participants and provide strategic-level military guidance for NATO in Security Force Assistance.

The Commander of the Army's Command for Training, Specialization and Doctrine (COMFORDOT), LTG Lamanna, took the floor emphasizing the importance of integrating civilian and military organizations to address complex challenges in today's geostrategic environment and the need for advisors to have a diverse skill set, technical knowledge, and excellent interpersonal skills to succeed in their roles.

The main topics of the Seminar focused on:

- the role of the stability policing in the military contribution in the SSR, emphasizing on its peculiar aspects comparing them with SFA activities with a special attention to two important SFA missions (Afghanistan and Iraq);
- an overview about the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) and the proposed SFA Capability Code considering the NATO's strategic path of modernization based on the new Strategic Concept;
- the UK approach to SFA Missions highlighting the way the forces are generated, managed and sustained through the analysis of a Case Study in Africa;
- the process of measuring the effectiveness of Security Force Assistance with assessment, monitoring and evaluation within the framework of Defence Capacity Building at Institutional level;
- the importance of SFA role in NATO operations delving into capabilities, Cross Cutting Topics and Human Security, examining how NATO can conduct an effective analysis of Host Nation gaps and how to maximize programs and resources;
- the consideration of a possible evolution of the SFA Concept across all stages of the continuum of competition and specifically as a force multiplier in the warfighting scenario.

At the end of the lessons, the NATO Senior Mentor, LTG (ret'd) Lollesgaard, who supported the seminar guiding and enriching the debate with his hints and expertise, underlining that a key element for success in SFA is local ownership.

## INSTITUTIONAL ADVISERS COURSE

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2024, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE), in collaboration with the US Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA), organized the third edition of the Institutional Advisers Course at the Italian Army Infantry School's officers' club.

The aim of the course is to contribute to meeting the need for sustained and standardized professional development of Allied and Partner military and civilian personnel to conduct stability activities.

The course has been planned as a blended learning solution. It starts with a distance learning period, with self-study assignments (ADL Component Course), followed by a residential part that is composed of a series of modules and is based on adult learning principles.

During the course, participants engaged in working groups to explore topics covered in the plenary sessions in detail and practiced methods for analysing and assessing the capacities of local forces.

The Institutional Advisers Course was enriched by real-life experiences, analyses, best practices, and lessons learned from three ongoing advising missions, including those in Mali and Georgia.

This course, as well as the SFA Operators Course and the Advanced Distant Learning's SFA Orientation Course are together classified "NATO Selected", which is a certified training opportunity open to NATO and Partners that meets NATO-Specific E&IT Requirements.



## SFA OPERATORS COURSE

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2024, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) held the first edition of the 2024 SFA Operators Course.

The aim of the course is to improve the competency and effectiveness of SFA operators working in current and future security related capacity-building missions. The event brought together more than 30 participants. Military and civilian personnel from 9 NATO and Partner countries enhanced their skills in SFA also consolidating the ever-wider Community of Interest on Security Force Assistance. Following the course director's welcome, the event kicked off with a team building activity, in order to allow participants to emphasize the relevance of information sharing, effective communication and mutual support and collaboration. During the course, several other important issues were raised.

One of the key points emphasized was the importance of assessments that feed into monitoring and evaluations of an advising mission's progress, enabling advisors to plan solutions to advise and mentor a foreign security force and improve its capabilities.

Another significant aspect that was explored was how cultural mediation and a gender perspective could impact SFA activities in a multicultural environment integrated with NATO Policy.

Furthermore, the discussion touched upon the importance on how to improve the way we interact and communicate with people in an SFA environment, both verbally and non-verbally.

The course was also enriched by a case study of EUTM Mali, which included an analysis of the mission and provided a broader overview of Africa.



## STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

On 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2024, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) held the first Steering Committee meeting for the year. This time, the event took place in Slovenia, one of the Sponsoring Nations, along with Albania.

After the welcome address from the Slovenian Armed Forces General Staff representative and the approval of the Agenda by the Chairman, the Director presented the status of the POW 2024 and the most relevant ongoing projects to be completed by the end of the current year.

Besides, among others, the Steering Committee discussed:

- the development of a new project just started, "A cross-cultural examination: Enhancing advising through intercultural communication and cultural mediation", aimed at delving into its relevance in the daily work of the Advisors considering such a significant could be its impact on mission achievement;
- the third editorial initiative entitled "Stabilization and reconstruction in a post conflict environment" that collects chapters from a selected group of international prestigious Experts;
- the draft proposal for a quantitative "Capability Codes and Capability Statements" that could become the NATO reference for all member Nations to build national SFA capability in order to fill the recognized gap in the NATO Defence and Operational Planning Process;
- the "Remote SFA concept" focused on the shortfalls came up from the research study conducted on the SFA Operator Profile and confirmed in the findings of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report (2023), that highlighted that the negative impact caused by the possible lack of continuity between the different SFA operators due to their rotation could basically results in an interruption of mutual trust relation built between the parts, jeopardizing the mission achievement.

Nations delegates praised the big progresses done by the Centre in its works, confirming their complete support to all initiatives and developing projects. The meeting concluded with the traditional signature of the decision paper and the proposal of the date for the next Steering Committee meeting.







From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2024, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) hosted the annual edition of the SFA Advisor Enhancement Seminar.

The aim of the seminar is to enhance interpersonal knowledge, skills, and techniques required to engage counterparts, build rapport, and gain mutual trust to effectively conduct advising activities across various operating environments and cultural contexts.

The event was based on the outcomes of the COE's SFA Operator Profile Analysis Report and the "Remote SFA" research project.

After the Director's welcome address, the seminar began promptly with a team-building activity designed to improve communication and cooperation among the attendees.

The seminar was enriched by the presence of Brigadier General Lambert, Deputy Commanding General of the US Army V Corps who held a lecture, instructing advisors on necessary skills and traits needed to be efficient operators in the field.

Additionally, Rear Admiral (Iraqi Navy) Al Sharooḥ attended as a guest speaker, discussing the Iraqi environment and the cultural context of the Iraqi Security Force.

After the lectures, both speakers had the opportunity to visit the COE and were briefed on its main projects and activities.

Another important aspect of the seminar was focused on building effective working relationships. It emphasized the significance of trust-building and influence and explored the importance of the impact of words and language.

The event concluded with a fruitful discussion regarding various notions and different perspectives raised during the lessons, examining from multiple points of view the roles, knowledge and skills that Advisors must acquire to operate effectively in ever-changing international scenarios.

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY TEAM VISIT THE NATO SFA COE**

The 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2024 at the NATO SFA COE premises was ended the first step of the project having as title “A Cross-Cultural Examination: Enhancing Advising Through Intercultural Communication and Cultural Mediation”.

The Liberty Analytic Support Initiative (LASI) team, composed by 10 among the best and brightest undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students students from Liberty University, and coordinated by Professor ROENICKE Scott Walter presented an in-depth analysis of all factors that are to be well considered by an Advisor who is preparing to meet with his counterpart: Intercultural Competence (IC), cultural dimensions, religion, sex and gender perspective, language barriers, social classes dynamics, mediation and negotiation techniques, and education, as well as recommendations using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The analysis through a cross-functional approach seeks to equip Security Force Advisors with the necessary components of intercultural interaction with 3 main aims to:

- define the components of Intercultural Competence (IC) and demonstrate how Advisors can be assessed for IC using the Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC) tool;
- analyse cultural differences through the frameworks of cultural dimensions, religious differences, gender roles, language barriers, and social classes, integrated with best practices in mediation techniques;
- develop training recommendations for improving security force advisor interactions in intercultural contexts, integrating best practices from education and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The LASI presented an innovative and comprehensive compilation of cutting-edge research and evidence-based best practices, framed in a well-structured analysis that will positively impact Security Force Advisors while they prepare to adequately face the uncertainties of environments that are often culturally distant from Western countries.





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