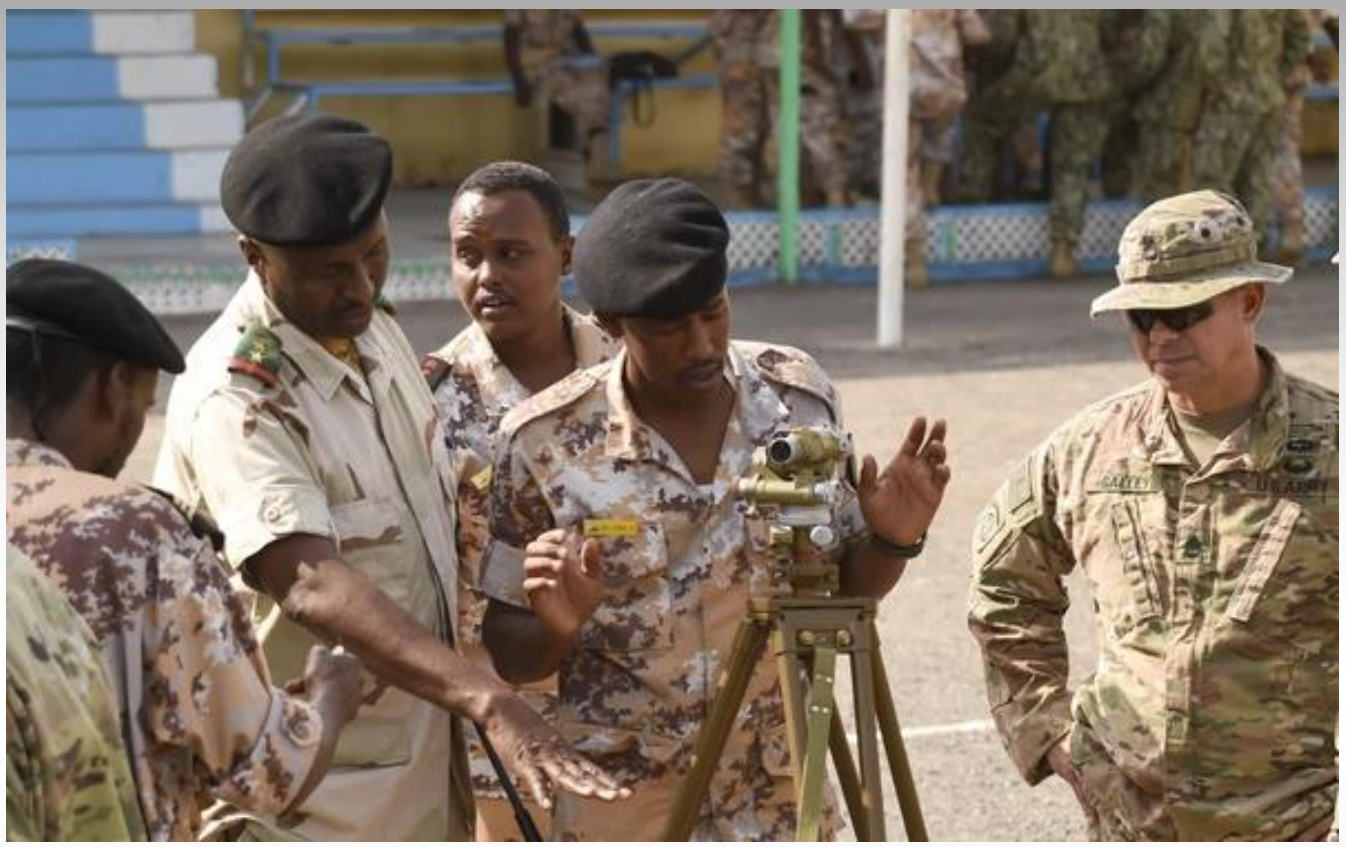
NEWSLETTER



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Army Security Force Assistance

Foreword

The Army's Security Force Assistance Proponent (SFAP) is thrilled to partner with CALL on this Newsletter. This newsletter addresses a topic whose importance is highlighted on the fields and forests of Ukraine and is of significant importance to the United States Army. Recent events in the Ukraine demonstrate that in an era of great power competition, there are times where Security Cooperation may become the decisive operation. Security Force Assistance, by strategic necessity, has become the tool to both deter our adversaries prior to conflict, and to strengthen our allies and partners before and during large scale combat operations.

The crisis in Ukraine establishes that SFA is now more important than ever. Our competitors at every level are seeking informational, geopolitical and geographic advantage in order to challenge the U.S. and our allies and partners across the globe. The Army is rapidly modernizing and organizing itself to fight these threats centered around the Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) concept, but the United States Army cannot do this alone. Without the assistance of our allies and partners, victory is not assured.

Harnessing the power of the SFA enterprise will allow us to strengthen our alliances and partnerships by building partner capability, capacity, and interoperability. As we move forward, the Army must expand the competitive space -- applying our capabilities or posturing our forces in coordination with our allies and partners to achieve U.S. policy objectives while deterring escalation. SFA is a unique Army capability that can facilitate those objectives and support Army operations across the continuum.

Optimizing the SFA enterprise to assess, build, and leverage the capacity, capability, and interoperability of our allies and partners is essential to success. Crucial to that is understanding ourselves. The articles in this newsletter will help us do just that.

The crisis in Ukraine and Europe demonstrate that the stakes are indeed very high. Security cooperation and SFA are key tools in the Theater Army and Geographic Combatant commander's inventory of options to achieve U.S. policy and strategic objectives. With that in mind, it is our hope that these articles will enhance your understanding of security force assistance.

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Chapter 1

Competing Through Deception: Expanding the Utility of Security Cooperation for Great-Power Competition

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https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/competing-through-deception-expanding-utility-security- cooperation-great-power-competition

The 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance's (INSSG) stated goal is to be an agenda allowing the United States to "prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation." The INSSG continues a trend from the previous administration's national security strategy (NSS) that not only declared "great-power competition has returned" but codified China and Russia as "revisionist actors." Despite the continued emphasis from two consecutive administrations on strategic competition as the focus of U.S. security strategy, the Joint Force and the Services are only now beginning to establish and codify their role within the nebulous concept of competition. The Joint Staff published Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-19 *Competition Continuum* in June 2019. As of June 2021, only the Army and Marines have drafted service-specific guidance on competition, with Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-4 *Competing* published in December 2020 and Chief of Staff Paper #2 *The Army in Military Competition* in March 2021.

Transitioning to strategic competition has remained challenging to the Joint Force and the services, which must reorient existing activities and generate new capabilities to address deficiencies often overlooked during two decades of national security policy focused on non-state actors. In addition to capabilities, the Joint Force faces a rival who seeks to avoid not only decisive engagement with the U.S. but conflict in general, attempting to attain "victory without fighting," the antithesis of current U.S. military education and operational art. Exacerbating asymmetric strategic views is the inherent interdependent nature of the modern operating environment that restricts the use of force. Furthermore, unlike the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the military must not remain the primary implement of foreign policy and instead enable competition through other instruments of national power (diplomacy, information, and economics), something the INSSG specifically addresses with the initial outlines of a "diplomacy first" doctrine.

At the intersection of adaptation, innovation, and addressing inadequacies lies enabling processes that generate strategic deception. A 2008 Defense Science Board report declared the "Department of Defense (DOD) understands and plans for military denial and deception at tactical level, but presently there is no process to enable defense strategy to be informed by the potential for strategic denial and deception." Developing strategic deception provides the U.S. a tool in competition that creates effects across multiple contested domains and geographic regions while concurrently increasing competition costs to rivals, impeding competitors' decision-making processes and protecting U.S. interests. The Joint Force can enable the U.S. to use strategic deception through its extensive security cooperation activities but must do so in a deliberate, pragmatic, and coordinated manner to avoid potential risks. Confusion and ambiguity will add complexity to a competitor's planning processes, thus raising competition costs without using military force.

While security cooperation is a whole of DOD initiative, the U.S. Army, which regularly executes a wide range of overt cooperative activities, is uniquely postured to facilitate strategic deception when coordinated with other instruments of national power. Furthermore, new Joint and Army concepts emphasize competition below levels of armed conflict and the synthesis of operations across multiple domains and environments. These two conceptual tenets support the development of DOD strategic deception guidance by synchronizing ongoing security cooperation programs with existing Military Deception (MILDEC) doctrine. Despite possessing underlying structures to execute strategic deception, the DOD and the greater United States Government (USG) must change longstanding practices associated with security cooperation; from restricting access to regional and country priority lists to increasing the emphasis on and authorities granted to information operations tied to cooperative activities. In developing a cooperation-based strategic deception framework, the DOD enhances its capability to support USG objectives and interests in competition below levels of conflict with strategic competitors.

Strategic Deception

Joint Publication (JP) 3-13.4 *Military Deception* defines Strategic MILDEC as a process "conducted to undermine adversary national leaders and senior military commanders' ability to make accurate decisions." In its simplest form, strategic deception obfuscates priorities, intentions, and interests of the United States from rival nations, inhibiting and influencing competitor's foreign policy and security strategy decision-making processes. If a strategic rival is uncertain where and through what instruments of national power the U.S. is focusing regional competitive efforts, then that rival will be unable to design and implement country-specific campaigns to challenge and mitigate U.S. influence. The U.S. currently fails to obscure many of its foreign interests. By reading publicly available posture statements and prioritized lists of interests to Congress or lines of effort on Global Combatant Commands (GCC) websites it is easy for U.S. rivals to know where and how to economize their malign competitive efforts.

While in its most basic applications strategic deception creates a cloud of vagueness around U.S. interests, it can also be operationalized to specifically target rival states producing a false perception of regional and global U.S. objectives. Creating an artificial emphasis on nations of negligible strategic importance can mislead rivals into expending limited resources in a way that has little to no effect on U.S. security interest. A 1973 research and development (RAND) report for the CIA specifically outlines the concept of operationalizing strategic deception against rival nations, "Strategic deception in its more ruthless aspects yields more than uncertainty and the consequent spreading of enemy resources; skillful deception causes a redistribution of the adversary's resources in the wrong direction, thereby assuring not only surprise but its full exploitation." The U.S. could potentially deceive a great-power competitor to commit to a peripheral nation undergoing protracted intrastate conflict, thereby restricting that rival's ability to compete elsewhere, draining their resources, and potentially degrade their international public standing; a major component of narrative competition and one of the three dynamics of military competition.

New Concepts for Competition

In response to the return to great-power competition, the Joint Staff has adopted the non-binary, non-linear concept of the competition continuum that outlines the environment in which the United States holistically applies "the instruments of national power to achieve objectives." The competition continuum outlines how the Joint Force campaigns through the simultaneous combination of three overarching activities: cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. Concurrently, the Army has developed the multi-domain operations

(MDO) concept, emphasizing "successful competition requires Army forces actively engaging across domains, in the electromagnetic spectrum (ESM), and in the information environment." The Army can now adapt and develop methods that fulfill its strategic initiatives to better support USG efforts within these two emerging frameworks. One such adaptation is synthesizing fundamentals of MILDEC and whole of government influence and information operations to enhance ongoing cooperation activities to achieve strategic deception and generate cross-domain effects in support of strategic competition.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0 *Operations* outlines four strategic roles through which the Army "accomplishes its mission by supporting the Joint Force and unified action partners." The role of shaping operational environments is paramount to creating conditions that enable the Army to support and execute competitive efforts below levels of armed conflict against great-power rivals. Much like the inherent nature of competition, "Army operations to shape are continuous throughout a geographic combatant commander's area of responsibility (AOR) and occur before, during, and after a Joint operation within an operational area." Activities that fall under shaping operational environments include security cooperation and forward U.S. presence, both of which can be combined with information domain activities and other elements of national power to strategically deceive rival states of regional U.S. interests.

The development of security forces assistance brigades (SFABs), regular deployment of civil affairs (CA) teams, execution of foreign internal defense (FID) through special operations assets, and the prominent role in bilateral and multinational exercises all make the Army a viable platform to execute strategic deception through cooperation. Furthermore, the Army not only possesses multiple information-related capabilities (cyber, public affairs, psychological operations) and information operations officers (FA30) but also has established G-9/S-9 staff sections facilitating interagency coordination and collaboration. Joint and interagency elements can use tactical and operational Army capabilities in conjunction with instruments of national power to generate strategic deception by exploiting cooperative activities through the information domain.

Executing Deception Through Cooperation

The Army cannot execute strategic deception through cooperation unilaterally and must do so at the behest of a combatant commander as part of an integrated campaign coordinated with Joint Force and other instruments of national power across multiple domains to achieve effective results. Additionally, strategic deception is predicated upon establishing regional and global priorities as there is no utility in strategically deceiving rivals if the United States chooses to compete in an omnipresent or hyperdynamic manner. It is therefore imperative that GCCs establish prioritization systems for the importance of nations within their AORs as they relate to national policy, objectives, and interests. The GCCs must not only nest their prioritization system with national policy, but also attempt to harmonize it with interagency partners operating within a given AOR to facilitate unified action. JDN 1-18 *Strategy* provides a three-tiered framework classifying national interests as vital, important, and peripheral, assigning specific criteria to each. GCCs can adapt and expand this taxonomy to set conditions to generate strategic deception through cooperation by adding two additional categories of non-interest and rival.

- **Vital interests**: What are we willing to die for? States generally have four vital interests: security of the home territory, safety of citizens at home and abroad, economic prosperity, and preservation of the national way of life.
- **Important interests**: What are we willing to fight for? Nations important interests generally include freedom of access to the global commons, regional stability, secure alliances, and

the promotion of the state's values.

- **Peripheral interests**: What are we willing to fund (deploy peacekeepers, balance trade deficits)?
- **Non-interest:** This nation is of negligible interest to the U.S., and it does not enable or empower rival nations.
- **Rival:** This nation is a designated competitor, revisionist power, rogue state, or active belligerent. What can we do to compel or deter their actions? How can we mitigate threats from this nation to our interests and objectives?

Field Manual (FM) 3-22 *Army Support to Security Cooperation* outlines the purposes and goals of Army-executed cooperative security activities to include "promoting specific U.S. security interests" and "providing U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation". Security cooperation encompasses a wide range of activities that fall within four overarching categories of security assistance; foreign military sales, donations, leases, and exchanges; SFA; FID; and security sector reform. Engaging in any form of overt security cooperation signals intentions and interests with the partnering nation, which competitors can clearly identify. FM 3-22 specifically identifies developing of defense and security relationships shape operating environments by, "sending a compelling regional and often global strategic communication message of a commitment to threat interdiction." It is through overt messaging tied to cooperation that theater commanders can use Army assets to generate strategic deception to impede an adversary's ability to compete and degrade regional U.S. influence.

The Army performs deception through either increasing or decreasing ambiguity in the enemy's decision-making process. FM 3-13.4 *Army Support to Military Deception* defines the former as operations "designed to generate confusion and cause mental conflict in the enemy decision maker" and the latter as efforts to "manipulate and exploit an enemy decision maker's pre-existing beliefs and bias through the intentional display of observables that reinforce and convince that decision maker that such pre-held beliefs are true." Simply put, increasing ambiguity clouds the information space and hides overall intent. Inversely, decreasing ambiguity presents a false and focused perception of your design to the enemy. The Army achieves tactical-level deception by performing diversions, feints, demonstrations, ruses, and displays. While tactically-focused, the diversion, ruse, and display can all be adapted to enable competitive strategic deception through Army security cooperation activities. A diversion draws the attention of a competitor away from main efforts and induces the misallocation of resources; a ruse uses false information to mislead competitors, often targeting their intelligence activities; and a display overtly attempts to enhance or exaggerate friendly activity or capabilities.

To operationalize the concept of generating strategic deception through competition, the DOD must conduct two primary activities within a given theater while simultaneously restricting access to overall USG priorities and interests. The first is the completion of ruses and diversions by conducting security cooperation activities in peripheral and non-interest states while heavily emphasizing these efforts through multiple information and diplomatic domains. These efforts would either attempt to increase ambiguity by diverting attention away from primary U.S. interest (diversion) or attempt to decrease ambiguity by drawing rival states to commit resources to nations that are of negligible interest to the U.S. These two actions are not mutually exclusive and in fact could be performed concurrently to reciprocally support each other. Completion of either a ruse or a diversion within competition would be predicated on the synchronization of multiple information-related capabilities promoting and emphasizing the activities of these teams and potential distinguished visitor (DV) engagements and support. For example, SFABs

deploy force packages of 20 advisory teams to a given GCC; if the GCC commander purposefully deploys two of those teams to lower priority nations, their presence creates ambiguity. If those non-priority deployments were also heavily emphasized through information operations, diplomatic engagements, and DV support then they could be used to divert attention from ongoing U.S. activities in higher prioritized nations or even draw competitors into those peripheral states to counter what are designed to look like major U.S. outreach efforts.

The second activity is related to the fact that the United States cannot hide or conceal all its national interests from rival states. Nations that control or influence key geographic features, are geopolitical treaty allies, or possess resources integral to U.S. security are vital interests. While strategic deception cannot hide the importance of such states, it can augment existing U.S. activities. Using information operations to enhance security cooperation activities within key states can make them appear larger or more effective, potentially discouraging rivals from competing because of perceived inflated costs of entry and U.S. competitive overmatch. Enhancing cooperative activities would require whole of government coordination and support, beginning with the country team to enhance perception through other instruments of national power. An example of this is if a four-person civil military support element (CMSE) is operating in a nation deemed a vital interest then a focused deception campaign can amplify all of its military-to-military and civilian-to-military activities across all public messaging mediums. Additionally, the combatant commander or chief of mission can even grant that element's leadership the ability to exaggerate their authorities, funding, and capabilities, making it appear to be a greater asset than it is and integrate these messages into diplomatic engagements.

Using security cooperation to generate strategic deception creates a risk the United States could lose rapport with peripheral or non-interest states used as part of larger deception campaigns. By their very nature, a loss of rapport, access, and influence with non-prioritized nations has minimal effects on U.S. security interests, but if aggregated this risk becomes exponentially larger and can degrade the ability to compete through narratives. The Army defines narrative competition as enduring and cumulative processes that results in "the rise and fall of a country's reputation based on general perceptions of its strength, reliability, and resolve." Losing in narrative competition affects the ability for the U.S. to perform cooperative activities globally and enables rival influence operations. Additionally, operational risks exist around how well the U.S. can control the narrative in the information domain of multiple foreign audiences, a task that requires an elevated level of local knowledge and cultural understanding. Complicating the need to control the narrative is the highly contested nature of the information domain in the modern operating environment, in which misinformation and disinformation are regular tactics of strategic rivals**.** Despite the contested nature and important role of the information domain in strategic competition, there exists no unifying agency or organization within the U.S. government to synchronize, organize, and conduct influence operations. The lack of a centralized influence agency, or unifying influence strategy, is a massive impediment to conducting strategic deception. Further restricting the use of strategic deception is a lack of robust legal authorities to conduct influence operations globally. A final risk exists in attempting to draw strategic competitors into protracted conflicts, which can increase the length and intensity of intra-state wars, potentially leading to regional instability. The U.S. can mitigate risks associated with using security cooperation as a mechanism to generate deception by emphasizing how the U.S. is providing high-quality training or other cooperative activities at no-to-little cost wherever they are occurring, regardless of underlying goals. A secondary risk exists in exaggerating or enhancing efforts in vital nations, which can be partially alleviated by regular and open communication with partners and ensuring not to promise anything that cannot

be delivered to partner nation officials. Finally, carefully planned, executed, and monitored strategic deception campaigns require close control of information to reduce the overall risk of their discovery.

All Warfare Competition is Deception

Despite the lack of contemporary employment, the Joint Force has a long and storied history of successfully using deception to enable operations and achieve strategic objectives. In World War II, the Allies used inflatable "armies," (fictitious radio broadcasts), and even a disguised corpse with forged documents to divert German forces away from invasion sites. In the 1991 Gulf War, the United States employed positional forces, DV visits, and information operations to deceive Iraqi leadership into diverting a large allocation of their forces, enabling the main U.S. effort to conduct an envelopment along the Iraqi flank. As the Joint Force focuses on how it can support strategic competition in an operating environment where force is inherently restricted, it can use historic examples of deception to build new models and methods that increase a rival's competition costs while concurrently protecting long-term U.S. interests. The world has long evolved from radios, balloon armies, and even cable television, providing the U.S. a new range of means and ways to deceive rivals below the level of conflict.

As the nation enters an environment defined by competition below levels of armed conflict, it becomes paramount to establish capabilities that both support the United States while concurrently impeding rival great powers. The Joint Force must think beyond tactical and operational applications of its various capabilities and focus on generating strategic effects across multiple contested domains. The use of security cooperation to generate strategic deception offers one such opportunity that the Joint Force and the greater USG must explore. In *The Art of War* Sun Tzu states, "all warfare is based on deception." 2500 years later, warfare has changed many times over, but at its core, the axiom remains true: All competition is based on deception.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

Chapter 2

Thinking Outside of the Sandbox: Succeeding at Security Force Assistance Beyond the Middle East

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https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April- 2021/Matisek-SFAB-Beyond/

The bulk of American military training programs over the past two decades has primarily centered on building security forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the United States spending 128 billion dollars on those two countries alone.[1] Such security force assistance (SFA) activities in the Middle East have been a revolving door, rebuilding partner security forces nearly from scratch every year. The guiding framework for SFA in these two countries has been the strategic objective of making partner forces effective enough to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) or counterterrorism (CT) missions without U.S. advisors having to oversee their activities.[2] This idea rose to codified prominence in 2009 with then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates advocating for the indirect approach of building partner forces to deal with security challenges.[3]

Such a narrative has translated into American and allied special operations forces increasingly relying on the "by, with, and through" approach to training host-nation special purpose forces to conduct COIN and CT. In many cases, by, with, and through enables partners to target actors and groups that are perceived as a national security threat to U.S. interests.[4] While effective at creating highly capable niche military units such as the Iraqi Golden Division and ten Afghan special operations kandaks, the creation of such elite forces has caused neglect in regular army units in Iraq and Afghanistan.[5] Residing outside of the focus and monitoring of Western military advisors, conventional forces in Iraq and Afghanistan succumb to the pathologies of corruption and patronage. In many cases, Soldiers are loyal to their unit commanders for parochial reasons such as religious sect; political party; or tribe, clan, and kinship rather than to the government of Baghdad or Kabul. This can be frustrating to the average advisor who views the military as a professional organization that is supposed to be apolitical and meritocratic. Yet, in the armies of most countries in the Middle East, societal norms and culture influence military behavior, meaning security institutions serve narrow purposes and interests and professionalism can be considered a dangerous trait to display.[6] Professionalism can be dangerous because such demonstrations of capability and effectiveness appear threatening to political elites and senior government officials.

After years of "pushing a rope," it has become abundantly clear that most militaries in the Middle East will not adopt American military institutions, let alone liberalized forms of democratic governance. This can be vexing for U.S. military leaders and policy makers as SFA planners provide utopian-looking PowerPoint slides and whitepapers with objectives and lesson plans on how SFA will be organized and implemented. For many advisors, no matter how much proper planning and preparation is undertaken with doctrinally correct lines of effort, host-

nation forces inevitably fall short of the standards expected by their American counterparts. It is in this planning phase that many advisors improperly believe that a foreign military unit will adapt to their Western military institutions and training programs. Difficulties with achieving desired end-states when building partner capacity is why Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, then U.S. Army Special Operations commander, used to describe "BPC [building partner capacity] efforts as random acts of touching."[7]

Advisors from the U.S. general purpose force, ad hoc advisory elements such as military transition teams, and specifically trained advisory units such as the Army's security force assistance brigades (SFAB), have often returned from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan exasperated by their experiences. Many of these advisors discover near the end of their deployment that the security forces they worked with still lack proficiency. For those lucky enough to do a follow-on deployment with the partner forces they worked with on a previous tour, their frustration will grow into rage when they learn the unit has likely regressed. Such frustration is understandable, as the Iraqi army collapsed against a much smaller Islamic State fighting force in 2014, and in 2021, the Afghan National Army struggles to defend their checkpoints and convoys against the growing power and influence of the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan.[8] These disappointments are commonplace despite the typical senior officer engaging in the time-honored annual tradition of saying that this time their SFA efforts have finally made progress and taken root.[9] Worse, even when their efforts are successful, such as they were during the wide-area security and advise, assist, and enable missions with Kurdish militias in the Iraq-Syria region, progress was strategically upended and credibility undermined by a hasty 2019 withdrawal of U.S. forces.[10]

Despite these disappointments, SFA continues to be relied upon as an instrument of power, especially for demonstrating commitments to partner governments and forces that genuinely want to absorb security assistance to improve its military effectiveness. As outlined in the 2017 national security strategy (NSS), this takes on a particularly important focus as the Department of Defense (DOD) attempts to pivot from COIN and CT to great-power competition.[11] Competition for influence against China, Iran, and Russia requires the U.S. to cultivate alliances and security partnerships around the world. In this context, SFA remains a viable means of maintaining the necessary level of engagement and influence while empowering allies and partners to take on local and regional security threats. Great-power competition occurs as a fight for influence in the "unquiet frontier," smaller periphery nations located along the seams between global powers.[12]

To effectively conduct SFA in these frontier regions, military advisors working in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, peripheral Europe, or the Indo-Pacific will need to be judicious about what lessons to take from years of experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. military needs to closely evaluate the advising culture it has developed in these two conflicts and be prepared to evolve and adapt to new challenges. These challenges are especially important with the creation of SFABs, specifically designed to conduct the advise, support, liaise, and assess mission in the area of responsibility (AOR) of each geographic combatant command.[13] Such a shift toward the advise, support, liaise, and assess paradigm is meant to move beyond the narrow scope of the train, advise, and assist mission in Afghanistan, describing a more expansive view of what advisors do, particularly in the area of security cooperation with partners who have near-peer military capabilities.

Successful conduct of SFA outside of the Middle East requires American advisors to be comfortable with narrower objectives, goals, and outcomes driven by the host nations themselves, along with a true adoption of the philosophy of mission command. At the same

time, advisors need to be prepared to accept more risk as the conditions of a highly active insurgency as experienced in Afghanistan and Iraq are substantially different from the operating environment in other nations. This is especially important in the COVID-19 era, which has brought substantial challenges to how SFA advisors develop and maintain relationships with allied and partner forces.

A New SFA Paradigm: Different Context Means Different Advising

Military advisors with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan may have become ingrained with a "thinking inside the sandbox" mentality. Such experienced advisors need mental flexibility that allows them to be comfortable narrowing the scope of their mission and objectives when working with partner forces in other regions. This is because of a significant difference in the strategic context: the United States is not trying to simultaneously nation-build and fight an insurgency in the Indo-Pacific or Africa. Where the objectives in recent wars have been to build security forces capable of shouldering the bulk of daily fighting from the U.S. and its allies, the objectives in other regions of the world will likely be more limited to the confines of demonstrating strategic resolve and helping a partner develop some modicum of deterrence capabilities in the era of great-power competition. This translates into competing for relationships and influence with host-nation officials and delivering on security assistance and cooperation promises.

During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, American military advisors faced the overwhelming task of building a conventional force nearly from the ground up while engaged in an ongoing fight against insurgent forces. Because the security forces of Iraq and Afghanistan were being rebuilt from scratch, American and allied advisors were responsible for every facet of training and equipping military forces, as well as supporting them on the battlefield. Every stage of training—from basic training for newly recruited Soldiers to educating senior officers at command and staff colleges—had American or allied money and people behind it. When employed in combat, Iraqi and Afghan units frequently relied on support from American airpower, artillery, transport, and logistics. This showed especially in the 2014 setbacks the Iraqi army suffered as the U.S.-led buildup created a brittle force of combat units without the necessary supporting framework of logisticians, engineers, and intelligence personnel.[14] Corruption and graft among officers at all levels further hampered the equipping and sustainment of Iraqi units.[15] The Iraqi army had been trained and equipped to fight but not to support itself in doing so. When faced with the daunting task of building a new national security force in Afghanistan after 2001, U.S. and allied advisors found themselves with the time and resources to build only the "tooth" and not the "tail." The Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) are no better in 2021, where logistics are the biggest impediment to maintaining forward presence and in being able to defend ANDSF checkpoints. No amount of SFA will compel ANDSF logistics personnel to take their jobs seriously enough to not pilfer the supplies.[16]

Given the fact that American advisors have been working to build host-nation security forces while these same forces are actively engaged in a fight for control of their countries, the instinct to attempt a full-scale overhaul is understandable. American advisors deploying to countries in the Indo-Pacific and Africa, however, will not face the task of building new security forces while in combat and must resist attempting a complate reconstruction of host-nation forces. This is not to say that either region is not without its specific challenges, such as the militaries in Libya, Mali, Philippines, and Somalia, each have their own specific pathologies that make defense institution building difficult to codify in the long term.[17]

However, it does mean accepting that the military structures and models in place are there for a reason, and as an advisor, it is necessary to maximize the potential within the given military system, whether for U.S. political purposes, lack of SFA resources, or host-nation capabilities.

While abilities among armed forces in Africa or the Indo-Pacific vary considerably, many current or likely U.S. partners at the edges of potential conflict already have well-established military institutions, typically referred to as tier-one militaries. Rather than going into a country with the mindset that the host-nation armed forces must be overhauled, American advisors are more likely to find themselves employed in assisting with marginal improvements and in finding ways of maximizing efficiencies, especially at the staff levels. This can be attributed not only to the existing capabilities in an established military, but also to the fact that U.S. advisors will be there at the pleasure and invitation of a host nation that might request specific focus areas for their American guests. Within this context, an advising force must invest substantial time in learning the structure of the partner or ally security forces. Learning the structure is important because advising will primarily focus on process improvements, such as planning capabilities, but with marginal gains. Furthermore, U.S. advising objectives at the operational and strategic levels might be less focused on improving the capability of a host-nation military than they are on improving interoperability and security relationships with particular countries. For example, the Japan Self-Defense Force is a capable, professional, all-volunteer military force that does not require SFA. However, both the Japan Self-Defense Force and the U.S. could benefit from senior American advisors working with Japanese brigade and division staffs on more complex staff processes such as multi-domain targeting or operational design. Focusing on more sophisticated headquarters functions with upper-tier partners enables better integration and interoperability with these allies and partners in the event of an armed conflict against a common adversary. SFA missions such as this will require a substantial shift in the mindset of American advisors drawing on their firsthand experience of working with the Iraqis and Afghans. Advisors working with more capable allies and partners will need to be prepared to emphasize the liaise mission more heavily than the advise or support missions.

While American advisors and the services that they are drawn from are primarily focused on large-scale combat operations and combined arms maneuver, advisors also need to be prepared to adjust their mission and objectives for the needs of a partner force that may not be focused on conventional force-on-force combat. Many U.S. allies and partners around the world, such as the Republic of Korea or the Baltic states, are indeed focused on defending against a conventional military threat. This might mean focusing on ways of increasing the deterrence capabilities of these partner forces. However, many U.S. partners in this and other regions have historically employed their militaries in other ways. Using their forces to deploy elsewhere in support of UN peacekeeping operations, some Indo-Pacific militaries are focused more heavily on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, a state of affairs that will likely continue in a region increasingly threatened by global climate change. In other instances, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand face internal security threats, employing their militaries for COIN and CT operations and law enforcement roles.

More importantly, U.S. advisors must be cognizant of the history, tradition, and culture surrounding the institutions and employment of host-nation armed forces and tread carefully in countries where the military has previously been a tool of repression for authoritarian regimes. The varying roles and responsibilities of military forces in different partner nations require deliberate engagement at the political and strategic levels before employing advisors to signal that the U.S. military is present for truly noble purposes. In some cases, this will

require American military advisors to eschew combined arms maneuver in favor of the logistical and medical training that is integral to humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. Moreover, advisors will need to become more comfortable with host-nation forces that focus on their own objectives rather than American national security interests. In this complicated sociopolitical milieu, American interests can be indirectly achieved with partnerships via newfound relations that establish long-term dialogue and influence.

In recent conflicts, eagerness to hand off the fight to a host-nation security force often resulted in American advisors pushing their Iraqi or Afghan partner forces toward American-designated objectives. Advisors often struggled to align host-nation force objectives with their own, as factors such as corruption, competing tribal or personal loyalties, or a simple lack of capability could stymie a partner force's ability to achieve an objective. However, in an environment where handing off the fight to the host nation is not the mission of a U.S. advisory force, advisors must be more comfortable with enabling the host nation to pursue their own objectives. This is because great-power competition requires empowering allies to take ownership of their domestic and regional security considerations in support of a more robust regional security architecture; the American advisor presence signals a strategic willingness to support and enable such actions. Organizing Joint training programs and exercises in this framework can solidify their willingness to take ownership of defense institution building on their own terms so that it becomes self-sufficient once advisors depart.

"One Captain, One Team, One Country": Mission Command and Risk Acceptance

To conduct effective SFA in these frontier states, the U.S. military needs to embrace the principles of mission command at the strategic level to enable advisors operating at the tactical levels. This enables them to improvise and adapt to a dynamic and ambiguous context where Chinese and Russian officials may be creating a hypercompetitive environment to provide SFA. Commanders who properly exercise mission command philosophy in this perplexing environment give their subordinate leaders wide latitude to accomplish the commander's intent as the subordinate sees fit, providing the subordinate leader the flexibility necessary to adapt to the situation on the ground and seize opportunities.[18] Decentralized COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which companies and platoons conducted independent operations out of small outposts, often represented tactical application of mission command. However, the overall strategy and mission of defeating insurgencies while building host-nation security forces capable of independently securing their own countries remained uniform across those regions. The essential job of an infantry company commander in Mahmudiya District, Iraq, was little different than that of a company commander two thousand miles away in Dara-I-Pech District, Afghanistan, not to mention both had to maintain constant vigilance against insider attacks.[19] However, those same two captains leading advisory teams in Singapore and Thailand might have two fundamentally different missions depending on a variety of factors.

The differences might include the form and shape of security relationships of each country with the U.S. This can be further broken down into what the host nation has asked American advisors to do and what mandate advisors have in providing different types of aid and training (i.e., lethal versus nonlethal assistance). Matters can be further complicated by virtue of host-nation relationships with competitors (e.g., China and Russia); internal conflicts and security challenges; the professional and political foundations of each country's security forces; and the unique history, culture, and politics of each state. The SFAB employment

model of "one team, operating semi-autonomously in support of a country led by a single officer" requires comfort with the philosophy of mission command scaled up to the strategic level.[20] It means giving freedom of movement and decision making space to tactical-level advisors to make strategic-level decisions; otherwise, advisors might find themselves engaging in ad hoc arrangements that undermine the purpose of their mission.[21]

Successful mission command, according to Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, relies on seven elements: competence, mutual trust, shared understanding, commander's intent, mission orders, disciplined initiative, and risk acceptance.[22] Most of these elements require particular considerations in the context of the advisory mission. To ensure competence and set the groundwork for mutual trust, advisors need to be drawn from the top-performing leaders of the military at all levels, from junior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to senior field grade officers. Rather than creating an advisor functional area, the most tactically proficient personnel with demonstrated leadership ability need to rotate between advisory units and the rest of the operating force. The qualities that make an officer or NCO a good leader of American troops are the same ones that make a good advisor to foreign troops.

Ad hoc advisory efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., military transition teams) were sometimes treated as economy of force missions, which means those roles were filled at times by the donor unit's less capable leaders. However, the Army is currently on the right track to improve its security assistance endeavor, manning its SFABs with officers and NCOs who have completed key leadership assignments and advertising these units as a broadening assignment for high performers. It must persist in this effort to recruit top talent by maintaining SFABs as a coveted assignment for high performers and prevent it from becoming a dumping ground for the mediocre. A similar effort is underway in the British military with the creation of the specialized infantry group, which mirrors many aspects of the American SFAB approach, attracting their most talented officers and NCOs to advise foreign forces. The emergence of the specialized infantry group presents another avenue for SFABs to excel at advising by cooperating with a close ally on codifying best practices and coordinating advisor missions to maximize influence and partnerships that can counter China and Russia.

Senior commanders of advisor units should be comfortable with a degradation in shared understanding as advising in-country becomes a highly fluid and dynamic experience. In many cases, immediate decisions and actions might be required by forward deployed leaders that cannot wait for the lengthy routing of staff summary sheets and memorandums for record. As described in numerous interviews with foreign military personnel, waiting on approval from a faraway chain of command is precisely what makes American advisors look weak to foreign military leaders.[23]

With advisor teams spread out to multiple countries across a geographic command, battalion- and brigade-level commanders will be unable to develop the deep situational understanding necessary to make decisions on the small details of a mission. They must trust the judgment of their subordinate officers and NCOs who are immersed in the operational environment daily. Furthermore, commander's intent issued to subordinate leaders will need to account for a broader variety of stakeholders. A captain charged with executing a colonel's intent must also balance that against the goals and objectives of the U.S. ambassador and interagency country team. Senior commanders must issue intent that is broad enough to be tailored to the integrated country strategy that each ambassador is charged with carrying out. Taken a step further, leaders on the ground could even be issued commander's intent that specifically

authorizes them to reasonably deviate from that intent in support of the country team's objectives (i.e., exercise disciplined initiative). This might even include giving financial authority and discretion to a certain dollar amount and enabling the authority of advisor decisions to signal conditionality to partner forces when they cross "red-lines." Finally, applying mission command to successful SFA missions will require senior commanders to reexamine and adjust their acceptance of prudent risk.

Advisors engaging in SFA missions in other regions of the world outside of Iraq and Afghanistan will often need to be comfortable with lower levels of force protection while working with host-nation counterparts. One of the most painful memories of advising in Iraq and Afghanistan has been the problem of insider attacks, where trained host-nation Soldiers have turned their weapons on their American advisors in "green on blue" attacks.[24] While U.S. military tactics and techniques have evolved to partially mitigate the threat of insider attack, such as the use of "guardian angels" to provide overwatch protection to advisors, these tragedies loom understandably large in the minds of military leaders up and down the chain of command. Engagements between American advisors and host-nation militaries are accompanied by robust security details, and photographs of Afghan officers with their American advisors nearly always depict the American wearing body armor and helmet, while the Afghan counterpart wears none.

While every SFA mission begins with a detailed analysis of the local threat and resources available to determine the protective posture required, there may be a temptation among senior advisors to revert to what they became accustomed to during multiple tours in Iraq and

Afghanistan. Being mentally prepared to accept a certain level of risk with force protection applies across the most mundane details of a military advisors' work—where they live, how they travel, what they wear, if and how they are armed, etc. A force protection posture in the

Indo-Pacific or sub-Saharan Africa that resembles what military advisors have adopted in Iraq and Afghanistan will only serve to alienate partner forces in much safer countries. This also translates into advisors getting cellphones that operate in any given country and have WhatsApp installed so that they can stay in constant communication with partner forces and provide real-time updates to their advisor team and leadership. While some may see this as a security violation, this is the harsh reality of any advising mission, and partner forces will want to develop a relationship with their advisor through text messages and group threads. Partaking in such activities will signal an advisor's willingness to develop interpersonal relationships with ally and partner forces for the greater good of the mission.

Conclusion

As the United States continues to emphasize great-power competition, its Armed Forces will undertake an increasing number of military advisory missions as the nation vies to maintain global influence.[25] The future of successful SFA engagements outside of the Middle Eastern sandbox is increasingly dependent on a nimble advising force that can tailor mission sets in alignment with the U.S. national security interests of empowering partners and allies. This requires breaking free of the mental traps of operating in failed states where state-building collided with fighting an insurgency. It means reemphasizing the importance of working with already capable military partners that will have their own institutionalized way of conducting affairs.

American advisors will need to become comfortable assisting capable partners with making marginal improvements, especially in less glamorous areas such as logistics, maintenance, and

record-keeping details (e.g., administrative work). They will need to accept the goals and outcomes of the host nation to a far greater degree than they might have during a massive COIN campaign. Additionally, the senior commanders of American advisor units will need to embrace mission command to allow junior advisors the flexibility to modify the execution of their mission to better integrate with the U.S. country team's objectives.

Finally, the model of deploying small advisor teams across a geographically broad area of operations will require no small amount of risk acceptance by the senior leadership of the U.S. military. Advisors accustomed to an entourage of armored vehicles and infantry squads from their experience in previous operations will ultimately fail in their new mission if they are unable to accept prudent risk to build genuine trust with their partner force. Without authentic trust at the leading edge between advisor and partner, any security force assistance mission, and ultimately, the strategic partnership within which it occurs, has limited chances of success. Advisors and their senior leaders need to get comfortable with the uncomfortable, such as conducting SFA through WhatsApp, and start thinking outside of the sandbox because strategic competitors are unrestrained in their desire to box out American influence.

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Chapter 3

The Future of U.S. Security Force Assistance

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https://mwi.usma.edu/the-future-of-us-security-force-assistance/

The United States has invested heavily in building the military capacity of partner forces in the two decades since 9/11. But these security force assistance (SFA) efforts have had mixed results.

Done well, SFA offers the putative promise of bolstering deterrence in great-power competition, improving access to and influence over foreign partners, and enhancing the effectiveness of partner militaries. If successful, SFA can provide options for policymakers in irregular warfare contexts at a fraction of the cost of large-scale military operations. SFA can be a source of stability and reduce the probability of major conflict around the world by strengthening the militaries of allies and partners.

But the most significant SFA ventures of the past twenty years—the U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq—have sowed doubts about its utility. The U.S. spent billions of dollars building partner security forces in both countries, plus the additional human cost of two decades of deployments to support external training and advising. The sobering result? Iraqi security forces collapsed in the face of the Islamic State's 2013-2014 offensive, and the 300,000-strong Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) fared no better during the Taliban's swift reconquest of Afghanistan in the summer of 2021.

It would be a mistake to look at these high-profile failures and conclude that SFA should play no future role in U.S. foreign policy. SFA will almost certainly be here to stay. But understanding when, where, and how it can be most effective requires a deeper understanding of its limitations.

Enduring SFA Challenges for Practitioners and Academics

Organizing for SFA

Despite the vast resources that the United States has poured into SFA, organizing for the mission remains a challenge. Many different U.S. government entities participate in SFA (or SFA-like activities), yet coordination between them remains elusive. This problem is captured in the critiques of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan as "one-year wars fought 20 times." Short organizational time horizons often hindered long-term planning and coordination, which is vital for addressing complex political problems like how to cultivate legitimate institutions in war-torn countries.

The security force assistance brigades (SFABs) represent a positive evolution in the U.S. Army's approach to combat advising. SFAB teams rotate in and out of partner countries, providing an important step toward persistent engagement. They also signal an effort to foster military advising as an important skill for U.S. Soldiers and to line up individuals who have the right skills with advising missions. Yet the SFABs are just one of multiple SFA mechanisms.

Evn within the Army, other units like special forces groups continue SFA-like missions, while the U.S. government maintains programs both inside the Department of Defense (DOD) and outside (e.g., the State Department's Global Defense Reform Program). Coordination remains an important challenge. The continuity, skills, and resources that SFABs provide may be necessary for gaining leverage with partners, but they are not sufficient and they could backfire if U.S. efforts are poorly organized, redundant, or directed toward unclear goals.

In theory, SFA is coordinated so that advisors conduct tactical and operational activities that support strategic objectives. In practice, the process is often messy and ambiguous: theater, country, and operational plans don't align with each other perfectly, and advisors may arrive in country without clear goals or find themselves negotiating with partner and U.S. entities to identify shared goals. Where should this coordination happen? Some experts have called for a functional combatant command to unify SFA efforts. But this proposal doesn't address the SFA-like efforts and authorities that reside outside of the DOD, and raises questions about the suitability of giving the U.S. military primary responsibility for solving what are often fundamental problems of political legitimacy in foreign countries. Finally, policymakers should reevaluate the authorities for SFA to ensure that they are flexible, responsive, and appropriate for new roles. The U.S. must find ways to make SFA agile and responsive to conditions on the ground without sacrificing oversight and accountability.

Integrating SFA into Competition and Grand Strategy

There will likely be growing demand for SFA as the United States reorients itself for an era of strategic competition. First, to the extent that SFA helps the U.S. maintain a presence in contested environments, it may enhance deterrence and provide better options to prevent conflicts from escalating in crises. Second, so-called gray zone or proxy conflicts are likely to increase as nuclear-armed major powers seek to compete while avoiding direct military conflict, leading in turn to a role for SFA to support partners facing subversive tactics from Russian or Chinese proxies. If all else fails and conflict breaks out, the U.S. does not want to fight alone. SFA can help strengthen alliances and improve interoperability. Moreover, the dynamics of competition are unfolding against a backdrop of increasingly constrained resources. As money gets tighter, SFA will look even more attractive because of its relatively low costs.

But all of these purported benefits rest on untested causal assumptions. Can the presence of military advisors create a credible statement of American interests in the region? Does SFA work best by increasing American influence, or partner operational effectiveness? Researchers should test these assumptions and evaluate whether SFA will work differently when its primary purpose is to mitigate threats from powerful state actors rather than nonstate actors or domestic insurgents.

A related question is whether liberal values are a strength of American SFA or a liability. Washington's rivals have demonstrated their willingness to violate norms and bend rules in pursuit of power—and may seek to weaponize corruption in their dealings with partner forces. During the Cold War, competition with the Soviet Union often led the U.S. to support decidedly illiberal partners. A new era of competition brings back an old dilemma: Should the U.S. arm, train, and advise partners who don't share U.S. values but who do share interests in countering common rivals?

This dilemma may be inescapable—or it may create a false dichotomy. U.S. efforts to use SFA

to impart norms such as respect for human rights and civilian control of the military date to the 1970s and have become more prominent since the end of the Cold War, as the U.S. has increasingly seen liberal values as part of a grand strategy for preserving an international order that recognizes the importance of sustained U.S. leadership. But norm diffusion can be slow and hard to measure and evaluate. The U.S. needs more research to understand the conditions under which the U.S. can socialize partner forces to its preferred values and norms.

Importantly, SFA is neither a silver bullet nor a grand strategy on its own. In the absence of a clear strategy that integrates political, economic, and military instruments, policymakers risk becoming overly reliant on SFA. Policymakers need to view SFA through the lens of persistent presence rather than as a discrete, bounded mission. Reorganizing SFA as a long-term activity can help build partner relationships and extend U.S. influence, but it comes with risks and trade-offs: it could draw the U.S. into unnecessary domestic political conflict in other countries or risk antagonizing other states. SFA will not always be the best course of action, and its utility can only be evaluated relative to that of other policy tools.

Navigating the Politics of SFA

Whether SFA achieves its desired effects typically hinges on the provider's ability to influence and shape the partner's actions. Because partners have their own interests, this is the hardest part of the SFA equation for the United States to control. Partners rarely want the same things as the U.S. and often have domestic political incentives that can distort how they use SFA. The good news is that after poor SFA outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. military recognizes that politics matter. Unless the answer is not to provide SFA at all, the challenge is to navigate those politics. How can the U.S. successfully influence partners to ensure that SFA achieves its desired ends?

There is no easy way to get people to do things they are not already inclined to do—but there may be ways to improve the odds. First, the quality of advisors can make a difference. Advisors who fail to understand their environment or connect with their counterparts will lack the visibility and access needed to diagnose and address problems on the ground. But good military-to-military relationships do not necessarily translate into political influence.

Many political problems originate outside of the military and reside with leaders who have their own reasons for resisting an independent, professional military. This means that the U.S. should, when possible, choose better partners to begin with. Common values and interests will not guarantee cooperation, but they increase the likelihood that a country will be a reliable partner. The less aligned the country's values and interests are with those of the U.S., the more likely that SFA will be misdirected or misused. The U.S. cannot always choose its partners—and partners beset by insurgencies are generally not good partners to begin with. But where possible, effective SFA may start with more selective engagement, especially where the goal is access or enhancing deterrence (as opposed to counterinsurgency [COIN] or state building).

Finally, the U.S. might reconsider how it cultivates relationships, putting more emphasis on championing specific partners within the state or the military. The U.S. has SFA levers at its disposal—such as educational opportunities in U.S. military institutions—that can enhance careers and help to cultivate strategic allies within partner institutions.

Paving the Way for Effective SFA

SFA has emerged as an attractive, if limited, tool over the last 20 years. While the American track record with SFA as a tool of COIN is mixed, the U.S. military should not let its SFA competencies atrophy in an age of great-power competition. On the contrary, SFA may become increasingly useful as a tool for managing relationships and deterring conflict—but only if policymakers learn the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Chapter 4
Advising in Small Wars
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(Reprinted from Small Wars Journal, April 2017)

https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/advising-in-small-wars

On July 31, 2013, the Taliban killed 13 of my Afghan police partners. *The New York Times* described the "charred remains of vehicles smoldering on the road" left behind by retreating Afghan forces. [i] The Secretary of Defense read my situation report. How should an advisor best support his partner when 10 percent of their force is killed? While neither General Anthony Zinni nor Dr. David Kilcullen discuss what it means to be a good advisor in detail, General Zinni does note the importance of "restoring key institutions as early as possible."

This paper explores how my special forces detachment restored the Nangarhar Provincial Response Company (PRC), a special operations element of the Afghan police, by fusing General Zinni's considerations and Dr. Kilcullen's fundamentals of small wars. [ii] This paper describes effects of a catastrophic loss on both the force and province. It also explains how my detachment forced Afghan and coalition forces to recognize the PRC's losses, reconstituted the PRC with internally- and externally-focused efforts, and finally restored their confidence with progressively tougher combat operations. Finally, I reflect on two regrets from this experience and offer some concluding remarks.

Good advisors rebuilt the PRC with trust earned through shared sweat and combat. Neither the small-war fundamentals nor considerations explain how to be a good advisor. The Institute for National Strategic Studies codified the strategic lessons of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*. Though *Lessons Encountered* takes a high-level view of those conflicts, Colonel Hammes strikes center-of- mass in his chapter *Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan* when he describes local security forces as "our ticket home."[iii] Small wars are tough and human; advisors need committed relationships with their partners if we are to succeed.

Tragedy

Unlike most special forces in Afghanistan that partnered detachments directly with their Afghan partners, my detachment was part of the allied special operations task force. My task force partnered American Special Forces detachments with allied special operations detachments with the goal of developing interoperable special operations forces. Task Unit Nangarhar, which I commanded from June 2013 to February 2014, was composed of American and Hungarian soldiers who trained, advised, and assisted the Nangarhar PRC to build enduring tactical, operational, and institutional capacity.[iv] Neither Task Unit Nangarhar nor the PRC had any mission other than to improve the PRC's tactical and institutional capabilities and combat the insurgency. Our goal was an independent PRC that weakened the insurgency through deliberate operations based on Afghan intelligence and targeting.

When we arrived in June 2013, the situation was bleak. A suicide attack against the PRC base the previous March had left the unit operationally ineffective. No one was killed, but the attack

caused coalition leaders to move the task unit advisors to Jalalabad Airfield—a more secure base—while their Afghan counterparts remained stationed amongst the wreckage of their headquarters.

The Nangarhar PRC should have been the keystone of provincial security. By Afghan doctrine, they are the provincial chief of police's most elite force. They exist to target and arrest insurgents and criminals too tough or in places too rough for the regular police.[v] The paramilitary PRC conduct high-risk SWAT-style arrests and quick reaction operations to support checkpoints under attack. Demoralized from the attack and advisor abandonment, the PRC chased bicycle thieves and protected mid-level officials. After a month of training however, the PRC found their footing. Participation in a large cordon and search operation restored their morale and built trust with us, their new advisors. Then, tragedy struck.

Field Manual (FM) 3-90-1 defines defeat as a "task that occurs when an enemy force has temporarily or permanently lost the physical means or the will to fight."[vi] The Taliban defeated the PRC on July 31, 2013, when they killed 13 patrolmen during a high-risk operation in the foothills of the infamous Tora Bora mountains. Though, as an organization, the PRC still had ninety men and eleven trucks, two days of isolation under Taliban fire destroyed their morale.

Worse, during the intense fighting with mounting casualties their supposed partners—my task unit—had not come to their aid. Despite phone calls, emails, and radio chatter, higher only provided permission for us to move forward 43 kilometers to the Khugyani district center where a police relief force was rallying. There, the deputy chief of police begged us to escort them 10 to 15 kilometers forward to relieve the isolated PRC. Unfortunately, no one knew their exact location. With higher fearing ambush, we were again denied permission to help. The next day, the Afghan Army rescued the broken remnants of the PRC platoon.

When we finally met the rescued PRC patrolmen, I saw our rapport burned along with their Ranger trucks. Fear of a green-on-blue insider attack hung in the air as we met them and my medic checked over the wounded. In the weeks following the attack, the broken PRC collapsed. Their commander visited our camp several times with disheartening reports: nearly half the force had deserted. Morale was destroyed.

Start or Restore Key Institutions as Early as Possible

General Zinni situates *start or restore key institutions* about halfway through his list of small-war fundamentals just below "culture's importance" and above "losing momentum." Based on our cultural awareness, we developed a plan to avoid lost momentum with three phases: recognition of the problem, reconstitution, and restoration of confidence. With the ultimate goal of an independent and capable PRC, each requirement leaned on the preceding requirement. The PRC's mission required them to strike against the insurgency. Those operations required trained manpower and equipment. Restored manpower and equipment required both Afghans and the coalition to recognize the problem.

Recognition

From our thorough mission analysis and aggressive schedule of introductions, we knew where to fire our red star clusters. Before we returned to our base, we let the world know how bad the situation was. Repeating "10 percent of the force killed, 50 percent desertion, and total loss of rapport with detachment" in daily reports and phone calls focused everyone's attention. The effects of the reporting were immediate and from the very top of our organization. The

American special operations forces (SOF) commander in Afghanistan made an exception-to-policy authorizing American-funded martyr payments for the PRC's fallen. Our task force's partnership officers pushed the Afghan logistics and personnel systems to prioritize deployment of new patrolmen, new vehicles, and new weapons to the PRC. While this was progress, a few hundred bucks and a pat on the back from the partners who abandoned you do not buy back trust.

To restore the morale of the force, we helped the PRC organize a memorial ceremony. High-level Afghan recognition from the deputy governor, the provincial imam, and the provincial chief of police heartened the remaining patrolmen and repaired lost rapport. Martyr payments were distributed before the memorial ceremony, ensuring family members would be present. The ceremony closed with groundbreaking on a permanent memorial to remember the fallen patrolmen. The ceremony was successful. Replacement patrolmen and equipment began to flow in. Deserters returned to the force.

Reconstitution

We undertook a dual-pronged internal and external effort to reconstitute the PRC, knowing we would need both if the PRC were coming back. Internally, detachment members trained the PRC and examined their internal capabilities. Externally, we built relationships. We also organized for interagency operations, finding that interagency operations are to counterinsurgency (COIN) as combined arms are to maneuver warfare—the best way to win. This approach incorporated at least five small-wars fundamentals and considerations, which are outlined below.

Be Careful Whom You Empower

Drill sergeants, jumpmasters, and Green Berets exude confidence because they are masters of their craft. A new sergeant major fresh from the Crisis Response Unit—the most elite force of Afghan police—led our effort to build mastery in the PRC's internal trainers. The PRC's recovery period gave us an uninterrupted opportunity to develop non-commissioned PRC trainers because they could focus without breaking to prepare for operations. With the commander's blessing, the detachment trained him and his trainers on tactics and their special equipment—radios, night vision, maps, counter-improvised explosives training, and GPS systems. This training capacity proliferated advanced skills throughout the force, boosting confidence and morale.

Local Forces Should Mirror the Enemy, Not Ourselves

Despite success building an internal training system, we were unsuccessful in making our PRC more like the insurgents. Based on detachment experience from Iraq, we handpicked and trained seven patrolmen in plainclothes reconnaissance. They cased qalats, preparing detailed sketches highlighting access points, wall heights, and daily patterns of life. They learned the fundamentals of long-range surveillance with binoculars and cameras. Finally, they practiced blending into isolated communities.

Unfortunately, I did not communicate the intent of the training well enough to their commander. During their final evaluation, the reconnaissance team briefed their plan to reconnoiter a notional objective in plainclothes. The commander immediately rejected the small team plan as too dangerous and plainclothes operations as possibly illegal. In our drive to organize for intelligence, I failed to understand the personal and cultural roadblocks that would prevent adoption of these reconnaissance techniques.

Organize for Intelligence

The detachment also invested in Afghan intelligence production by tightening its relationship with the American former police investigators who trained and mentored the PRC's investigative arm. Rapid advisor turnover and minimal intelligence production had sidelined the investigators. However, more engaged advisors, detachment pressure, and Afghan interest restored their morale and increased output. Intelligence development is a long-term process, but restarting intelligence early led to three successful Afghan operations that captured insurgent weapons and ammunition.

Fortuitously, a new Hungarian detachment also arrived during the reconstitution period, bringing a signals intelligence system. We had met this detachment during pre-mission training in Germany and were excited to have this experienced and competent force join us. Unlike the other systems in use before their arrival, the Hungarian system provided detailed signals intelligence analysis exclusively for our task unit. No longer forced to compete for scarce American signals intelligence resources, we increased our intelligence production to develop appropriate confidence operations for phase three of our restoration efforts.

Coordinate Everything With Everybody

As General Zinni advises in his ninth consideration, we coordinated everything with everybody. Though we had already met with the battle space integrator, we redoubled our rapport-building efforts. I participated in his weekly meetings, sent my intelligence sergeant to their intelligence meetings, and started attending the brigade commander's "SOF Shura" (special operations forces meeting) to disseminate our message across eastern Afghanistan. We also pressed the broader SOF community for support. Another special forces company lent intelligence and some assault ladders, while also promising coordination on future Afghan operations. Meetings with other government agencies provided valuable intelligence and material support.

Outside of the Army, detachment engineer and weapons sergeants built a symbiotic relationship with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams (FAST). The DEA FAST partnered with Afghan national counter-narcotics police, who had national authorities and independent intelligence collection. What the FAST did not have was permission to conduct operations unilaterally. National counter narcotics police warrants and intelligence would provide the basis for the PRC's first confidence-building operations.

Organize for Interagency Operations

We also pushed the PRC to coordinate everything with everybody and reorganized them for Afghan interagency operations. During the PRC's reconstitution period, the national special police headquarters sent each PRC a colonel to raise unit stature. COL Mohmad Gul was new to Nangarhar and not interested in staying at the base and licking his wounds. Instead, he became the interagency face of the PRC.

Careful invitation of Afghan officers to the PRC memorial ceremony across the security forces opened the door to Afghan interagency coordination. As the PRC recovered and retrained, COL Gul developed relationships with everyone. Our meeting with the Afghan 2/4/203 Infantry yielded the promise of an Army support platoon on any operation in their area of operations. The Afghan local police in Shinwar, a prominent district in the province, secured roads for PRC searches. The provincial prosecutor dispatched prosecutors to assist PRC operations to protect the chain of custody and ensure operations were conducted legally. The national counter-narcotics police provided intelligence and warrants for arrest operations.

Restore Confidence

Start easy and seek early victories

Only six weeks after losing 13 patrolmen to the Taliban, the PRC arrested a narcotics and insurgency financier on a pre-dawn raid that validated the interagency task organization and PRC's new tactics. The PRC infiltrated under the cover of darkness, led by a source of the Afghan counter-narcotics police. Afghan Army Soldiers secured the outer-cordon and egress route. With the target secure, the "cordon and knock" technique yielded the target without a shot fired. The provincial prosecutor ensured the operation was conducted legally. This operation revitalized the PRC and morale was restored. This blueprint—nighttime infiltration with door knock at dawn—provided the template for subsequent operations, both partnered and increasingly unilateral.

We cemented victory on confidence operations by awarding "high-risk arrest" badges. Like Napoleon, my detachment knew "a Soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon." These badges celebrated the mettle of the patrolmen brave enough to face a midnight raid. The detachment wore them too; together we fought and earned the patches.

Engage the women

On target, we bumped into this fundamental from Dr. Kilcullen. Though our task force brought together the diverse resources and skills of eight allied nations, it did not bring the highly trained women of the cultural support teams. Ever resourceful, my detachment identified two military policewomen from the California National Guard who wanted to help. These women sought a break from setting speed traps for ATVs travelling faster than 15 miles per hour around the base's one-mile perimeter. They came on target, searched female quarters, and talked to local women.

We were content with our innovation, but then the PRC went a step further. Our military policewomen had encouraged innovation and nontraditional responses in the PRC. They brought out policewomen from the Nangarhar Police Headquarters and we were shocked. These women defied cultural stereotypes and were the best police in Afghanistan. They did not kick around clothes; they searched. They did not flip through books; they examined. Most importantly, they did not let local women get away with things, and they did not put up with bad behavior from the male police either. Dr. Kilcullen says local forces should mirror the enemy, but here, our mentorship pushed the PRC to be better than the enemy.

Be there

Confidence operations restored morale and combat rebuilt trust, but only vengeance would cement the PRC's confidence in themselves and us, their advisors. We took them back to Sherzad to face the men who killed their comrades. Afghan helicopters inserted us, (the detachment, PRC, and counter-narcotics police) and awoke insurgents deep in their safe zone. Explosive destruction of two opium factories stirred the rest. Occasional insurgent pop- shots transitioned to steady rifle fire and then thudding machinegun rounds. The Taliban answered our helicopter mini-gun fire with their own heavy machineguns. AC-130 cannon fire ended the battle. We gave as good as we got. The PRC celebrated their victory and returned renewed.

Two Regrets

Despite our success in reconstituting PRC Nangarhar, I have two regrets: one related to information operations, and the other to Afghan combined after action reviews (AARs). Both General Zinni and Dr. Kilcullen emphasize the importance of information in COIN, using terms like dialogue, image, information management, psychological operations, and narrative. Our

efforts to influence the Afghan and coalition leaders and bureaucrats succeeded: the PRC received necessary material and personnel. Important Afghan leaders came to their base and spoke of their sacrifice. However, the only Afghan media to cover their cause came from the chief of police who understood and used media. Building this capacity in the PRC commander may have been impossible for cultural reasons, but I should have tried. The good news story of the PRC's reconstitution could have been followed across Nangarhar, improving the image and standing of the organization.

My second regret is that I did not conduct effective AARs with the PRC. Surprisingly, neither General Zinni's considerations nor Dr. Kilcullen's fundamentals emphasize how we should teach our partners to learn. Training Circular (TC) 25-20 specifies that AARs are "conducted during or immediately after each event" and repeatedly emphasizes the immediacy of successful reviews. [viii] If local forces are the long-term solution to security, we have a duty to help them reflect and learn. 13 kilometers separated the PRC from Jalalabad Airfield where my detachment lived. After 24 or 48 hours of continuous operations, we never took the time to stop in with our partners after an operation. Instead, we would meet with leaders the next day or days later to discuss successes and failures. Did our comments get down to the right rifleman? I doubt it. I knew this was wrong at the time, but my exhaustion overcame my desire to teach at those moments. Dig deep.

Conclusion

Setback is a dangerous way to think about challenges in insurgency. General Anthony Zinni and Dr. David Kilcullen offer valuable insights into how we conduct insurgency at the tactical level. At least 20 percent of those insights fit the case I described. However, they neglect the human connection necessary to build and advise partners. The death of 13 of my partners and desertion of their force was not a setback to be managed, but a leadership challenge for my detachment and myself to overcome. Advisors in COIN need to be invested in growing partner capabilities so they can stand on their own. They also need to know when to take the reins.

When the PRC suffered their catastrophic losses, we got them back on track by recognizing their losses, reconstituting the force, and restoring their confidence. My detachment ensured everyone knew what the PRC needed to recover and made sure it was delivered. Reconstituting the force had internal and external components. Internally, my detachment retrained the PRC and reorganized them to conduct interagency operations. Though we reached outside the PRC initially to bolster their combat power, the lasting interagency orientation made PRC Nangarhar especially adept at COIN operations because they could leverage the strengths of their partners. Finally, we leaned on the one thing that can restore confidence in security forces after a setback: tactical operations. We provided those operations in spades, but carefully tailored each mission to ensure it built on the previous operation. Another big loss might have broken them for good.

The night in January that I said goodbye to my footlockers and welcomed my replacement, the PRC captured insurgent weapons on a unilateral dawn raid based on intelligence from their own investigators. A prosecutor served a warrant and supervised the operation. The police chief issued a congratulatory message. The next night, the PRC did it again. The PRC, the wounded comrade we had been helping along, was now running on their own. Our mission had been accomplished.

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End Notes

[i] Ahmed and Sahak, "Scores Killed in 2 Days of Clashes Between Afghan Police and Taliban Fighters."

[ii] "Sharpen Those Pencils - 15 January Getting Danger Close | Small Wars Journal."

[iii] Hooker Jr and Collins, "Lessons Encountered," 277.

[iv] Douglas A. Livermore, "Green Berets Receive Awards for Valor at Battalion Ball."

[v] ISAF Public diplomacy division, "Media Backgrounder: Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)."

[vi] US Department of the Army, FM 3-90-1: Offense and Defense, 1:1–26.

[vii]"LiveLeak.com - Mujahidin Taking over Control of Sherzad District - Nangarhar 6 Aug.2013."

[viii] US Department of the Army, "TC 25-20: After-Action Reviews," 2

Chapter 5

Retooling U.S. Security Sector Assistance

Stephen Tankel, Tommy Ross

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https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/reforming-u-s-security-sector-assistance-for-great-power-competition/

One of America's most important foreign policy tools is not fit for its purpose. U.S. security sector assistance—the means by which the United States strengthens alliances and partners—is stuck in the past. Crucially, it is out of sync with U.S. priorities when it comes to where resources are needed most, and the types of capabilities required by America's allies and partners.

Despite widespread agreement on the need to prioritize strategic competition with Russia and China, the U.S. still directs a disproportionate amount of assistance toward the Middle East. An emphasis on counterterrorism (CT) since 9/11 has also contributed to an emphasis on building the wrong capabilities. The U.S. is not equipping allies and partners with the capabilities they need to deal with competitors who are adopting increasingly sophisticated strategies in the areas of cyber security, strategic communications, and illicit commercial activity. Moreover, the mechanisms needed to integrate security sector competition with other instruments of national power, including diplomacy, military operations, strategic communications, and other foreign assistance, are underdeveloped at best. These shortcomings hinder U.S. allies and partners, in turn leaving them vulnerable to Chinese and Russian influence.

Assistance could and should be a critical tool for deterring competitors and enabling, influencing, and reassuring frontline allies and partners. Making it so will require the U.S. to change how it envisions, prioritizes, plans, and executes security sector assistance, and that it become more adept at using assistance for signaling purposes. This in turn will necessitate that the executive and legislative branches work together to expand the resources for security assistance or to end the misuse of the resources currently available. In taking these steps, the U.S. government should ensure that assistance is delivered in a way that reinforces, rather than neglects, its fundamental commitment to democracy and human rights, for ignoring these values cedes valuable ground to America's competitors.

Signs of a Gradual Shift

The United States provides security sector assistance to foreign civilian and military forces, agencies, and institutions ranging from local law enforcement and judicial systems to standing militaries. This assistance is intended to strengthen U.S. access to key territories and facilities; shape partners' national security decision making and governance; and build their capacity and capabilities for use against shared threats and adversaries. It also promotes the U.S. defense industry via arms transfers; supports the infrastructure and operations of multilateral organizations such as NATO; and increases military interoperability. The State Department implements assistance across the entire security sector, including organizations responsible for

defense, law enforcement, and security of key assets like ports and borders. The Department of Defense (DOD) has a narrower mandate and provides assistance to partner militaries under the umbrella of security cooperation. The Pentagon also engages in a range of other activities—combined exercises, staff talks, port visits, and officer exchanges—that fall under security cooperation as well. We use the term security sector assistance for simplicity and to distinguish where these additional security cooperation activities are relevant. The U.S. government does not typically define foreign military sales as assistance, but we believe it should, and that it should factor direct commercial sales into its assistance planning as well. Both types of sales can lead to sustained U.S. engagement with a partner in the form of training, maintenance, and sustainment for the purchased items.

Over the last several years, the national security enterprise has endeavored to shift its broader focus—from weapons systems to diplomacy—away from CT and toward strategic competition with state actors. As part of this shift, policymakers have attempted to realign security assistance to contribute more directly to strategic competition, primarily by creating new resources for security assistance in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. The European Deterrence Initiative, launched in 2014, has allocated around 6 billion dollars annually to enhance America's deterrent posture in regards to Russia. It has been supplemented by the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, authorized by Congress in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to provide 250 million dollars in security assistance to bolster Ukraine's security. Congress also created the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative in 2014, later re-designated as the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative, and funded it as a five-year, 425 million dollar security assistance effort, which it has since extended through FY2025. This program is intended to improve the ability of Southeast and East Asian nations to address growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. In the FY2021 defense bill currently being finalized, Congress is set to authorize a Pacific Deterrence Initiative. This initiative is modeled on the European Deterrence Initiative, and may be funded with as much as 6 billion dollars annually to improve U.S. posture in the Asia-Pacific region. It will reportedly have a significant security assistance component.

These efforts have been laudable, but far from sufficient. The European Deterrence Initiative has largely been used to shift enduring costs for U.S. military presence in Europe into the Overseas Contingency Operations portion of the defense budget. It has also dedicated the vast majority of funds to posture and equipment pre-positioning, with little attention to security assistance beyond combined exercises—a significant missed opportunity. The Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative has been managed insularly by the U.S. Europe Command, which has bypassed synchronization with other Defense Department and U.S. government stakeholders, leading to a focus on the provision of "training and equipment at the expense of developing a long-term strategic vision and implementation of meaningful defense reform." In the Asia-Pacific, the Maritime Security Initiative has shown promise, but its relatively limited funding has failed to significantly contribute to a rebalance of assistance toward the region, and it has largely funded projects with little deterrent value. Incoming U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander Adm. Philip Davidson declared, "China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States." Moreover, none of these initiatives have prioritized partner security sector governance—a vital element of any strategy that seeks to shape the behavior of U.S. allies and partners. As Congress considers the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, it is essential that these mistakes (failure to integrate security assistance with other instruments of national power, overemphasis on posture at the expense of cooperation, and too little ambition for assistance initiatives) are not repeated. Even avoiding them, however, will go only so far in terms of optimizing security sector assistance for the challenges ahead. The U.S.

government should also address broader challenges with the way security sector assistance is prioritized and executed.

Still an Outmoded Instrument

To increase the effectiveness of security sector assistance for strategic competition, the United States should address deficiencies related to where and how it uses this assistance. Currently, assistance is focused on the wrong countries and being used to build the wrong capabilities. Assistance remains over-directed toward countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central Asia, rather than to those in Europe and Southeast Asia where the main competition with Russia and China occurs. There are several reasons for this disparity.

First, annual commitments to Israel and Egypt—totaling 3.3 billion dollars and 1.3 billion dollars, respectively—eat up a large portion of the Foreign Military Financing budget. The origins of U.S. munificence to both countries is linked to the "payoff for peace," that is, the U.S. commitment to Israel and Egypt after they signed the 1979 Camp David Accords. Distinct from the Foreign Military Sales program, through which the State Department brokers purchases of U.S.-made defense articles and defense services by foreign partners, the Foreign Military Financing program provides grants and loans to help partners (generally lower-income countries) purchase those articles and services. It is intended to be the premier program for building the capabilities of frontline allies and partners. Given its purpose, it would make sense for the U.S. to be steering more Foreign Military Financing toward Europe and Asia.

Second, the 9/11 attacks brought new requirements: promoting CT cooperation and rapidly building the capacity of local partner forces, especially the creation or enhancement of tactical units, to address "urgent and emergent threats." This naturally led to a focus on countries where terrorists operated or might take root, which reinforced the geographic focus on the Middle East, and expanded it to include countries in Central and South Asia. This focus was especially marked at the Defense Department. The amount of assistance it administers climbed significantly since 9/11 and totaled just over 7.5 billion dollars in the FY2021 budget request. Approximately 6.5 billion dollars comes from contingency funds for capacity building in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflict zones. Supporting these conflicts created additional security assistance cost centers among partners that played critical roles supporting CT operations and U.S. logistics footprints. For example, Pakistan received over 23 billion dollars in security assistance and military reimbursements as a result of its importance to the U.S. as a CT partner after 9/11. Jordan has also experienced a marked increase in assistance over the same period, receiving close to 10 billion dollars.

Overall, the U.S. spends about 20 billion dollars annually on security sector assistance, of which only approximately eight percent is allotted to Europe, East Asia, and the Pacific, according to Security Assistance Monitor. Addressing this imbalance will require the departments of State and Defense to reprioritize their budget requests, and Congress to cease earmarking security sector assistance dollars based on outmoded objectives.

The overriding focus on CT in U.S. security sector assistance programs and national security strategy (NSS) more broadly over the past two decades has not only contributed to its orientation toward the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central Asia; it also compounded challenges related to how the U.S. uses assistance, specifically America's emphasis on countering urgent threats and on capacity building for CT or special operations units. Where the State Department provides assistance to civilian security sector forces and institutions in other countries, it overemphasizes building tactical capabilities for law enforcement (that is,

training small operational units on narrow capabilities like interdicting narcotraffickers or conducting CT raids) at the expense of the administrative capacity and professionalism of these forces and institutions. Defense Department assistance has similarly focused on building the tactical capabilities of partner militaries. Such tactical assistance—which often includes status-signaling weapons systems and resources to supplement partner personnel training budgets—is often prioritized by partners as well, particularly in the absence of effective U.S. messaging on the importance of broader reforms.

The U.S. emphasis on CT led to a buildup of Special Operations Command and the services' special operations forces components as well, and a commensurate focus on building the capacity of their special operations counterparts in other countries. Although the services dispense assistance, they don't invest much in terms of the planning necessary to tie the execution of this assistance to either specific objectives or longer-term engagements. Other than the Army's security force assistance brigades, the services don't organize for the security sector assistance mission. Even in the Asia-Pacific, the main focus of assistance before the Maritime Security Initiative was the special operations forces capacity-building mission in the Philippines. This focus on special operations force has left the services, and U.S. partners' conventional forces, out of the equation in many places. Iraq and Afghanistan are a notable exception, but even in these countries the U.S. has focused on building specific types of military units with a heavy emphasis on partner special operations capacity.

While the United States has directed security sector assistance toward the Middle East and South and Central Asia and focused more on building partners' tactical capacity for CT, Russia and China are using aggressive military pressure to coerce neighbors and compete in new domains, such as cyber and space. They are also using instruments of statecraft outside the traditional security arena, such as economic pressure, lawfare, and even technical standards-setting. For example, China has used commercially flagged fishing vessels to perform militia-like functions in support of its activities around South China Sea features. Russia has used its cyber capabilities to disrupt critical infrastructure, interfere in elections, undermine political leaders, and spread disinformation throughout NATO-aligned Eastern Europe. The U.S. has failed to keep pace—either on its own in terms of its use of all instruments of national power, or in terms of the security assistance it provides partners to enhance their capabilities to mount effective responses and build resilience.

Optimizing Security Sector Assistance

If security assistance is to be an effective tool in strategic competition, then the U.S. government needs to do better. Washington should develop a sophisticated, integrated planning process at the State Department and DOD for security assistance; significantly increase the Foreign Military Financing budget or redirect spending from the Middle East and North Africa to Asia and Eastern Europe; use security assistance to convey strategic messages to both rivals and partners; and feature human rights considerations more prominently when engaging in arms sales. This would require the U.S. to address underlying deficiencies in planning, prioritization, and execution in ways that account for the unique challenges that Russian and Chinese approaches to competition bring: the use of disinformation, private security contractors, cyber tools, and civilian and commercial actors, such as commercial fishing fleets. This is not to suggest that Washington should look to security sector assistance as the solution to all of its national security challenges. Rather, assistance should be better integrated with other instruments of national power. The following recommendations are intended to close the gap between where the U.S. currently is regarding its use of security sector assistance and where it

needs to be to compete effectively. Some of these recommendations are focused more squarely on China and Russia, whereas others relate to broader reforms to the security sector assistance enterprise.

The first recommendation is that it is essential to create coordinated, department-wide planning processes at the departments of State and Defense. The U.S. government is hamstrung by inefficient and incoherent planning and coordination processes that do not allocate assistance based on U.S. foreign policy priorities, country prioritization, availability of resources, and regional and country-specific assumptions. Congressional earmarks make prioritization more difficult, but getting rid of them will not solve the problem. Policymakers should recognize the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of many aspects of strategic competition and begin to break down stovepipes both within and between key agencies involved in the planning and completion of security assistance. Interagency coordination should move beyond mere deconfliction and concurrence toward a truly collaborative real-time planning and response. Lack of coordination also exists within departments, which should reform their assistance planning processes. Of equal importance, security sector assistance planning, and prioritization should account for the fact that China and Russia are mounting sustained challenges to governance and rule of law at the regional, national, and multinational levels. Advancing governance and rule of law therefore should be a key aim of assistance.

The State Department has a wider mandate for security assistance, encompassing both military aid and assistance for civilians. It is also supposed to use security assistance to advance broader, more long-term objectives like trade and investment, efforts to help allies and partners develop an innovation base, and major diplomatic initiatives. To fulfill this mission, the State Department should develop a planning process that elevates common interagency objectives for assistance, deconflicts competing objectives where necessary, identifies security assistance resources projected to be available for the period of time necessary to achieve such objectives, and recommends the allocation of assistance based on U.S. foreign policy priorities. Those priorities should be derived from the next administration's NSS and informed by the availability of resources, and regional and country-specific assumptions. The State Department also needs to create a framework to guide the use of assistance as dictated by the above planning process in alignment with other instruments of national power, and a framework for factoring in how arms sales—both Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales—might affect U.S. security assistance planning and broader U.S. foreign policy objectives. Last year, the House of Representatives passed a State Authorization Act that required these and other reforms, but it has languished in the Senate since then.

Defense Department assistance should focus narrowly on four inherently military objectives. First, supporting State Department-coordinated efforts to build long-term capacity so that an ally or partner can manage its own security challenges. Second, achieving a fundamental improvement in U.S. posture to prevail (including via coalitions) in a potential contingency, for example, by assisting a partner to build a deep-water port or develop the capability to contribute in a specific role to potential coalition operations. Third, generating short-term capacity when deemed necessary to achieve strategic objectives or improving interoperability for a specific goal. And, fourth, responding to real-time developments, such as deterrent signaling, personnel recovery, or humanitarian response. Defense Department planners should be required to identify the objectives they are serving and justify their plans on that basis. They also should be conducting a rigorous analysis to identify gaps in Pentagon plans for contingency scenarios involving near-peer competitors or other real-time developments that could impact U.S. interests and basing priorities for security assistance on those gaps. Stronger

links between contingency planning and security cooperation will help focus Defense Department security assistance and advance strategic competition.

The second recommendation is that a more sophisticated and coordinated planning process should lead the U.S. to redirect security assistance to U.S. allies and partners in Asia and Eastern Europe and expand the nature of assistance provided. The U.S. government has begun shifting some assistance, such as Section 333 capacity building administered by the Pentagon, away from U.S. Central Command countries to countries in the U.S. European Command and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command regions. The State and Defense departments need to accelerate this shift to compete more effectively with Russia and China. The U.S. should be using Foreign Military Financing, as well as Maritime Security Initiative funding and other programs, to help regional states in Asia develop anti-access and area denial systems to challenge Chinese power-projection operations. The departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security should also be coordinating to increase support for U.S. Coast Guard cooperation with allies and partners to challenge China's white hull strategy.

Realizing a significant reallocation of security assistance in support of strategic competition will require increasing the overall budget for Foreign Military Financing, these budgets have declined from a peak of 9.4 billion dollars in FY2015 to the current year's 7.5 billion dollars, while the importance placed on security cooperation with allies and partners and the variety of threats they face have increased. The amount of such an increase will depend on the needs of key allies and partners, and whether Congress is willing to reduce Foreign Military Financing to Israel and Egypt, which in some years accounts for nearly two-thirds of the program's budget. Unquestionably, the State Department can improve its prioritization of the remaining amount, which is spread across more than 100 partners globally, but those limited resources go only so far.

In our experience, selling Congress on an injection of resources or on reductions to Israel and Egypt will require considerable effort. The State Department would need not only to provide a compelling strategy for how resources that can be freed up by reducing commitments to Israel and Egypt will be used to improve America's national security posture, it also will need to provide a convincing assessment that such reductions will not infringe on Israel's qualitative military edge in the region or lead to a breakdown in the peace treaties between Israel and Egypt. We believe these crucial U.S. interests (Israel's security and regional stability) can be maintained at lower aid levels. However, we are also realistic about the political challenges that make such a shift so difficult regardless of what any policy analysis suggests. For this reason, although we typically would recommend starting with a reallocation of existing resources before increasing the overall budget, we recognize that directing more money to the problem might be the least-worst option. A compelling case can be made for new resources and authorities to expand the types of aid provided under Foreign Military Financing—including to address the gaps identified above, such as cyber security and law enforcement. The argument will be strongest if it is articulated within broader strategies for competing with China and Russia.

In addition to Foreign Military Financing, there are a mix of other programs the U.S. could use to increase the capacity and capabilities of key Eastern European NATO allies. As Max Bergmann observed on these pages a few years ago, Congress is likely to be unwilling to provide much assistance funding through traditional grant methods, especially as Eastern European countries are wealthier than typical grant assistance recipients. This approach is deeply flawed: Many of Eastern Europe's governments lack the economic wherewithal to

engage in the types of military development necessary to compete with Russia. Moreover, the U.S. has clear and urgent goals in the region that should not be left dependent on the vicissitudes of partners' budget politics. At the same time, we agree with Bergmann that the U.S. cannot and should not shoulder too much of the responsibility for these countries, which should demonstrate a commitment to acquisitions. One of the problems with Foreign Military Sales, though, is that U.S. weapons systems that Eastern European militaries would need to compete with Russia are top-of-the-line and likely unaffordable for mid-tier countries. Providing excess defense articles is one workaround, but this puts recipients at the mercy of what is available. Bergmann's recommendation that the U.S. provide a mix of grants and loans to help NATO countries make acquisitions themselves is a fine one, and we would offer complementary or alternative approaches as well. The U.S. government could consider a lend-lease program in which equipment itself is provided via a loan or low-cost lease for a period of time to be used in an agreed-upon manner, after which the recipient could purchase the equipment at a reduced cost. Pooled sales and multilateral cooperative platforms modeled on the Movement Coordination Center Europe are other promising solutions. Any one of these models would be an improvement on the current approach.

As China, Russia, and others compete across a range of domains stretching beyond traditional military strength—cyber security, law enforcement, and disinformation—the U.S. government should enhance its ability to provide timely, relevant assistance in these areas. In our experience in government, American allies and partners routinely ask for this assistance. Yet, U.S. capacity building in each of these areas is immature. Cyber security assistance is meagerly resourced and often ad hoc, with limited assistance programs spread incoherently across government agencies. Likewise, intelligence and law enforcement capacity building are limited and often plagued by turf battles. Enabling allies and partners to counter disinformation represents an emerging area of focus, and Washington should rise to the occasion. In many of these areas, effective governance is often one of the most crucial gaps America's allies and partners confront. To meet these challenges, the U.S. should reimagine security sector assistance, factor in its impact on governance and rule of law and increase the involvement of the departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Treasury.

The third recommendation is that the U.S. should enhance the ability to use security assistance to deliver strategic messages to allies and partners on the one hand and competitors on the other. Assistance can be a valuable tool to reassure allies and partners, incentivize them to take or avoid certain actions, and reinforce coalitions or multilateral structures. It can also be used to deter competitors in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and timely by communicating redlines, demonstrating new capabilities, and responding to provocations. This means not only providing assistance that will have material effect but also delivering assistance to maximize its strategic messaging value in terms of timing and context. For instance, the delivery of new weapons systems or the demonstration of an emerging partner capability in the context of a joint exercise might be timed to occur in response to real-time developments, such as feature reclamation in the South China Sea or election interference. To maximize the signaling potential of assistance, planners should incorporate strategic messaging into their assistance plans, understanding how to time, sequence, and announce aid delivery. The State and Defense departments should also develop the ability to mount rapid responses.

Finally, although the U.S. will need to work with illiberal states at times, it also needs to account for how the assistance it provides and arms it sells will be used by recipients and perceived by third parties in ways that impact overall support for a free and open international system. For example, there are valid reasons for the U.S. to sustain its longstanding partnerships with Gulf

nations like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, but these partnerships carry costs that can undermine accountability to U.S. democratic and human rights principles. Put simply, the actions of U.S. allies and partners can implicate the United States, and it should calibrate assistance, especially arms sales, accordingly.

We recognize but reject several of the arguments that can be made for overlooking the behavior of countries that receive assistance or purchase arms from the U.S. Policymakers may be concerned that if the United States makes it harder to buy U.S. weapons, then foreign governments will turn to Russia and China, thereby robbing it of the economic and political influence it currently enjoys. The economic argument does not stand up to scrutiny. Military spending may create fewer jobs than public spending in other sectors, and arms exports in particular appear less likely to positively impact job growth because they often require offsets. Policymakers also may believe that arming partners, even if they behave irresponsibly, is the best or perhaps only option for achieving deterrence against shared competitors and adversaries. In reality, clearly articulating redlines and retaining pre-positioning agreements and emergency basing rights for military access may be a better option. Additionally, we would point out that in both cases, the U.S. has more leverage with recipients than it might appear. Countries that are critical to U.S. national interests are already longtime recipients of security assistance and purchasers of American arms, meaning they are already reliant on U.S. trainers and support systems. These countries may be able to diversify their arms sourcing—and many partners are already seeking a strategic hedge by purchasing defense systems from multiple security providers—but they will find it difficult to shift completely from the U.S. to another primary patron. Because of the long support tails and interoperability requirements associated with most sophisticated weapons systems, partners would pay a significant cost, in terms of both finances and functionality, to end assistance relationships with the US.

There is value in using arms sales for strategic influence or to undermine U.S. competitors, but these gains should be weighed against the costs of arming unreliable partners. In general, the U.S. should be wary of using arms sales and military aid to compete with Russia and China for the allegiance of countries that both lack strategic value and have poor records when it comes to governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights. This does not mean zeroing out assistance to any country that fails to meet U.S. expectations in these areas. To avoid falling into the trap of believing the U.S. needs to outbid Russia and China by lowering its standards, the State Department should reassess positive and negative incentives built into security assistance planning. A more sophisticated range of options, including offramps, redlines, and positive conditions, should be routinely included in security assistance planning for risky partners, improving both U.S. leverage and its ability to walk away when needed. These incentives and redlines should be clearly communicated to partners early and often.

Conclusion

Security sector assistance was critical for building the web of U.S. alliances and partnerships that endures across the globe, as well as the military capacity of many countries in these regions. That was then. This is now. Today, the U.S. is no longer well-positioned to use security sector assistance to compete with China and Russia—especially in “gray zone” activities short of war—or to prepare for a potential conflict with either of them. Security sector assistance can be a vital tool of American statecraft. Using it effectively will require rethinking the types of assistance the U.S. provides, reorienting this assistance toward the regions that matter most, and better integrating it with other instruments of national power. Much of the hard work will take place behind the scenes, in Congress and the interagency

process, where reforms to the ways in which security assistance is prioritized, planned, and implemented are desperately needed.

Chapter 6

Back to The Future: Security Force Assistance After Afghanistan and The End of The U.S. Strategic Vacation

Jahara Matisek, William Reno

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When the Cold War ended in 1991, the United States emerged with hegemonic primacy. Over the succeeding three decades, U.S. foreign policy programs tended to reflect the aspirational priorities of a generally good-willed superpower with the luxury of being essentially unchallenged. The proliferating list of these priorities included increasingly precise elements of democratic promotion and support for global norms (i.e., those promulgated by the United States and its allies) like free markets and human rights. During this time, there were no existential consequences for American strategic hubris and failures with interventions (e.g., Somalia). However, with China and Russia growing more assertive, parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe are now contested through indirect approaches (e.g., providing military aid, advisors, and information warfare). This indirect approach to competition is a strategic reality, given the imperative for nuclear armed powers to avoid direct conflict with one another and attendant risks of uncontrolled escalation. Moreover, the baroque complexity of the U.S. framework for security force assistance (SFA)—as it emerged during the post-Cold War years when a lack of meaningful strategic pressure allowed it to do so and was based on the idea that flaws can be addressed with new layers of rules and procedures (e.g., the Leahy Law)—provides ample opportunities for adversaries to exploit these weaknesses.

Now the strategic vacation is over.

The previous administration of Donald Trump elevated great-power competition to the center of U.S. national interests and President Joe Biden's administration is furthering this agenda of strategic competition against China and Russia. In this context, unlike during America's unipolar moment, there are real U.S. strategic consequences of poor choices regarding intervention and engagement with partners. Reckless state-building endeavors, directionless counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, expansive and ill-defined counterterrorism (CT) missions, and elaborate SFA programs—all aimed at shaping the world in the United States' image—are becoming a strategic liability. This reckoning is what retired General H.R. McMaster described as "strategic narcissism," which he defined as "the tendency to define challenges to national security as we would like them to be and to pay too little attention to the agency that others have over the future." Still, although we muddled through years of SFA in places like Iraq and Afghanistan with remarkably little to show for it, effective competition will hinge heavily on SFA going forward. This means trying to make allied, partner, and proxy security forces more effective but, critically, doing so in new ways that borrow from Cold War–era models that are better suited to the return of strategic competition.

As debates grow about the future of SFA (if the United States should continue spending almost 20 billion dollars a year on it, and where to engage for maximum influence) policymakers and strategists face a no-win situation. Growing international competition to provide SFA means tough decisions regarding how to spread U.S. SFA resources globally. Should efforts be

weighted toward partners like Ukraine and Taiwan to signal to adversaries that America is committed to strengthening their relatively capable armed forces? Or should regions like Africa and the Middle East be prioritized, places where partners may not share U.S. strategic aims and where regimes might be fearful that increased military capacity will be turned against them? Among this latter category, there is also now an option for countries to turn to China, Russia, and other SFA providers (e.g., Turkey in Somalia or the United Arab Emirates in Libya), who often prove more adept than the U.S. at working in these political contexts. Whether to signal commitment or to avoid simply ceding ground to rivals, today's competitive environment means that the U.S. will have little choice but to continue (and grow) some SFA missions, regardless of the U.S. military leadership's apparent desire to pivot back to general-purpose forces for high-end conventional warfare.

The Context of Growing SFA Competition

The importance of continuing SFA missions, despite its catastrophic (and costly) failure in Afghanistan, comes as the U.S. relearns lessons of Cold War competition between nuclear-armed powers in which the exercise of violence is confined to limited wars in the strategic periphery. Direct confrontation in areas of core strategic concern to adversaries—as Ukraine is from a Russian perspective—presents too great a risk of escalation to nuclear war. The main arena for the pursuit of influence through force of arms is in the periphery and through allies, partners, and proxies. That was true during the Cold War, and it included SFA involvement in a number of developing countries' civil wars, directly in Vietnam, for example, and indirectly in Angola, Mozambique, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and elsewhere. This resembles the 21st century terrain for SFA, and its outsized strategic role in relation to actual expenditures and force commitments means the U.S. needs to get it right. This is a departure from U.S. SFA in Afghanistan in recent years, principally because, absent the Cold War context, that mission largely lacked clear strategic purpose once the Taliban regime was destroyed and al-Qaeda scattered.

It is understandable that U.S. policymakers and military leaders want to forget Afghanistan, like many earlier wanted to forget Vietnam, but also wholly irresponsible. Instead, U.S. leaders should learn the lessons from the failure of Afghanistan, of which three are already evident. First, SFA should not be undertaken unless the potential strategic gains outweigh the risk. Having strategic clarity means not intervening every time China or Russia intervenes in some insignificant area. It may be better for the U.S. to sit out the Central African Republic civil war (2012–present) and let Russia make its own self-inflicted mistakes there as the Wagner Group embroils Moscow in that country's conflict. This means U.S. political leaders must be able to articulate how and why a particular SFA mission serves U.S. national interests and look to make small, achievable gains.

Second, SFA must be adapted to the realities of increasing numbers of partners that lack the political will to sustain high-capability forces and that do not fully share U.S. political interests. This means not giving partners expensive equipment that they cannot afford or maintain. These host-nation forces can eventually be cracked by politically committed and motivated insurgents when Americans are not there to oversee them. Some good partners can appear in otherwise difficult environments, such as the U.S-led SFA mission to Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State. But that congruence of political will and capabilities will not be the norm.

Finally, gains from SFA must be understood in nuanced, comparative terms. Even amid the overall failure of Afghanistan, there were both things that were done right and things that were done wrong. There is also value in allies and partners providing SFA alongside U.S. forces in certain regions as a way of signaling commitment, improving interoperability, and increasing costs to competitors. All of this suggests that future SFA missions will be much smaller than in Afghanistan and will jettison most state-building agendas. Such SFA will be limited in terms of expectations that recipients will mimic U.S. standards of behavior.

SFA is the Future

Indirect approaches matter, especially because U.S. rivals have learned—not least by watching what befell Saddam Hussain in 1991 and, more fatally, in 2003—not to engage in actions that provoke a conventional U.S. military response. Along with acquiring, or trying to acquire, their own nuclear weapons as an insurance policy, adversaries have turned to indirectly engaging in places like Yemen and Syria, across the Indo-Pacific region, and in Africa to achieve gains without facing a harsh American military response.

To compete, the U.S. must be able to more effectively wield its SFA capabilities. Doing so means understanding four ways of improving its delivery from the strategic to the tactical level.

First, there need to be key influencers involved in any large-scale efforts to work with partner and proxy forces in making them more militarily effective. This might mean creating a regionally-focused Joint task force, getting Congress to authorize a named SFA mission, or appointing a general officer or senior civilian equivalent as a "czar" to oversee long-term efforts in a certain country or region. These steps would increase accountability while reducing the likelihood of rapid turnover, including departures of those who developed a deep understanding of the local political context.

Second, the U.S. military most overcomes risk aversion when it comes to working with host-nation governments and their security forces. The deaths of four U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers in a 2017 ambush while on patrol with Nigerien security forces caused so much congressional blowback that the Pentagon significantly scaled back its military presence in Africa in 2018. Then, in 2020, almost all in-person advising with Afghan forces ceased because of COVID-19. Moreover, as a number of U.S. and European advisors have described in interviews, many of their advisory missions to Africa and the Middle East were canceled because of COVID-19 concerns. The shift to virtual military advising did not work, as many Western advisors lamented in interviews that partner forces would evasively engage in "performative behaviors" during video calls because advisors could not verify the reality being sold to them. However, Iranian and Russian military advisors continued working alongside pro-Assad military forces in Syria regardless of COVID-19 dangers.

Third, expertise matters and must be paired with achievable objectives. Efforts in Sierra Leone after its civil war ended in 2002 are instructive. The deep involvement by two U.S. ambassadors, John Hirsch and Joseph Melrose, was critical. Building a robust peace process through strong negotiations was effective because of these two career diplomats' knowledge and experience. Each brought strong analytical skills and extensive on-the-ground understanding to help rebuild the government and security forces of Sierra Leone in a rare example of a relatively low-cost, high-return undertaking with clearly articulated U.S. goals.

Finally, while plenty of research demonstrates that gender equality and diversity reduce the likelihood of civil war, the narcissistic belief that this can be quickly imposed in more traditional, conservative societies creates backlash even if it generates progress in some

quarters. For example, interviews with current and former Ukrainian military personnel revealed laments about how a U.S. focus on such issues was a distraction. Moreover, they described how Russia exploited such narratives through information operations to create the perception that U.S. advisors were feminizing (and weakening) the Ukrainian military. LGBTQ+ rights are a good thing in their own right, but an emphasis on this issue in a strategic partnership with a host nation can clash with the broader advance of U.S. national interests. These tradeoffs raise hard questions that the U.S. did not have to address during its post-Cold War period of largely unchallenged hegemony, such as whether SFA should engage extensively with known human-rights abusers (e.g., the Rapid Intervention Battalion in Cameroon). Ideas and values do matter in defining national interests, but for SFA, that means weighing the risks and benefits when assessing whether the U.S. should engage with a potential partner.

Competition and the Stark Fist of Reality

One certainty is a future characterized by a plurality of strategic competitors. The past 30 years of U.S. global dominance are extraordinarily unusual in world history, but that was the context in which the current elaborate and baroque SFA process was designed. That context was more tolerant. Tactical and operational failures had little strategic consequence. SFA will only become harder in a newly competitive environment while it is destined to become a central feature of the indirect approaches to warfare that are a hallmark of that competition between nuclear-armed powers.

The bottom line is that SFA needs to be changed and improved. On a practical level, this means several things. First, oversight of SFA should continue, as it is reflective of the values of a democratic society that privileges civilian control of its armed forces. Some of these values, however—particularly various dimensions of human rights—will be challenged, especially if competing with a committed adversary. Next, SFA missions will need to accept greater risk. Moreover, delivering SFA should not take two to three years, as it currently does. Additionally, important SFA programs will benefit from the sustained application of expertise and contextual knowledge, rather than rotating these people out of the mission. And most fundamentally, SFA should often not be embedded in missions such as stability operations, reconstruction, or broad state-building, nor should it try to implant replicas of Western norms in places that lack a social base or popular demand for them.

These are lessons the United States' strategic competitors know by virtue of their positions as challengers and the imperative of indirect approaches in a nuclear world. They are lessons that the U.S. needs to relearn. Doing this is more than an intellectual challenge; it means confronting a gigantic bureaucracy and changing a culture rooted in the way things have been done in a very different strategic environment.

Chapter 7

Projecting Soft Power Through The State Partnership Program
Matthew A. Hughes

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https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/projecting-soft-power-through-state-partnership-program

Background

Power is a relative term, especially when referring to the amount of control and influence a nation wields in the global community. In analyzing nations' sources of power, American political scientist Joseph Nye popularized the concepts of hard power, or "the ability to use carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will," and soft power, an influence which "co-opts [nations] rather than coerces them."[1] Whereas nations mainly derive hard power from military forces, Nye asserts a nation's soft power stems from "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority)."[2] Soft power grows through cultural diffusion, which often occurs more rapidly thanks to globalization, but there are also institutions that directly contribute to soft power projection. The U.S. Department of State (DoS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are chief among these institutions cultivating American soft power through initiatives and foreign presence.

Investment into these soft-power tools has been under tight scrutiny as U.S. policy shifts toward hard power. A common theme in executive budget proposals between 2017 and 2019 involved funding cuts between 23 and 32 percent for diplomacy and international aid.[3] Although Congress countered these proposals, albeit narrowly by one vote in the Senate in 2018, these proposals mark a clear shift in power priorities, rendering the budget for soft-power tools volatile and unpredictable.[4] As policymakers consider significant budget cuts in traditional soft-power tools, however, other countries are investing resources toward soft-power projection. China's national strategy, for instance, now includes the political jargon wenhua ruan shili (cultural soft power) and plans for cultural influence to permeate.

In the midst of budget cut proposals and foreign competition in the sphere of soft power, the government must continually explore avenues to improve efficacy. One means is to recognize that while there are distinct, traditional tools to project soft power and hard power, roles, responsibilities, and effects can overlap. Joseph Nye noted, "Sometimes the same power resources can affect the entire spectrum of behavior from coercion to attraction."[5] The National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP) is one such power resource that can have this strategic effect—a traditional hard power entity with great capacity to project soft power abroad. Established in 1993, the SPP involves partnerships between individual states and sovereign nations whereby states' National Guard units conduct engagements with partner nations' security forces, emergency response personnel, and other organizations. In standing up new partnerships, the U.S. sought to optimize efficiency and partner-building capacity by establishing partnerships on factors such as parity in ethnic composition or disparities in state National Guard unit strengths and partner nation (PN) security force weaknesses. In a perennial shaping operation, the SPP yields strategic dividends by fostering trust, shared values, and interoperability with partners in

ways that support U.S. policy objectives. The longevity of SPP partnerships and the civilian occupations of Guardsmen foster conditions to shape conditions abroad, but partnerships do not yet fully exploit this capacity to project soft power. As American leaders consider budget cuts to diplomacy, leaders should explore the feasibility of leveraging the SPP to hedge losses in soft power. Investing in the preparation of personnel, coordinating SPP events by training them in the partner nation's language, and providing education on soft power and interagency collaboration can enhance SPP efficacy. Consulting with and including diplomatic considerations in planning and assessments may also enable NG units to project influence. States can further capitalize on opportunities to project soft power through the National Guard's SPP by training key SPP personnel in foreign language and soft-power considerations and by taking a hybrid approach to gap analysis.

Key Players Require Language Training and Familiarization with Soft-Power Considerations

Despite the strategic role and expansive scope of partnerships, program responsibility funnels down to a small group of individuals. Funding for a typical state partnership supports one SPP bilateral affairs officer (BAO) assigned to the U.S. Embassy in the partner nation, one SPP state coordinator located within the state, and five to seven events annually.[6] Partnerships lacking a full-time BAO have a traditional combatant commander's activities (TCA) coordinator on six-month temporary duty assignment or a state coordinator who travels to the partner nation to coordinate events.[7] Partner nation representatives, security cooperation personnel, or other military or civilian leaders propose events or activities, often based on a partner nation's requests to help build capabilities by providing expertise. Leaders, including but not limited to, the relevant service section chief (e.g., Army Section Chief), BAO or TCA coordinator, Senior Defense Attaché, and state coordinator discuss proposed events and activities to ensure they nest with long-term strategic plans for the PN and region. The BAO further develops this plan and, in collaboration with other security cooperation leaders, proposes the plan to state and Combatant Command (COCOM) leaders for approval. Hence, the SPP model invests a significant amount of influence into one or two individuals—the BAO or TCA coordinator and/or the state coordinator—making them single points of success or failure for a partnership.

The level of training provided to the BAO or TCA coordinator and the state coordinator have significant second- and third-order effects on the outcome of partnerships. BAOs, TCA coordinators, and state coordinators should also have a strong grasp on diplomacy and soft power, including relevant government agencies and the role of the SPP in projecting this type of influence. Historical lessons learned note, however, the need to "educat[e] BAOs that […] building capacity" in sectors such as health through medical engagements "can provide access, influence, and soft power." [8] (Penn 2012). To properly train personnel on such facets of security cooperation, the Security Cooperation Management State Partnership Course (managed by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Defense Institute of Security Cooperation Studies [DISCS]) includes a one-hour introduction to USAID and a three-hour block of instruction on SPP operations that addresses DoS and civilian programs enhancing SPP planning and PN interaction.[9] Such training helps to reduce knowledge gaps among state coordinators, but BAOs and TCA coordinators do not attend this course. This lack of training is detrimental to partnerships heavily reliant on TCA coordinators, especially in U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) where TCA coordinators outnumber BAOs.

Remarks in after action reviews (AARs) and lessons learned raise other concerns about BAO knowledge gaps, especially with regard to foreign language proficiency. Generally, units

identify officers who are already proficient in the PN's official language or push to provide a new BAO with rudimentary training or foreign immersion. Occasionally, however, BAOs or TCAs report without proficiency in the language. The fact that these billets are not language-coded billets perpetuates this issue, as the billets do not necessitate language proficiency, despite the bilateral nature of that office and the inherent benefits of speaking that language. Not only would language training help new BAOs or TCAs develop rapport with PN officials, but these personnel would better be equipped to analyze doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) and identify gaps and opportunities as they read PN military doctrine and other publications, such as PN officers' professional military education reports on their nation's readiness and capability gaps.

States Should Adopt a Hybrid Approach to Partner Nation Gap Analysis

States conduct gap analysis at the commencement of a new partnership and periodically (every five years) thereafter. This process involves key stakeholders or an analysis team assessing a PN's current capabilities in a series of focus areas (e.g., human resources, security forces, training, logistics and maintenance, etc.), describing the desired state in each area, and identifying gaps between the present and desired states. This analysis informs SPP planners and facilitates planning for effective SPP activities. Regularly conducting this process helps to steer partnerships by objectively evaluating efficacy of engagements through measured progress in these focus areas.

Despite the common practice of performing gap analysis for partnerships, there is a limited amount of doctrine or tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) shared among units regarding this process. The Army's Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) published a bulletin on SPP best practices that provides general guidance on SPP functions and objectives, but does not discuss the concept of gap analysis or the mission analysis process behind planning SPP activities. Without doctrine; a handbook outlining best practices or providing templates; or a dialogue on lessons learned; gap analysis products vary significantly in scope, focus, and detail by partnership, as does the efficacy of partnership activities. Increased interagency collaboration can help to remedy this deficiency and optimize partnership gap analysis.

Similarly, dialogue between National Guard units and other government agencies is rare. Instead, gap analysis usually involves key stakeholders and staff from the National Guard unit with limited to no consultation with agencies such as USAID or the DoS.[10] National Guard units can enhance gap analysis by using USAID and DoS reports, and historical data as inputs to their partnership analysis. States should also institutionalize a formal gap analysis similar to USAID, which typically involves stakeholders and assessment teams conducting desktop research and team discussions, a gap assessment workshop, field visits, focus group discussions, analysis and report writing, and a validation workshop yielding comprehensive analysis products. Incorporating USAID and DoS will approach the measure of interagency collaboration outlined in Presidential Policy Directive 23, which calls for "the establishment of a common, collaborative and effective approach to the planning [of] successful security sector assistance activities."[11] Such collaboration will also help to resolve incomplete gap analysis mentioned in AARs and lessons learned regarding SPP activities, such as failing to explore possible soft-power engagements as key stakeholders do not recognize the potential payoff of such events.[12] Similarly, historical partnership assessment products list operational capacity and capability among evaluation variables, but scoring criteria is vague and subjective.

A recent initial partner gap analysis conducted by the Nevada National Guard for its new partnership with Fiji reveals the utility of taking a hybrid approach. Leaders referenced USAID

and DoS assessments of Fiji as inputs and included diplomatic considerations among their key indicators.[13] This approach deviated from the traditional list of indicators directly relating to war fighting functions or staff sectors (e.g., human resources, security forces, logistics, information systems, etc.) typical of an SPP partnership gap analysis. The Nevada National Guard Gap Analysis Team assessed these areas, yielding several potential high-payoff engagements. This innovative approach cultivated informed discussion and fostered interagency collaboration in coordinating whole-of-government efforts behind SPP objectives.

The Nevada National Guard's best practice of making interagency collaboration a fundamental facet of gap analysis should be transformed to doctrine; this should be the norm, rather than the exception. These TTPs, such as using key indicators like medical care and emergency response, ensure planners consider soft-power projection in determining the most meaningful SPP activities to pursue. Considering these soft-power sectors also enables the National Guard to leverage units and individual Guardsmen with unique skillsets. Institutionalizing a hybrid approach to gap analysis by incorporating soft-power variables and considerations can help planners identify new opportunities to network with DoS, USAID, and PN organizations.

Conclusion

As countries dedicate more resources toward diplomacy, budgets for U.S. traditional soft-power tools seem uncertain. The National Guard's SPP is one means whereby the United States can hedge against potential losses in influence threatened by budget cuts. While SPP activities have influenced PNs and strengthened their ties to the U.S., this program is capable of projecting more soft power by ensuring key SPP personnel satisfy training requirements and by refining planning and assessments. Training BAOs or TCA coordinators and SPP state coordinators on soft power and exposing them to organizations engaged in diplomacy will foster inclusion of soft-power considerations in state partnership planning. Strong language proficiency among these key players will help them to build rapport with PN counterparts and develop meaningful SPP activities addressing PN concerns raised in their own reports and studies. States should also strive to incorporate soft-power considerations into partnership activity planning and assessments. Formal gap analysis involving interagency collaboration can help to identify opportunities to influence PNs through engagements promoting American soft power. These changes will better enable leaders to leverage the National Guard SPP as a tool to project soft power.

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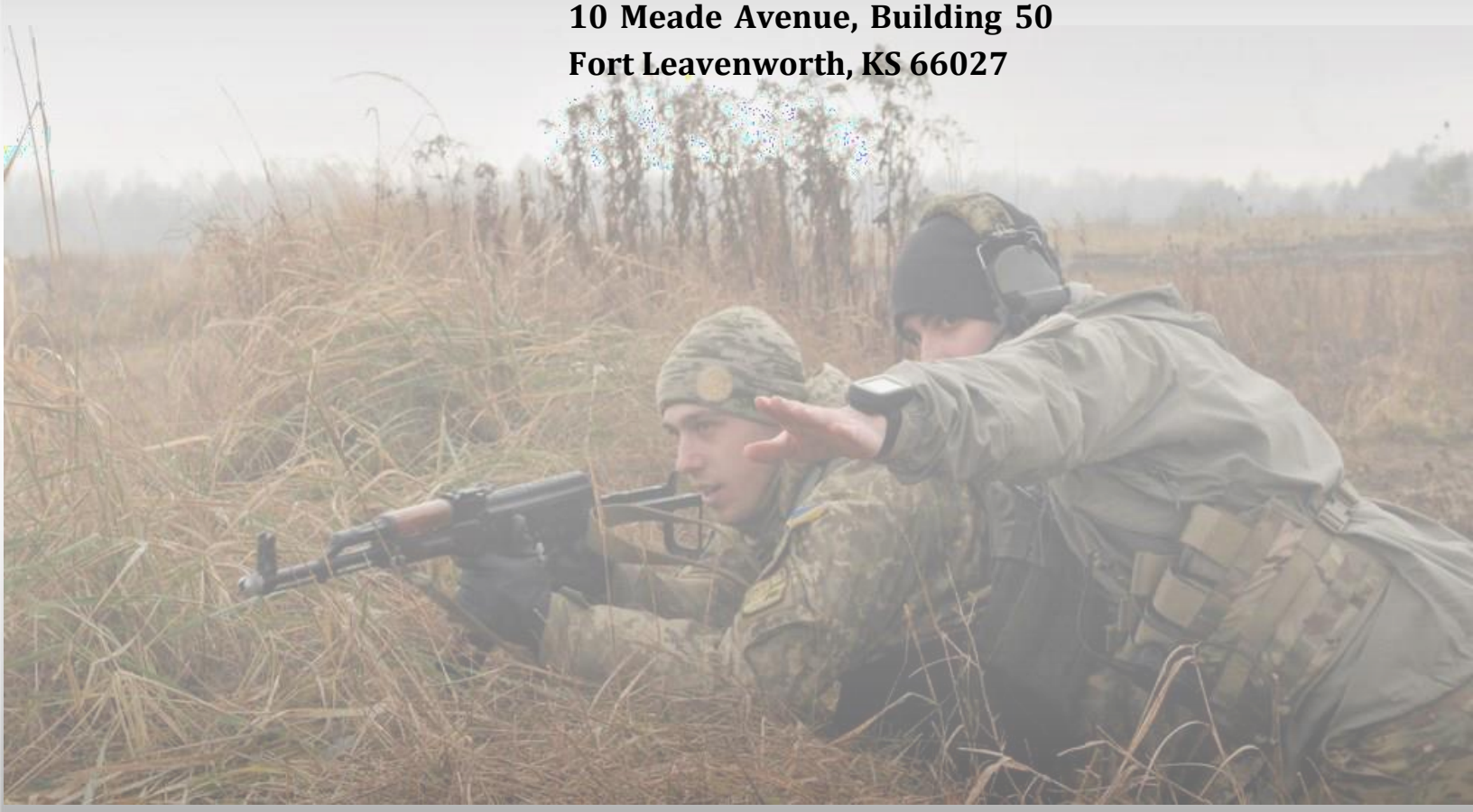

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