



POLICY ROUNDTABLE:

THE PROS AND CONS OF SECURITY ASSISTANCE

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1. The Future of Security Assistance

By Stephen Tankel

On November 11, as “leaders from around the world” came together to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, President Donald Trump stood apart from them. His solitude was a physical manifestation of the fact that Trump’s “America First” policy increasingly risks becoming “America Alone.” It also reinforced Trump’s isolation within his own administration, where many senior officials continue to trumpet the importance of allies and partners: The *National Security Strategy*, *National Defense Strategy*, and the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* have all forcefully advocated for the need to sustain strong alliances and partnerships to advance vital national interests.¹

In the years after 9/11, as it became clear that large-footprint military operations were neither sustainable nor successful in dealing with violent non-state actors, the United States placed increasing emphasis on working “by, with, and through” allies and partners. The focus on working with weaker states primarily for counterterrorism purposes was new, but the importance of security cooperation was not. It has been a vital component of American statecraft for decades. As the United States re-postures to focus more on great power conflict and rogue regimes, security cooperation with, and assistance to, allies and partners will remain critical for achieving global defense objectives.

¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of The United States of America*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; The Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, January 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; The White House, *National Security for Counterterrorism of The United States of America*, Oct., 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>;

Trump's bellicose rhetoric and undermining of American diplomacy may have inadvertently increased the importance of security assistance and cooperation as a tool for achieving U.S. objectives. If so, this will put even greater pressure on policies and programs that have not always delivered the envisioned return on investment. It also raises a number of questions: Will the reforms mandated by the last two National Defense Authorization Acts bear fruit?² Even if they do, will it be enough to overcome the a-strategic nature that often defines the U.S. government's use of security assistance and cooperation? Are the political and socio-economic challenges in partner nations so entrenched that they cannot be overcome, and, if so, is the current U.S. approach making things worse? If it is worsening things, how can the United States at least improve its return on investment? And what other trends will shape the efficacy of security cooperation and assistance?

To help answer these questions, we brought together a mix of academics and former policymakers to examine security assistance and cooperation through three distinct lenses: an academic overview of some of the core political challenges; a policy analysis of a distinct case study, where the absence of strategic planning was especially notable; and a forward-looking assessment of future trends that policymakers must account for, even as they continue to wrestle with existing challenges.

Security Assistance and Cooperation: A Brief Overview

Security cooperation and security assistance are terms often used without always being defined — or sometimes even understood — by the people writing about them. Without getting too in the weeds, it's helpful to briefly describe these concepts and delineate where they come from.

Security assistance refers to programs through which the United States provides arms and other defense materials, military training, defense institution-building efforts, and other defense-related services. The State Department has overall responsibility for many of the

² *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018*, Public Law 115-91, <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ91/PLAW-115publ91.pdf>; *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, Public Law 114-328, <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ328/PLAW-114publ328.pdf>.

largest and longest-standing of these programs, which fall under Title 22 authority, including foreign military financing, foreign military sallies, and international military education and training. However, it is the Department of Defense that actually implements many of them. It also administers the Section 333 authority, which consolidated many of the Title 10 capacity-building authorities created since 9/11 into one.

Because of its focus on allied and partner militaries, security assistance is largely synonymous with military assistance. Indeed, the two are often used interchangeably. However, the United States also provides security sector assistance to civilian institutions through programs such as the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement.³ For our purposes, it is helpful to nest security sector assistance within the broader rubric of security assistance.

Security cooperation encompasses all Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments. This includes all Defense Department-administered security assistance, as well as joint military exercises, defense institution-building, defense and military contacts, information-sharing and intelligence cooperation, and logistics support. The United States currently engages in security cooperation with 224 countries and international organizations around the world.⁴

The United States spends billions on security assistance and cooperation to achieve various objectives. The most obvious goal is to build the capacity of partners' military and police forces, as well as their defense and law enforcement institutions so they can confront shared security threats and contribute to international missions. Many of the new security assistance and cooperation authorities created after 9/11 have focused on capacity building specifically for counterterrorism purposes. Capacity building and joint exercises also increase the interoperability of partner forces with the U.S. military. Although capacity

³ For more on INCLE assistance see, *Security Assistance Monitor*, "International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement," <https://securityassistance.org/europe/content/international-narcotics-control-and-law-enforcement>.

⁴ "Defense Security Cooperation Agency Overview," accessed July 2018, <http://www.dsca.mil/2014-foreign-customer-guide/security-cooperation-overview>.

building generally focuses on operational and tactical capabilities, it also may (and should) include professionalization of partner forces and institutions.

Another aim is to build or maintain relationships with partner countries in order to secure access — to bases or transit routes — and increase U.S. influence with the host nation government. That influence may be used to yield specific outcomes, such as encouraging recipients to buy arms from the United States as opposed to a competitor or to contribute to an international coalition. In other cases, the purposes of gaining influence are fuzzier, and may include balancing against a regional competitor, or simply generating goodwill. Critically, whether for access or influence, security assistance and cooperation are being used as incentives, which may lead to them being deployed in ways that are inconsistent with capacity-building needs in a given country.

Looking Back, Forging Ahead

All three contributors to this roundtable identify challenges of security assistance and cooperation and posit potential solutions to improve their effectiveness. Each essay has its own take, which compliments the others.

Andrew Boutton draws on academic research, including his own, to dig into why efforts to build partnership capacity for internal defense — especially in the areas of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency — have often failed to achieve their objectives. He assesses various explanations, including selection bias, i.e., countries receiving assistance that were already beset by numerous problems; technical issues with capacity-building programs themselves; and divergent threat perceptions between the United States and partner countries. Boutton finds that although such variables do matter — more in some instances than others — the overriding challenge, at least in countries where recipient regimes are riven by internal power struggles and institutions are underdeveloped, is the creation of moral hazard. Specifically, leaders in these countries use assistance and cooperation to coup-proof their regimes, believing that the United States will not abandon them despite their bad behavior. In some cases, security assistance and cooperation can actually provoke or increase internal violence as a result.

Tommy Ross uses the case of Somalia to highlight the dangers of engaging in capacity building efforts without a solid strategic foundation. As the first ever deputy assistant secretary of defense for security cooperation, Ross is intimately familiar with the interagency challenges, the warren of congressional authorities, and the poor preparation that can undermine capacity building efforts. He also recognizes the dangers that misaligned political incentives of the sort Boutton discusses can present. Without discounting these challenges, however, Ross argues that the wider problem is strategic incoherence. He highlights two issues in particular in the case of Somalia: the short-term focus on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) at the expense of the Somali National Army (SNA), despite the fact that AMISOM's mission was always time-limited and the SNA would need to be prepared when that mission ended; and the myopic emphasis on tactical training and equipment at the small unit level, rather than focusing on broader — and much-needed — defense sector reform. It's true that there is a lot the United States cannot control when it deploys security assistance and cooperation. However, this makes sound strategic planning all the more important, as Ross ably illustrates by demonstrating what happens when it is lacking.

Melissa Dalton leverages her experience at the Department of Defense, and the research she has conducted since, to widen the aperture and explore three trends that will challenge the way the United States engages in security cooperation over the next five years. First, she digs into how the Trump administration's increased emphasis on arms sales will impact efforts to build allied and partner defense capabilities and interoperability, as well as the potential that this emphasis will exacerbate the dangers that American arms are used to violate human rights in recipient countries. Second, she explores Defense and State Department efforts to assess, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of security cooperation and assistance in order to mitigate the types of challenges Boutton and Ross identify. Third, she reinforces the need to understand the political context in recipient nations, and highlights the fact that shifting from counterterrorism to a focus on strategic competition with near-peer competitors does not reduce the types of risks that Boutton identifies. Rather, Dalton argues there is a danger the United States will feel increased pressure to abandon its principles and values in order to keep pace with competitors who do not subscribe to them.

For almost as long as the United States has engaged in security assistance and cooperation, experts inside and outside of government have lamented a lackluster return on investment and worried about unintended consequences. Concerns have grown in recent years, as the gap between U.S. investments and intended outcomes in recipient nations appears to have widened. Congress is to be commended for consolidating capacity building authorities and strengthening requirements on the Defense Department to work with the State Department to assess, monitor, and evaluate security cooperation to ensure it aligns with U.S. foreign policy priorities. Both agencies have recognized the importance of improved planning and evaluation processes, although much work remains to be done. This work is likely to become even more essential given that, as U.S. appeals for greater burden sharing by allies and partners increase, the tendency to rely on security assistance and cooperation is also likely to grow.

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2. The Dangers of U.S. Military Assistance to Weak States

By Andrew Boutton

In the years since World War II, the United States has provided vast amounts of military assistance to countries across the globe. These countries have varied in their levels of development and in their strategic importance to the United States. The goal of many of these post-9/11 programs has been to enable recipient security forces to combat domestic

insurgents, control their territory, and withstand armed internal challenges.⁵ The historical record reveals that U.S. capacity-building efforts have often resulted in failure to achieve these goals.

What explains this? Selection bias undoubtedly plays a minor role: Many recipient countries were already experiencing persistent violence and serious political and institutional dysfunction, which, if they persist, can create the impression that military assistance is failing. Other explanations for these outcomes have emphasized technical and tactical problems with capacity-building programs, which, while important, overlook more fundamental political obstacles. More recent explanations for the negative consequences associated with military aid incorporate differences in threat perceptions between the United States and host country,⁶ and the problems of preference divergence inherent in U.S.-client relationships.⁷ I build on these observations to argue that in some institutional contexts, U.S. military assistance will provoke or escalate violence, *even beyond what we might expect in the absence of external assistance*. Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that in uncertain political environments — where regimes are riven by internal power struggles and institutions are underdeveloped — military aid can create a dangerous moral hazard.⁸ The provision of military assistance to vulnerable leaders increases leaders' incentives to coup-proof their regimes, while also creating the perception that the United States will continue to assist them in dealing with the resulting violence. This combination

⁵ U.S. military aid programs are typically motivated by a combination of goals that varies across cases. The goal most relevant for my purposes is capacity-building.

⁶ I use “recipient,” “host,” “partner,” and “client” government interchangeably throughout. For an example of work on threat perceptions, see, Stephen Tankel, *With Us and Against Us: How America's Partners Help and Hinder the War on Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁷ Stephen Biddle, Julia MacDonald, and Ryan Baker, “Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1-2 (2018): 89-142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1307745>; Walter Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relations in Counterinsurgency* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qa'ida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa* (West Point, NY: Combatting Terrorism Center, 2007).

⁸ I describe some of this evidence below, but for more detail please see Andrew Boutton, “Coup-Proofing in the Shadow of Intervention: Alliances, Moral Hazard, and Violence in Authoritarian Regimes” forthcoming, *International Studies Quarterly*.

explains why capacity-building programs in weak states so often yield such frustrating results.

Coup-Proofing, Power Consolidation, and Violence

Many of the top recipients of U.S. military assistance — both historically and since 9/11 — have been institutionally weak and fragile. Leaders in these countries are vulnerable to removal by government or military rivals, and a unified, competent military capable of combating insurgents is also capable of overthrowing the leader. As a result, these leaders have security priorities that differ substantially from those of the United States.⁹ Rather than constructing competent and professionalized militaries — which is the stated aim of much U.S. military assistance — insecure leaders often seek to coup-proof their security forces in order to ensure their own political and physical survival.

Coup-proofing refers to a broad set of actions a leader takes to prevent a military coup. Paranoid leaders will often meddle with their security forces. For instance, they may sacrifice competence in favor of political allegiance in military promotions, removing qualified officers and stacking their security forces with family or ethnic kin who are less competent but politically loyal.¹⁰ Another typical action is to create bifurcated security forces, in which smaller but politically reliable units tasked with regime protection receive special treatment and U.S. military training,¹¹ with the rest left to wither on the vine. This reduces overall combat leadership and effectiveness, and also degrades morale among the rank-and-file soldiers whose career prospects are blocked.¹² Coup-proofed military forces

⁹ Biddle et al., “Small Footprint, Small Payoff.”

¹⁰ Kristen A Harkness, “The Ethnic Army and the State: Explaining Coup Traps and the Difficulties of Democratization in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 4 (2016): 587–616, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002714545332>.

¹¹ Ali Abdullah Saleh’s Counter Terrorism Unit and Republican Guard are good examples of this. On two-tiered militaries see Alexis Kedo and Colby Goodman, “U.S. Military Aid to Presidential Guards a Risky Venture,” *LobeLog*, Oct. 6, 2015, <https://lobelog.com/u-s-military-aid-to-presidential-guards-a-risky-venture/>. On Saleh, see Gregory D Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America’s War in Arabia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

¹² Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

are often unable or unwilling to defend the regime,¹³ which explains why militaries in weak states so often fold in the face of far smaller insurgent armies.

Another form of coup-proofing involves the leader consolidating power around himself and a small group of insiders. This entails denying the broader population access to political power, using state resources for patronage instead of public goods,¹⁴ and governing through exclusion by eliminating rivals or potential rivals from the regime and military through purges.

From the leader's perspective, coup-proofing may appear to be the best strategy to retain power.¹⁵ However, these actions have two important consequences that directly undermine the objectives of most U.S. military assistance programs. First, power consolidation necessarily alienates powerful factions in society and key figures in the regime or military. For example, if a leader purges the wrong military officer or attempts an ill-timed power grab, it can provoke a backlash. The purged factions often respond by launching a rebellion, and this dynamic has been shown to be an important cause of civil wars, particularly in Africa.¹⁶ Second, by dividing the security forces and degrading their leadership and morale, coup-proofing impairs the regime's ability to combat domestic insurgents.

These actions thus produce the dual effects of increasing the likelihood of domestic insurgency while decreasing the regime's ability to effectively deal with it. Although leaders have other, more peaceful options to insulate themselves from coups — such as the formation of inclusive power-sharing agreements¹⁷ — the provision of U.S. military

¹³ Philip Roessler, "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa." *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (April 2011): 300-346, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887111000049>.

¹⁴ Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Personal rule: Theory and practice in Africa." *Comparative Politics* 16, no. 4 (July 1984): 421-42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i217474>.

¹⁵ Jun Koga Sudduth, "The Strategic Logic of Elite Purges in Dictatorships." *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 13 (2017): 1768-1801, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016688004>.

¹⁶ Roessler, "The Enemy Within"; Boutton "Coup-Proofing in the Shadow of Intervention."

¹⁷ Philip Roessler and David Ohls, "Self-Enforcing Power Sharing in Weak States," *International Organization* 62, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 423-54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000073>.

assistance can induce overconfidence in the recipient regime.¹⁸ This often causes leaders to opt for these more aggressive forms of coup-proofing, gambling that the United States will continue providing aid to help quell the resulting violence.

Insecure, Yet Overconfident

The U.S. provision of military assistance signals a degree of interest and investment in the survival of the incumbent regime, and foreign leaders understand this quite well. A vulnerable leader receiving security assistance will thus be more likely to coup-proof his military, purge rivals from his regime, or consolidate power if he believes that his external patron will come to the rescue to deal with the backlash.¹⁹ Why share power with your political rivals if you can violently exclude them and convince a foreign patron to protect you from the fallout?

Washington's backing of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki offers a case in point. The United States spent billions to establish a viable, inclusive government and to enable the security forces to defend the regime. Maliki had numerous opportunities to construct an inclusive governing coalition and competent military, but doing so would likely have undermined his top priority, which was to secure his shaky grip on power. More than anything else, he feared being removed or killed by former Ba'athists, so he set about personalizing his regime and security forces along sectarian lines, using textbook coup-proofing tactics.²⁰ In fact, on the same day as the official U.S. withdrawal in late 2011, special forces led by Maliki's son surrounded the houses of the vice president, deputy prime minister, and minister of finance, all popular Sunni officials. These moves sparked a massive backlash among the Sunni population, eventually culminating in the rebirth of the Islamic State insurgency. Maliki's thoroughly coup-proofed security forces were unable and

¹⁸ Although the focus here is on military aid, it is important to note that other types of security assistance can have similar effects. This is because it is not the aid *per se* that creates these perverse effects, but rather the signal it sends to the partner regime.

¹⁹ Boutton, "Coup-Proofing in the Shadow of Intervention."

²⁰ Toby Dodge, "Iraq's Road Back to Dictatorship," *Survival* 54, no. 3 (2012): 147-68,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2012.690990>.

unwilling to risk their lives to defend the regime, and fled rather than defend major Iraqi cities, like Mosul and Ramadi, from far smaller insurgent forces.²¹

The violent response from factions within the Sunni population that he had marginalized likely did not take Maliki by surprise. But he was so confident that Washington would never abandon its investment in Iraqi stability and, by extension, his regime — particularly after the United States intervened to back him following the 2010 elections — that he also believed Washington would bail him out, perhaps by providing more military assistance, or even intervening to fight the insurgency on his behalf.²² This led to a moral hazard: Maliki took U.S. support as a blank check to consolidate power, betting that he would not have to face any of the consequences alone.

Likewise, a series of South Vietnamese presidents in the 1950s and 1960s exploited Washington's dependence on them to consolidate their own power, rather than risk opening the political system as Washington preferred. The exclusionary policies of Ngo Dinh Diem ensured that any challenge to his regime would be violent, leading directly to the Viet Cong insurgency.²³ Diem had weakened his military to such an extent, however, that he would have been unable to remain in power without U.S. support.

In 1966, President Nguyen Cao Ky used Lyndon Johnson's public pledge of renewed military support at the Honolulu summit as an opportunity to immediately rid himself of Nguyen Chanh Thi, the powerful Buddhist general whom Ky feared. The purge sparked a mutiny of Buddhist ARVN units loyal to Thi and a massive uprising among the Buddhist population, which nearly toppled the regime and required Washington's assistance to put

²¹ Erica DeBruin, "Coup-Proofing for Dummies: The Benefits of Following the Maliki Playbook," *Foreign Affairs*, July 27, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2014-07-27/coup-proofing-dummies>.

²² Ali Khedery, "Why We Stuck with Maliki – and Lost Iraq," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-stuck-with-maliki--and-lost-iraq/2014/07/03/odd6a8a4-f7ec-11e3-a606-946fd632f9fi_story.html; see also "The rise of ISIS," *Frontline*, season 33, episode 2, Oct. 28, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/rise-of-isis/>.

²³ Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 189.

down.²⁴ Leaders in Saigon consolidated power not despite U.S. military assistance, but *because* of it.

What Can Be Done?

These findings point to a number of proposals that may alleviate the moral hazard inherent in U.S. military assistance to weak states.

Most obviously, the United States should — to the extent possible — limit security partnerships to regimes in which the leader is less vulnerable to irregular removal. Here, the divergence of fundamental security priorities between the United States and the host regime is less acute, and thus military aid is less likely to encourage aggressive power consolidation by the incumbent regime. The presence of robust, stable political institutions can explain why U.S. military assistance programs have been, on balance, quite effective (though not without fault) in countries such as Colombia, Indonesia, South Korea, and Jordan. Each of these regimes is well-institutionalized, stable, and has not experienced an attempted coup in decades.

Indonesia is useful as an illustrative case. Initial U.S. efforts to secure counterterrorism cooperation against Jemaah Islamiya (JI) after 2001 were abortive, even after the 2002 Bali bombings made it clear to the Indonesian political establishment that JI was a legitimate threat that required attention. Indonesia was a fragile, young democracy whose leaders were wary of a meddlesome military, and thus were reluctant to take drastic domestic security measures. In 2005, however, after a series of reforms greatly diminished the military's political power,²⁵ security cooperation grew much closer. By 2012, nearly the entire leadership of JI had been either arrested or assassinated by Indonesia's elite U.S.-

²⁴ Patricia Sullivan, "S. Vietnamese Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/26/AR2007062602195.html>.

²⁵ Marcus Mietzner, "A Veto Player no more? The Declining Political Influence of the Military in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia," in *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, ed. Mirjam Kunkler and Alfred Stepan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

trained counterterrorism unit,²⁶ and the group had virtually ceased to exist in its original form.

On the other hand, my own research suggests that partnerships with new regimes, personalist regimes, and regimes with a legacy of personalist or military rule are more likely to be destabilizing.²⁷ Maliki's Iraq — a weak, newly established democracy with a recent history of personalist rule under Saddam Hussein — brought together several of these elements. Foremost in Maliki's mind during his time in power was the possibility of a coup at the hands of Ba'athist loyalists. As noted earlier, the United States gave Maliki a security umbrella, which he exploited to aggressively repress and purge any challenges to his power (all of which he assumed were Saddam loyalists), under the assumption that the Americans would be there afterward to clean up any mess that resulted.

Likewise, Niger democratized in 2011, but has a history of personalist rule and military interventions. After an attempted coup in 2015, President Mahamadou Issoufou immediately purged his entire senior officer corps — including the commanders of two elite counterterrorism units — accusing them of collaborating with former prime minister Hama Amadou to reclaim power in a coup.²⁸ Niger has recently become one of the top recipients of U.S. military assistance in the region, and Issoufou has increased defense spending dramatically. The Nigerien military remains ill equipped and under-paid,²⁹ however, with most of the resources going toward his personal guard.³⁰ French and American investments

²⁶ R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Indonesian Democracy: From Transition to Consolidation," in *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, ed. Mirjam Kunkler and Alfred Stepan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

²⁷ Andrew Boutton, "U.S. Security Assistance, Civil-Military Crises, and the Escalation of Political Violence," *Working paper* (2018), https://www.andrewboutton.com/uploads/2/0/8/8/20883260/domestic_sourcesr1.pdf.

²⁸ Agence France Presse, "Niger: Libération de prisonniers du coup d'État présumé de 2015," *Jeune Afrique*, March 26, 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/421356/societe/niger-liberation-de-prisonniers-coup-detat-presume-de-2015/>.

²⁹ "Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counterinsurgency," International Crisis Group no. 245 (2017), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/245-niger-and-boko-haram-beyond-counter-insurgency>.

³⁰ Laurent Bigot, "Au Niger, l'armée affaiblie par la paranoïa de son président," *Le Monde*, Oct. 10, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/10/10/au-niger-l-armee-affaiblie-par-la-paranoia-de-son-president_501114_3212.html.

in stability in the region have arguably created a moral hazard.³¹ Without such support, Issoufou's purges and weakening of the security forces would leave him vulnerable to violent backlash. While it is possible that external military assistance provides some measure of short-term stability, it also has the inadvertent effect of providing cover for Issoufou to consolidate power and politicize the armed forces, which will likely generate greater instability in the long run.

It would be wishful thinking, however, to argue that Washington could avoid working with such regimes altogether. In fact, many of the regimes in which Washington claims to have vital security interests are fragile and plagued by the same governance problems discussed herein. Working with these regimes is often unavoidable. Where this is the case, the United States should consider the following.

First, due to misaligned security priorities, productive cooperation and capacity-building in these cases can only be achieved by shaping and altering host-state incentives through the establishment and credible enforcement of conditionality. This notion is widely recognized among development aid scholars, but has recently gained traction among those who study security assistance.³² Recent work on security assistance advocates allocating security assistance *ex post* as a reward for effort and reform, rather than *ex ante* as an inducement, in a manner similar to the Millennium Challenge Account.³³ In a recent book,³⁴ Walter Ladwig shows that the United States has been able to exercise greater influence over host government policy when it enforces conditions, as it did in the Philippines and El Salvador.

Positive conditionality requires the United States to verify the efforts undertaken by the partner government, which in turn necessitates more intrusive monitoring. Many countries will balk at this as a violation of sovereignty, but the United States should insist upon it as a

³¹ Boutton, "U.S. Security Assistance, Civil-Military Crises, and the Escalation of Political Violence"; Nathaniel Powell, "The Destabilizing Dangers of U.S. Counterterrorism in the Sahel" *War on the Rocks*, Feb. 8, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/the-destabilizing-dangers-of-american-counterterrorism-in-the-sahel/>.

³² Stephen Biddle, "Building Security Forces and Stabilizing Nations: The Problem of Agency," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 126–38, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00464.

³³ Melissa Dalton, Hijab Shah, Shannon N. Green, and Rebecca Hughes, *Oversight and Accountability in US Security Sector Assistance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018).

³⁴ Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front*.

condition of military assistance. A larger presence will not only enable better monitoring of the host government's coup-proofing actions, but may also mitigate the internal security dilemma that drives such behavior. The worst paranoid excesses of the Maliki regime did not occur until after 2011, when the United States was no longer present on the ground as a safety net protecting his regime.

The United States should also signal that it is prepared to cut ties with regimes that work against its security interests. Washington's reliance on security assistance to fight terrorism abroad, without putting large numbers of U.S. forces in combat, often undermines the credibility of any threats to withdraw this assistance. Even in the rare cases when punishment has been enacted, as it has been several times with Egypt and Pakistan,³⁵ it has historically come in the form of temporary freezes that are later lifted even after little change in behavior. In the case of both Diem and Maliki, the United States ultimately withdrew its support when backing them became untenable. But the fact that this only happened after years of military assistance instilled in both leaders the *perception* that they could do no wrong, and that steadfast support would continue even as they further consolidated power. By the time America decided to advocate for their removal, it was far too late and the damage was already done. Unwillingness to enforce conditions and withdraw support can seriously undermine the objectives of U.S. assistance and makes it more likely that other leaders will test the limits of what the United States will tolerate from its clients.

Second, the United States military should prioritize the construction of depoliticized, merit-based forces, even if it means restructuring the host nation's military.³⁶ This should be both an objective and a condition of U.S. capacity-building assistance. A built-in assumption in U.S. capacity-building efforts has always been the notion that foreign militaries are small-scale replicas of Western militaries — hierarchical, apolitical, and

³⁵ Andrew Miller, "Trump Blinks and Egypt's Sisi Wins," *Foreign Policy*. Aug. 10, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/10/trump-blinks-and-egypts-sisi-wins/>; Eric Schmitt, and David E. Sanger, "In Sign of Normalization, Pentagon to Reimburse Pakistan \$688 Million," *New York Times*. Dec. 17, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/18/world/asia/pentagon-to-reimburse-pakistan-688-million.html>.

³⁶ Kristen Harkness, "Security assistance in Africa: The case for more," *Parameters* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2015), https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/Issues/Summer_2015/5_Harkness.pdf.

representative of the country as a whole.³⁷ This leads to the conclusion that where foreign security forces are dysfunctional or inept, an influx of American professionalization, equipment, and money—rather than fundamental restructuring—is all that is needed to fix the problem. In reality, the military in many institutionally weak countries is “a coterie of distinct armed camps owing primary clientelist allegiances to a handful of mutually competitive officers of different ranks, seething with corporate, ethnic, and personal grievances that divide their loyalties.”³⁸ Security forces constructed in this manner feed the violent, exclusionary politics that drive conflict in many of these regimes. Efforts by a partner regime to politicize the armed forces through purges or coup-proofing should be grounds for aid suspension or withdrawal.

Conclusion

It is widely recognized among those who study security assistance that this aid is often used too liberally, in part because of Washington’s tendency to define its security interests broadly. There exists within American elite opinion a lamentable impulse to “do something” in response to any instability abroad, particularly in the Muslim world. The policies resulting from this impulse often involve throwing money, weapons, or special operations forces at the problem without thinking carefully about unintended consequences or second-order effects. George Kennan’s advice to Congress in 1966 that “[w]e would do better if we would show ourselves a little more relaxed and less terrified of what happens in these smaller countries...and not jump around like an elephant frightened by a mouse every time these things occur” is as relevant today as it was during the Vietnam War. As long as Washington continues to adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward instability abroad, any threats to withdraw security assistance will likely be met with skepticism by partner countries.

Both the United States and its partner states can benefit from military assistance, as past cases have demonstrated. But Washington needs to recognize that the provision of military

³⁷ D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

³⁸ Samuel Decalo, *Civil-Military Relations in Africa* (Gainesville: Florida Academic Press, 1998), 6.

aid is highly political and does not occur in a vacuum, unconnected to local political conflicts. Providing it means *de facto* involvement in these conflicts, putting a thumb on the scale on behalf of incumbent regimes, many of which are weak and have goals that are anathema to those of the United States. If Washington is able to incorporate into its capacity-building efforts a sensitivity to host government security interests and local politics, combined with close monitoring and credible, enforceable conditionality, these programs can work to the benefit of both countries, even in the most difficult cases. This requires not only deeper engagement in capacity-building interventions in some places, but also discontinuing efforts where the host government is preoccupied with internal power consolidation.

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3. The Dangers of Incoherent Strategy: Security Assistance in Somalia, 2009–2018

By Tommy Ross

Following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. Government focused its attention on ungoverned or under-governed territories where al-Qaeda was known to operate. The collapsed state of Somalia was high on the list. U.S. attention intensified following the 2006

ascent of Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (“al-Shabaab”), an al-Qaeda-affiliated movement that quickly claimed and held most of the territory comprising central and southern Somalia. Beginning in 2009, the United States escalated its efforts to confront al-Shabaab and build the Somali defense sector, using tools from across the military and diplomatic spectrum. Aid given to the Somali National Army (SNA) and the troop-contributing countries of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which was established in 2007, represents by far the most significant capacity-building initiative in Africa during the last decade. AMISOM’s capabilities have improved as a result, enabling it to seriously degrade al-Shabaab. Yet, AMISOM will soon be dissolved, even though the SNA is years away from being able to replace it. Meanwhile, Somalia remains far from secure, with conditions that could enable al-Shabaab to regenerate.

Critics of U.S. military capacity-building assistance often focus on interagency coordination challenges, misalignment of political incentives, labyrinthine legal authorities, and U.S. forces that are poorly prepared for the mission. Though these issues undoubtedly impact the success of capacity-building efforts, the chief spoiler is often an endemic inattention to strategy: that is, to the art of aligning realistic ways and means, and identifying and mitigating risks, to achieve a clearly defined objective within a defined time period. Strategy demands a resource- and risk-informed theory of change that traces a path from the status quo to the intended objective. Yet, capacity-building efforts often lack such strategic foundations. Few cases illustrate this point better than U.S. capacity-building efforts intended to degrade and defeat al-Shabaab.

AMISOM’s tactical success stands in contrast to the strategic failure to establish sustainable security in Somalia. U.S. assistance to empower AMISOM contributors and the SNA to provide security in Somalia thus makes for an important case study of U.S. military capacity-building and the challenges that plague its ability to deliver long-lasting results that have strategic effects.

U.S. Involvement in Somalia

In 1991, civil war broke out in Somalia, as political dissidents rebelled against the oppressive regime of longtime president Mohamed Siad Barre, ultimately forcing his exile. Since then, Somalia has remained “the world’s longest running collapsed state.”³⁹

The country assumed additional importance to the United States following the Sept. 11 attacks because of its potential to become a terrorist safe haven.⁴⁰ A small al-Qaeda network was already present in the region, and more members headed for Somalia after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. The United States began conducting counterterrorism missions in Somalia, relying heavily on local warlords, who handed over local Islamists and Arab immigrants, along with actual al-Qaeda operatives, in order to collect additional rewards.⁴¹ Men who had fought in the Afghan jihad during the 1980s converged to retaliate against the warlords who were targeting them, and later formed the nucleus of al-Shabaab.

In 2005, U.S. focus intensified, as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a conservative Islamic group suspected of links to terrorism, began its rise to prominence.⁴² In 2006, Ethiopia, supported by the United States, invaded Somalia, defeated the ICU, and installed the Transitional Federal Government.⁴³ Its action, however, also enabled al-Shabaab’s rise. Originally the armed wing of the ICU, it harnessed local anger at the Ethiopian invasion and became the most capable non-state actor in the country, exerting dominance over Somalia for most of the ensuing decade. Al-Shabaab formally allied itself with al-Qaeda in 2012, following years of informal cooperation.

³⁹ Ken Menkhaus, “State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a ‘Functional Failed State’ in Somalia,” *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656, no. 1 (November 2014): 154–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002716214547002>.

⁴⁰ Stephen Tankel, *With Us and Against Us: How America’s Partners Help and Hinder the War on Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁴¹ Tankel, *With Us and Against Us*.

⁴² Ashley Elliot and Georg-Sebastian Holzer, “The Invention of ‘Terrorism’ in Somalia: Paradigms and Policy in US Foreign Relations,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2018): 215–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220460903268984>.

⁴³ Mark Mazzetti, “U.S. signals Backing for Ethiopian Incursion Into Somalia,” *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/world/africa/27africa.html>.

The United States has pursued two primary objectives in Somalia: the defeat and dismantlement of Islamic terrorist organizations perceived to threaten U.S. citizens and interests, and the establishment of long-term, stable governance and self-reliant security in the country.⁴⁴ Initially, security assistance played a limited role. However, in 2009, the United States saw an opportunity to intervene more robustly in Somalia. Ethiopian troops completed their withdrawal and transfer of power to the new Transitional Federal Government. AMISOM, which was established in 2007 to restore stability, became Somalia's primary security provider. As this opportunity emerged, the United States began to shift the focus of its strategy from support for proxies, such as Somali warlords and the invading Ethiopian forces,⁴⁵ to capacity-building assistance for AMISOM. It has been paired with varying levels of lethal counterterrorism operations and direct advisory missions throughout the last decade.⁴⁶

Capacity-building efforts have been beset by tensions between America's two primary goals in Somalia. The United States has prioritized short-term, tactical objectives to achieve its counterterrorism goal, often at the expense of broader and longer-term efforts centered on promoting security and stability. Moreover, unresolved policy determinations about whether to cast lots with the Somali federal government, decentralized Somali actors, and/or AMISOM as the long-term guarantor of Somalia's security have led to strategic incoherence.

Building Somalia's security sector also requires navigating myriad Somali actors, foreign government assistance providers, and multi-layered political divisions. Currently, Somalia's formal security sector includes "the six brigades of the SNA; the National Intelligence and

⁴⁴ "U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia," Remarks by Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy R. Sherman at the United States Institute of Peace, June 3, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/us/rm/2014/227079.htm>.

⁴⁵ Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, and Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," *New York Times*, Oct. 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html>.

⁴⁶ Seth G. Jones, Andrew Liepman, and Nathan Chandler, "Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab," RAND Corporation (2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1539.html.

Security Agency; the police force; and special forces.”⁴⁷ In addition, clans — the dominant organizing unit of Somali politics — maintain paramilitary organizations that are “hatted as part of the formal security sector.”⁴⁸ These formal organizations alternatively compete and cooperate with informal security forces — including political militias, personal protection units, private security contractors,⁴⁹ and foreign military personnel, including, but not limited to, those working under the AMISOM banner. A 2017 World Bank report found roughly 67,000 “persons under arms” in Somalia, excluding insurgents, of which the SNA comprised only 17,000.⁵⁰ These actors compete for power in an environment characterized by profound corruption, complex clan and ethnic rivalries, extreme poverty, and numerous foreign actors with competing agendas.

During the 2009–2018 timeframe, the United States invested heavily and consistently in sustaining AMISOM’s operations and in building sufficient capacity among AMISOM contributing forces to carry out relevant AMISOM missions. Support for Somali forces was far more limited: Operational support has been disjointed, while capacity-building assistance has been limited and largely targeted to elite special forces units. In both cases, capacity-building assistance has focused on tactical training and equipment at the small unit level, rather than on broader — and much-needed — defense sector reform.

⁴⁷ Ken Menkhaus, “Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Somalia,” Centre for Security Governance Papers, no. 5 (April 2016), 22,

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/NSSPs_in_Somalia_April2016.pdf.

⁴⁸ Menkhaus, “Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Somalia,” 22.

⁴⁹ Armin Rosen, “Will Private Contractors like Blackwater Join the Fight Against ISIS?” *Slate*, Oct. 13, 2014, <https://slate.com/business/2014/10/blackwater-why-private-security-contractors-will-likely-be-involved-in-fight-against-isis.html>.

⁵⁰ “Federal Republic of Somalia: Somalia Security and Justice Sector PER,” World Bank Report No. AUS8353 (January 2017), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/644671486531571103/pdf/Somalia-SJPER-01302017-Final-Version.pdf>.

U.S. Support to AMISOM

Five troop-contributing nations comprise AMISOM.⁵¹ Uganda, the most substantial contributor, and Burundi have participated since the mission's establishment in 2007, while Djibouti joined in 2011. Ethiopia, which has deep ethnic and cultural links to tribes in central Somalia and which has often intervened in Somali affairs, was integrated into AMISOM in 2014, following a 2011 independent military excursion. Kenya, driven by ethnic and cultural links to Somalia's "Jubaland" region and concern about displaced persons relocating to its territory, likewise launched an independent military push in 2011 and joined AMISOM in 2012.

U.S. support for these countries has been consistent and substantial. Since 2009, the United States has allocated roughly \$1.8 billion to support AMISOM through the State Department Peacekeeping Operations account.⁵² Funding has averaged \$180 million annually, ranging from \$75 million in 2011 to over \$250 million in 2016 and 2017. The support is divided primarily between two efforts: a direct annual contribution to the United Nations Support Office in Somalia,⁵³ which sustains AMISOM operations, and ongoing training and equipment for units from contributing countries on their way to Somalia.⁵⁴

⁵¹ A sixth troop contributing country, Sierra Leone, sent a battalion in April 2013, but then withdrew it in January 2015, because of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

⁵² "Peacekeeping Operations in East Africa, 2009–2018," *Security Assistance Monitor*, <http://securityassistance.org/data/country/military/Peacekeeping%20Operations/2009/2018/all/East%20Africa/>.

⁵³ "United Nations Support Office in Somalia," About Page, accessed Nov. 1, 2018, <https://unsos.unmissions.org/about>.

⁵⁴ "U.S. Army Support to the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) Program," Center for Army Lessons Learned: News From the Front, March 4, 2017, https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/NFTF_ACOTA_2.pdf. See also, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Peacekeeping Capacity-Building Assistance," U.S. Department of State, November 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/270963.pdf>.

The Defense Department’s “Global Train and Equip” program provided over \$700 million to build the capacity of AMISOM contributing forces during this timeframe.⁵⁵ According to the Security Assistance Monitor, the program provided \$236 million in assistance to Uganda, primarily for equipment including light helicopters, armored personnel carriers, combat vehicles, and radios.⁵⁶

The same program provided Kenya with \$341 million over the same time span to supply it with helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, special operations training, Humvees, and other equipment.⁵⁷ Support for the other AMISOM contributors — Ethiopia (\$43 million), Djibouti (\$24 million), and Burundi (\$35 million) — has been modest in comparison. In addition, the United States reported spending \$275 million through the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund,⁵⁸ which Congress established in 2014, on “East Africa Regional” priorities, much of which presumably supported AMISOM contributors, as well as \$31 million on Kenya, \$19 million on Ethiopia, and \$9 million on Uganda. Details about the uses of such funding are scantily available. And contributors benefitted from a special East Africa-focused capacity-building authority in 2012, when it provided \$75 million in dedicated funding, and again in 2014, when it provided \$37 million.⁵⁹ Additionally, for

⁵⁵ The Global Train and Equip program began under the authority provided by [Section 1206](#) of the 2006 defense authorization bill; its authority later evolved into [Section 2282](#), and then [Section 333](#), of Title 10, U.S. Code.

⁵⁶ Data for Department of Defense “Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority” and Section 333 Building Partner Capacity” programs in Uganda, Fiscal Years 2009-2018, *Security Assistance Monitor*, <https://securityassistance.org/>.

⁵⁷ Data for Department of Defense “Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority” and Section 333 Building Partner Capacity” programs in Kenya, Fiscal Years 2009-2018, *Security Assistance Monitor*, <https://securityassistance.org/>.

⁵⁸ “Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund from 2012 to 2018,” *Security Assistance Monitor*, accessed Nov. 8, 2018, <http://securityassistance.org/data/country/military/Counterterrorism%20Partnerships%20Fund/2012/2018/all/Global/>; Nina M. Serafino, “The Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund Proposal: Questions for Congress,” July 14, 2014, <https://fas.org/sfgp/crs/terror/IN10103.html>.

⁵⁹ “Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority Spending in East Africa from 2009 to 2018,” *Security Assistance Monitor*, accessed Nov. 8, 2018, [http://securityassistance.org/data/country/military/Section 1207\(n\)%29 Transitional Authority/2009/2018/all/East Africa/](http://securityassistance.org/data/country/military/Section%201207(n)%20Transitional%20Authority/2009/2018/all/East%20Africa/); “Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority — Total U.S.

several years, a small contingent of U.S. special operations forces has provided “advise and assist” support to AMISOM forces on the ground.⁶⁰

U.S. support has been narrowly tailored to sustain the capacity of AMISOM troop contributors to carry out counterterrorism missions in Somalia, neglecting the development of broader defense capacities that could be sustained in the long-run. Much of the State Department’s assistance has supported AMISOM’s operational costs rather than capacity-building. The capacity-building assistance provided by the United States has focused on tactical unit training and the provision of equipment. The United States has not substantially invested in the development of institutional systems, strategic-level command-and-control structures, logistics capabilities, or other features of mature militaries.

The resulting legacy of nearly \$2 billion in assistance is that, while AMISOM has — perhaps temporarily — degraded al-Shabaab, AMISOM contributors appear to have made few long-term capability gains. Its operations in Somalia have remained inconsistent,⁶¹ military professionalism remains a significant challenge, and contributors are “plagued by limited political will, delayed operations, coordination problems, and logistics and manpower shortfalls.”⁶²

A second legacy resulting from the tactical focus of capacity-building efforts may be the void AMISOM will leave behind. The mission was always intended as a temporary solution to a long-term problem. It was originally conceived as just a six-month operation.⁶³ Yet, for most of the last ten years, U.S. policy has focused on sustaining AMISOM operations, with

Security Aid in 2014,” Security Assistance Monitor, accessed Nov. 8, 2018,

<https://securityassistance.org/content/section-1207%28n%29-transitional-authority>.

⁶⁰ “U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia,” Remarks by Wendy R. Sherman.

⁶¹ Omar S. Mahmood and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, “Impact of EU Funding Dynamics on AMISOM,” Institute for Security Studies, East Africa Report, no. 16 (December 2017),

<https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear16.pdf>.

⁶² Jones, Liepman, and Chandler, “Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia.”

⁶³ Paul D. Williams with Abdirashid Hashi, “Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia,” The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (February 2016), <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Exit-Strategy-Challenges-for-the-AU-Mission-in-Somalia.pdf>.

little thought of what comes after. Now, as AMISOM forces plan for a 2020 exit, al-Shabaab remains a threat that the Somali security sector is incapable of tackling alone.

U.S. Support to the Somali National Army

In contrast to its support for AMISOM contributors, U.S. assistance to Somalia has been meager, sporadic, and narrowly targeted. Efforts to reestablish a Somali National Army date back to the 2008 Djibouti Agreement. The United States initially deferred to other donors — in particular, the European Union, which established the European Union Training Mission in 2010⁶⁴ — on efforts to build and train this new army. It largely neglected the SNA until 2015, and has never fully committed to aiding its establishment. As a 2016 RAND study put it, “U.S. military assistance to the Somali National Army has been limited and incremental, which is unfortunate, since the army is a critical component of long-term stability.”⁶⁵

Before 2013, U.S. assistance was constrained in part by a U.N. arms embargo blocking military assistance without prior U.N. approval,⁶⁶ as well as by concerns about the stability of the Somali government. 2013 marked a turning point. In March 2013, the United Nations relaxed its arms embargo, authorizing military assistance to strengthen the Somali government. The following month, President Barack Obama approved the provision of defense articles and services to the Somali army.⁶⁷ A September 2013 al-Shabaab attack against civilians in the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya, further energized U.S. attention to Somalia. However, it would be two more years before this policy direction translated into substantial capacity-building assistance. The United States only began providing capacity-

⁶⁴ “Common Security and Defence Policy: EUTM Somalia,” European Union, updated October 2014, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/sede/dv/sede210915factsheeteutmsomalia/_sede210915factsheeteutmsomalia_en.pdf.

⁶⁵ Jones, Liepman, and Chandler, “Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia.”

⁶⁶ “UN Arms Embargo on Somalia,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, last updated Nov. 21, 2017, https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un_arms_embargoes/somalia.

⁶⁷ “Obama Approves Sending U.S. Military Aid to Somalia,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-usa/obama-approves-sending-u-s-military-aid-to-somalia-idUSBRE93711G20130408>.

building assistance in Fiscal Year 2015, with an initial investment of \$13 million to train an infantry company, most likely a special operations unit known as Danab.⁶⁸

The following year, capacity-building assistance rose to \$67 million, continuing an infusion of funds to Somali special operations forces. In addition, the United States reported providing \$50 million to Somalia in 2016 through the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund to build SNA counterterrorism capabilities.

In 2016, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa Commander Gen. Kurt Sonntag noted that the Command's "proposed training plan would increase and enhance the Somali national security forces, including the army, national guard and national police."⁶⁹ Yet, what little assistance the United States has provided to Somali forces has, as with AMISOM, been largely tactical, mostly targeting the development of counterterrorism capabilities in special operations units. U.S. assistance has particularly benefited two units of elite counterterrorism forces: a 120-person rapid reaction force known as Gaashaan,⁷⁰ and a 150-person advanced infantry company named Danab.⁷¹ A combination of U.S. Special Operations Forces and private contractors, such as Bancroft and Dyncorp, have provided the training.⁷² In April 2017, President Donald Trump authorized the deployment of several dozen U.S. troops to Somalia to conduct train-and-equip operations.⁷³ That number has since risen to over 500 personnel, mostly special operators.⁷⁴ The deployment of Special Operations units has further emphasized capacity-building of Somali special forces units,

⁶⁸ Joseph Trevithick, "America Is Expanding Its Secretive War in Somalia," *The Drive*, March 31, 2017, <http://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/8851/america-is-expanding-its-secretive-war-in-somalia>.

⁶⁹ Mazzetti, Gettleman, and Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War."

⁷⁰ Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, "US-Trained Somali Commandos Fight Al-Shabab," *Voice of America*, July 31, 2014, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-trained-somali-commandos-fight-against-al-shabab/1968832.html>.

⁷¹ David Shinn, "Somalia, Al-Shabaab, the Region and U.S. Policy," *International Policy Digest*, April 19, 2015, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2015/04/19/somalia-al-shabaab-the-region-and-u-s-policy/>.

⁷² Shinn, "Somalia, Al-Shabaab, the Region and U.S. Policy."

⁷³ Carla Babb, "VOA Exclusive: Dozens More US Troops Deployed to Somalia," *Voice of America*, last updated April 14, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/dozens-more-us-troops-deployed-somalia-voa-exclusive/3809351.html>.

⁷⁴ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Helene Cooper, "1 U.S. Soldier Is Killed and 4 Are Wounded in Somalia Firefight," *New York Times*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08/world/africa/american-soldier-killed-somalia-.html>.

including by augmenting “advise and assist” operations in which U.S. forces may directly accompany and direct Somali military forces during combat operations. As a result, “In the past couple of years ... raids involving U.S. special forces have usually been conducted in tandem with Somali commando units, notably the *Danab* battalion.”⁷⁵

U.S. support for the broader SNA has been limited and erratic. The United States has provided \$66 million in stipends for individual soldiers over the past several years, as well as supplying fuel and food for SNA units.⁷⁶ However, in December 2017, the United States halted all of this assistance in the wake of concerns that corruption was diverting it from reaching Somali soldiers.⁷⁷ The stipend program had already been stopped and restarted several times. And shortly after Gen. Sontag’s command had begun to refocus capacity-building efforts on the SNA’s general forces, the December 2017 decision effectively scuttled that plan.

Unsurprisingly, Somali forces remain limited in their capabilities. Following a Somali government “operational readiness assessment” of the SNA in December 2017, the United Nations, African Union, and the Somali government each assessed that, as African Union Special Representative for Somalia Francisco Madeira stated, “the Somali National Army, in its current state of readiness, is not in a position to assume responsibility from AMISOM forces currently deployed in Somalia.”⁷⁸ A 2017 study of the SNA by a Mogadishu-based

⁷⁵ Paul D. Williams, “A Navy SEAL Was Killed in Somalia. Here’s What You Need to Know About U.S. Operations There,” *Washington Post*, May 8, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/08/a-navy-seal-was-killed-in-somalia-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-u-s-operations-there/?utm_term=.6ec4foe83877. While it may be tempting to view the special operations advisory mission as a new development, it represents an evolution of means more than ways; since at least 2010, the United States has been [funding private military contractors](#), including former special operations personnel, to advise and assist both AMISOM and Somali forces.

⁷⁶ Katharine Houreld, “Exclusive: U.S. Suspends Aid to Somalia’s Battered Military Over Graft,” *Reuters*, Dec. 14, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-military-exclusive/exclusive-u-s-suspends-aid-to-somalias-battered-military-over-graft-idUSKBN1E81XF>.

⁷⁷ Houreld, “Exclusive: U.S. Suspends Aid to Somalia’s Battered Military Over Graft.”

⁷⁸ “United Nations Security Council 8165th Meeting,” Jan. 24, 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/s_pv_8165.pdf.

think-tank found, “The list of needs is so fundamental that it is no exaggeration to suggest that Somalia is building its army from the very foundation.”⁷⁹

The challenges that caused the United States to terminate assistance to Somali general forces in 2017 directly stem from the institutional weaknesses of the Somali Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Army headquarters operations, which Washington has largely neglected. In 2016, the Defense Department allotted roughly \$10 million for a “national logistics hub” and \$5 million for “brigade and battalion level” engagement.⁸⁰ Aside from these two expenditures, the only inkling of any engagement at the institutional level are a smattering of investments in individual officer education.⁸¹ The World Bank found in 2017 that, “due to lack of capacity and unclear roles and responsibilities, the MoD is unable to currently exercise effective governance of the defence sector. The Ministry has approximately 30 people on its payroll. ... As such, the SNA is largely independent of Ministerial control.”⁸² The lack of effective defense governance has been at the heart of some of the most vexing and persistent challenges to the Somali security sector: unpaid wages, human rights abuses and insufficient military justice mechanism, corruption and ghost soldiers, and clan integration.⁸³

⁷⁹ Paul R. Camacho and Ibrahim Mohamed Abukar, “Somalia’s Security: The Reconstruction of the Somali National Army,” Center for Policy Analysis & Research (February 2017), <http://www.cfpar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Reconstruction-of-the-Somali-National-Army-Briefing-Report-4.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Data for Department of Defense “Section 1206 Train and Equip Authority” in Somalia, Fiscal Year 2016, *Security Assistance Monitor*, <https://www.securityassistance.org>.

⁸¹ “Global Somalia Funding from 2009 to 2018,” *Security Assistance Monitor*, <http://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Somalia/2009/2018/all/Global/>.

⁸² “Somalia Security and Justice Public Expenditure Review,” United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the World Bank (January 2017), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/644671486531571103/pdf/Somalia-SJPER-01302017-Final-Version.pdf>.

⁸³ For unpaid wages see: “Somali: Government Forces Seize Defense Ministry HQ Over Unpaid Salaries,” *Garowe Online*, May 18, 2017, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somali-government-forces-seize-defense-ministry-hq-over-unpaid-salaries>; for human rights abuses and insufficient military justice mechanisms, see: “Somalia 2017 Human Rights Report,” Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277289.pdf>; for corruption and ghost soldiers, see: Harun Maruf, “Somalia: Up to 30 Percent of Soldiers Unarmed,” *Voice of America*, Dec. 19, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-government-says-up-thirty-percent-its-soldiers-unarmed/4170388.html>;

The U.S. approach to the SNA has been rooted in bad strategy. U.S. policymakers and officials never effectively confronted key questions about the desired role, structure, and composition of the SNA. The SNA has evolved in fits and starts, absent clear strategic direction, from its 2008 reestablishment through the 2017 agreement of a National Security Architecture, which established SNA structure, mission, and sizing guidelines for the first time.⁸⁴ Throughout this period, major questions — with significant ramifications for efforts to create political unity and overcome drivers of insurgency — have hung over the Somali security sector: Should security be centralized in a national army or decentralized along regional or clan lines? How should clan militias be integrated into a coherent national force? What should be the relationship between the SNA and independent polities in Somaliland and Puntland? Should the SNA be structured primarily for peacekeeping or warfighting missions? By neglecting the SNA as an institution, and these questions specifically, the United States has largely forgone the opportunity to influence how the Somali national security architecture is organized and whether it will be viable.

The Perils of Strategic Incoherence

Now, after 10 years and roughly \$2 billion in assistance, AMISOM is on the verge of departure and the SNA remains incapable of ensuring Somalia's security.

In 2011, the *New York Times* reported that the United States was engaged in “a piecemeal approach” and “an overall American strategy in Somalia that has been troubled by a lack of focus and internal battles.”⁸⁵ In 2012, the Senate Armed Services Committee concluded that “there appears to be no coherent long-term strategy or timeline for transitioning the

for clan integration, see: “Shortages, Clan Rivalries Weaken Somalia's New Army,” *IRIN News*, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100141/shortages-clan-rivalries-weaken-somalias-new-army>.

⁸⁴ “Security Pact,” London Conference Somalia, May 11, 2017, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Gettleman, Mark Mazzetti, and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Relies on Contractors in Somalia Conflict,” *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/world/africa/11somalia.html?pagewanted=1&r=2&&mtref=undefined>.

AMISOM mission or associated U.S. support.”⁸⁶ The committee required the government to produce a Somalia strategy to address these concerns. Five years later, Congress felt compelled to demand another such strategy.⁸⁷

Congress shares some of the blame for the strategic incoherence that has characterized U.S. policy toward Somalia. During the last decade, it legislated at least six distinct capacity-building authorities.⁸⁸ Four of the six authorities were focused on counterterrorism and oriented toward tactical train-and-equip activities. Two authorities excluded Somalia as a recipient, thus funneling assistance toward AMISOM contributors. While these authorities may have simply reinforced Executive Branch instincts (many were passed in response to administration requests), they also validated these instincts and created constraints that made evolving the approach a challenge.

To these observations one might respond that, while U.S. efforts over the last ten years may appear incoherent, myopic, and ineffective in retrospect, it would be unfair to judge them harshly given that U.S. strategy was formulated in response to complex and ever-shifting political dynamics, deeply imperfect partners, competing agendas among the international donor community, limited resources, a constrained operating environment, and a resilient adversary. That such challenges existed is undeniable. Yet, effective strategies identify difficult challenges and develop approaches to mitigating them. Military strategists are instructed that a good planning framework “creates a shared understanding of the [operating environment]; identifies and frames problems within that [operating environment]; and develops approaches, through the application of operational art, to

⁸⁶ “S. Rept. 113-176 - Carl Levin National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015,” 113th U.S. Congress (2013-2014), <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/113th-congress/senate-report/176/1?overview=closed>.

⁸⁷ “H.R. 2810 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018,” 115th Congress (2017-2018), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810>.

⁸⁸ These authorities include the Section 1206 of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Global Security Contingency Fund (first authorized by the FY 2012 NDAA and most recently reauthorized by the FY 2018 NDAA), Section 1207(n) of the FY 2012 NDAA, 10 U.S. Code 2282, the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund, and 10 U.S. Code 333.

resolving those problems, consistent with strategic guidance and/or policy.”⁸⁹ Providing tactical assistance to the neglect of addressing institutional challenges, vacillating emphasis between AMISOM and the SNA, and failing to engage in shaping outcomes of key structural and policy decisions impacting the Somali national security enterprise are indications, not of challenging external factors or limited resources, but of a U.S. strategy half-formed and poorly executed.

Strategic Ramifications

The incoherence of the U.S. approach has brought two significant consequences for U.S. national security interests. First, U.S. objectives in Somalia remain distant and there is no clear plan for pursuing those objectives following AMISOM’s planned 2020 departure. Earlier this year, American University professor Tricia Bacon testified before Congress that, “at a strategic level, the campaign against al-Shabaab is at a stalemate ... the current strategy will not militarily defeat al-Shabaab or even seriously degrade the group. Yet, there is little momentum to pursue a negotiated political settlement either.”⁹⁰

It therefore seems likely that the United States will remain engaged in Somalia at a robust level in terms of role, resources, and, potentially, personnel for the foreseeable future. If AMISOM troops withdraw by 2020 as planned, there is little hope that the SNA can effectively fill the security void, likely creating additional risk to U.S. interests and pressure for the United States to expand its unilateral operations. On the other hand, while AMISOM leaders have called for a postponement of the withdrawal,⁹¹ such a delay would simply sustain U.S. resource commitments indefinitely.

⁸⁹ “Joint Planning,” Departments of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, June 16, 2017, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_o_20171606.pdf.

⁹⁰ “Tricia Bacon Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,” 2018, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/031418_Bacon_Testimony.pdf.

⁹¹ Halima Athumani, “AMISOM Heads of State Call on UN to Reverse Troop Drawdown in Somalia,” *Voice of America*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/amison-heads-state-call-on-united-nations-reverse-troop-drawdown-somalia/4278061.html>.

The second consequence has been the shaping of U.S. foreign policy beyond Somalia in ways that have undercut U.S. policies and values. The long-term reliance of the United States on AMISOM and the countries contributing forces to it has created dependency relationships that have undermined U.S. foreign policy goals in the region. As the largest contributor to two U.S. priority missions — AMISOM and the mission to eliminate Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army — Uganda has proved particularly vexing in this regard. During the course of the AMISOM mission, Uganda has devolved from an exemplary democracy to an increasingly autocratic, oppressive society that punishes political dissent and tramples on human rights.⁹² Yet, the U.S. response to Uganda’s decline has been muted because of its strategic dependency.⁹³ Moreover, Uganda has manipulated this dependence, for example, by threatening to withdraw from AMISOM when it was criticized for supporting an anti-government militia in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁹⁴

U.S. counterterrorism goals have similarly skewed American policy toward Ethiopia. Ethiopia has not only been a major force contributor to missions — both AMISOM and non-AMISOM — aimed at reaching U.S. objectives, but also reportedly hosted a U.S. military facility used to launch lethal strikes against al-Shabaab targets until 2016.⁹⁵ Despite acute and longstanding concerns about Ethiopia’s human rights record, the United States has tempered its criticism of the Ethiopian regime and continued to supply military assistance in spite of congressional efforts to impose restrictions.⁹⁶ Strategically, these policy

⁹² Jon Temin, “The Alarming Decline of Democracy in East Africa: How Washington Can Help Reverse the Trend,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 27, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-africa/2017-11-27/alarming-decline-democracy-east-africa>.

⁹³ Melina Platas and Kim Yi Dionne, “U.S. Foreign Policy and Ugandan Domestic Politics Collide,” *Washington Post*, April 7, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/07/u-s-foreign-policy-and-ugandan-domestic-politics-collide/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7dd1b71ae1f; Temin, “The Alarming Decline of Democracy in East Africa.”

⁹⁴ “Uganda to Withdraw Troops from Somalia, Says Mukasa,” *BBC*, Nov. 2, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-20121102>.

⁹⁵ John Hudson and Siobhán O’Grady, “As New Threats Emerge, U.S. Closes Drone Base in Ethiopia,” *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 4, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/04/as-new-threats-emerge-u-s-closes-drone-base-in-ethiopia/>.

⁹⁶ “5 Practical Recommendations for U.S. Policy on Ethiopia,” Freedom House, May 12, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/blog/5-practical-recommendations-us-policy-ethiopia>.

imbalances have not only undermined U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region, but have undermined U.S. credibility in its advocacy for core democratic values more broadly.

Conclusion

For the better part of the last 15 years, the United States has pursued national security objectives in several different regions with a strategy based on the premise that security assistance can be used to rapidly build the capacity of foreign forces to decisively defeat terrorist organizations posing a threat to the United States. Capacity has been seen as a strictly supply-side equation, wherein the United States can improve a partner military's effectiveness simply by plugging in new equipment and providing a modicum of small unit training, thus avoiding the need for any long-term commitment. And partners would willingly pursue goals aligned with U.S. interests, thereby saving the United States from the need for direct intervention. These assumptions are at the heart of the military mantra of operating "by, with, and through."

The Somalia case study exposes these assumptions as wishful and naive. It has demonstrated that capacity cannot be built either simply or quickly, but demands a consistent, sustained, holistic approach. It has shown the complexities of working through partners with a host of competing agendas. It has demonstrated that a narrow counterterrorism agenda almost inevitably runs headlong into more enduring U.S. foreign policy priorities, and even that counterterrorism objectives are poorly served by a near-term and tactical focus on counterterrorism. More than anything, it has shown the importance of strategy, and the pitfalls of strategies poorly formed.

Somalia is not lost, and the international community still has an opportunity to get it right. For the United States to be a constructive participant in that effort, it must set aside these misguided assumptions and develop a strategy that clearly identifies risks and organizes U.S. ways and means to achieve its stated ends despite these risks. It is these kinds of tailored and deliberate strategies — rather than the often empty bumper-sticker mantras of

“by, with, and through”⁹⁷ or “train, advise, and assist,”⁹⁸ — that are needed to guide U.S. capacity-building around the world.

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4. The Risks and Tradeoffs of Security Cooperation

By Melissa G. Dalton

Security cooperation is hardly new. The United States has been providing assistance to allies and partners, and pursuing an array of defense-related engagements with them since World War II. Increasingly, however, the U.S. government is relying on security cooperation to further its global defense objectives. The aim, as stated by Secretary of Defense James Mattis, is to work by, with, and through allies and partners so that they own the spaces where this cooperation occurs.⁹⁹ Look no further than the 2018 U.S. National

⁹⁷ Linda Robinson, “SOF’s Evolving Role: Warfare ‘By, With, and Through’ Local Forces,” RAND Corporation, May 9, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/05/sofs-evolving-role-warfare-by-with-and-through-local.html>.

⁹⁸ Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “Amy Mulls Train & Advise Brigades: Gen. Milley,” *Breaking Defense*, Dec. 14, 2015, <https://breakingdefense.com/2015/12/army-mulls-train-advise-brigades-gen-milley/>.

⁹⁹ Joseph Votel and Eero R. Keravuori, “The By, With, and Through Operational Approach,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 89. (April 2018), <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-539772139/the-by-with-through-operational-approach>.

Defense Strategy,¹⁰⁰ which elevates security cooperation as its second pillar.

The complexity of the security challenges confronting the United States — from strategic competition with near-peer competitors to counterterrorism efforts against non-state actors — are often unbounded by regional geography and require networks of allies and partners to fill gaps, cover seams, buttress capabilities, and open access. This is one reason why security cooperation has become more pervasive and integral to U.S. defense strategy, and arguably, at times, a substitute for it. Another reason is that domestic political pressures have created incentives for U.S. leaders to ask more of allies and partners when it comes to collective security.

Neither of these pressures — the complexity of the global threat environment, nor the domestic compulsion to share more of the burden — is likely to decrease in the near future. At the same time, at least three trends will challenge the way U.S. departments and agencies plan, conduct, and execute security cooperation in the next five years: changes in U.S. defense trade policy, skepticism of the return on investment, and contextual factors in recipient countries. The United States will need to create policy frameworks and operational approaches that reconcile the effects of these trends in a coherent fashion to mitigate policy tensions and maximize impact.

New Emphasis on Defense Trade

In April 2018, the Trump administration announced an updated arms transfer policy, which aims to make it easier for U.S. industry to sell weapons to other countries.¹⁰¹ This is the first update to U.S. conventional arms transfer policy since the Obama-era Presidential Policy

¹⁰⁰ The Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, January 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ “National Security Presidential Memorandum Regarding U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy,” The White House, Office of the President, April 19, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/national-security-presidential-memorandum-regarding-u-s-conventional-arms-transfer-policy/>.

Directive-27.¹⁰² It reflects recognition that the global arms market is increasingly crowded, and the United States must reform its approach to remain competitive. The Trump administration clearly wants to sell more arms abroad, in theory, to create American jobs and empower allied and partner countries so that they can tackle their own security challenges, as White House and Department of State officials have publicly noted.¹⁰³ President Donald Trump himself has showcased this approach in meetings with Saudi officials. Parallel reform efforts are underway to accelerate the delivery of arms sales to recipients while abiding by policy and technology release requirements.

The elevated focus on economic gains as an incentive for defense trade seems to be the major change, and is being used as a means for stimulating domestic manufacturing growth through increased jobs and production. This approach aims to help fulfill Trump's "America First" campaign promise of creating jobs at home. The reality of the benefits reaped from growing employment opportunities, however, is uncertain as military spending may create significantly fewer jobs than public spending in other sectors.¹⁰⁴ These jobs, however, may be high in value both in terms of wages and increased technology. Thus, analysis of the economic emphasis of the policy should focus on improved job opportunities as opposed to employment growth. Relative to other exports, arms exports may also be less likely to impact job growth because they often require offsets (otherwise known as supplemental agreements made in an arms sale) in addition to monetary transactions.¹⁰⁵ Partner nations are often pressured to offset their public dollars being spent on foreign goods by requiring domestic production or trade agreements, and thus, arms transfers might not increase employment as much as the sales figures would imply.

¹⁰² "Presidential Policy Directive - United States Conventional Arms Transfer Policy," The White House, Office of the President, Jan.14, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/15/presidential-policy-directive-united-states-conventional-arms-transfer-p>.

¹⁰³ "U.S. Arms Transfer Policy: Shaping the Way Ahead," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Aug. 8, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/events/us-arms-transfer-policy>.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Pollin and Heidi Garrett-Peltier, "The U.S. Employment Effects of Military and Domestic Spending Priorities: 2011 Update," Political Economy Research Institute (December 2011), https://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/PERI_military_spending_2011.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Samantha Cohen, Melissa Dalton, and Andrew Hunter, "Essential Imperatives for Arms Transfer Policy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 24, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/essential-imperatives-us-arms-transfer-policy>.

Additionally, arms transfers are a foreign policy tool and cannot be wholly separated from U.S. security cooperation policy. Arms transfers should be designed to build allied and partner defense capability and interoperability in ways that mitigate risk in U.S. plans for managing crises and contingencies, whether in the South China Sea, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East. Indeed, greater linkage between Department of Defense contingency planning and security cooperation communities will ensure stronger alignment to defense priorities and objectives. Depending on the reliability of a partner, and the degree to which it shares U.S. principles, arms transfers may prompt humanitarian risks, because once arms are transferred, the United States may have limited leverage or control over how they are used. While intensifying oversight of how arms are used and holding partners accountable may mitigate risks, uncertainty remains in terms of how a partner will use its equipment.

Seeking Return on Investment

The Trump administration is hardly the first to press allies and partners to do more for their own security. However, the president himself has sought to fully underscore his concerns about key allies in NATO and East Asia failing to shoulder the security burden, although often in narrow and selective terms. While the president's demands are seemingly hardline, U.S. political and public skepticism on the return on investment for security cooperation expenditures has been growing over the last four years. This is especially true when it comes to grant-based security sector assistance, for which the media has documented a litany of cases involving misuse and misconduct by recipients. The collapse of Iraqi troops when confronted by the Islamic State in 2014 has since become synonymous with the failures of security assistance in some circles.

In the last two National Defense Authorization Act cycles, Congress strengthened requirements on the Department of Defense to work with the U.S. State Department to strategically plan, assess, monitor, and evaluate security cooperation initiatives to ensure they track with U.S. foreign policy priorities. It also consolidated over 100 capacity-building authorities into one. Reform efforts are underway within the Defense Department to adapt its policy planning, processes, and resource alignment under this new Section 333 authority.

It is still early to judge the success of these requirements — that will have to wait until the assessment, monitoring, and evaluation systems are established and bear fruit. The Department of Defense has taken promising steps to provide Combatant Commands with advisors and templates for developing partner capacity-building program proposals, which require the articulation of outcomes, objectives, measures of success, and risk mitigation factors. However, significant steps will still need to be taken in implementing these historic reforms, not least of which is ensuring the broader security cooperation workforce — from Washington policy and program management offices, to U.S. Embassies, Military Services, and Combatant Commands — have the requisite tools and the capacity to plan, execute, and evaluate security cooperation activities.

Meanwhile, although the State Department has experimented with pilot programs for planning and evaluating the effectiveness of grant-based, security sector assistance, the Trump administration has prioritized its defense trade agenda (discussed above) over needed parallel reforms to how the State Department fulfills its statutory leadership on broader issues of foreign policy and grant-based security sector assistance. This imbalance between evaluations and defense trade has been reinforced by the U.S. budget de-prioritization within the State Department (and USAID), which will only further constrain the department's ability to effectively lead and work with the Defense Department to be responsive to calls for greater return on investment for security relationships with allies and partners. At the same time, compelled by deep suspicions of the utility of foreign aid, the Trump administration is also pursuing a top-down review of U.S. foreign assistance (e.g., for development, governance, and humanitarian support). However, the foreign assistance review could provide a silver lining opportunity to integrate common criteria into resource planning and execution to better align foreign assistance with policy priorities, which could have mirrored effects for security sector assistance.

Context Matters

The United States has strongly signaled its strategic intent to use security cooperation as a policy tool for a range of defense objectives — from countering terrorism to bolstering a network of allies and partners to compete with China and Russia. However, it must consider the downstream effects more concretely and in ways that impact security

cooperation planning and execution. Security cooperation may well achieve immediate objectives, such as disrupting a terrorist attack or signaling deterrence through combined exercises in advance of a diplomatic summit. It may even provide long-term benefits via institutional capacity-building to strengthen resilience to foreign penetration (e.g., defense institution-building in Ukraine).

These are critical tasks and functions that advance U.S. objectives. However, they must be calibrated to the context in which they are being implemented, so as not to inadvertently elevate partner expectations to a level that the United States cannot match, empower bad actors, reinforce predatory governance, exacerbate conflict dynamics, and/or cause civilian harm.¹⁰⁶ As the United States shifts its focus to strategic competition with near-peer competitors, there is a risk of abandoning bedrock principles and values that have historically undergirded U.S. leadership in order to keep pace with competitors who do not ascribe to the same rules and are willing to overlook partner transgressions. The challenge for the United States in this competitive environment will be to reinforce the principled basis for questioning and modulating its security relationships when necessary, while also making clear that the capability output and political outcomes of a security relationship with the United States far exceed those offered by U.S. competitors.

Having a robust assessment, monitoring, and evaluation system and articulating a theory of change will enable such calibration and the design of conflict-aware security cooperation. Inevitably, however, emergent crises and threats to national security interests will put pressure on policymakers to sidestep rigorous planning and assessment, monitoring, and evaluation processes. These decisions should be made with a conscious acknowledgment and assessment that there are risks and trade-offs to doing so, and appropriate mitigation measures should be developed so as not to fundamentally derail other U.S. foreign policy priorities in a particular country or context.

¹⁰⁶ Frances Z. Brown and Mara Karlin, “Friends with Benefits: What the Reliance on Local Partners Means for U.S. Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2018-05-08/friends-benefits>.

Conclusion

Security cooperation is not a strategy unto itself, even if it can be an effective way of achieving core U.S. defense objectives. The U.S. government should broker such deals with a clear-eyed assessment of the risks and tradeoffs of arms transfers — for the sake of “improving a relationship,” weighed against operational, economic, and humanitarian value. With growing impulses to shift the burden of global security requirements to allies and partners, America will have to resist temptations to myopically strike arms transfer deals or train local security partners for immediate gain without thorough consideration of the risks and the development of a mitigation plan. It will have to build rigorous and principled policy frameworks and technical approaches that are both operationally and economically responsive, to enable it to compete and secure its objectives in the 21st century.

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