

HELPING OTHERS DEFEND THEMSELVES

The Future of U.S. Security Assistance

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Abstract (Summary): In the decades to come, the most lethal threats to the US' safety and security are likely to emanate from states that cannot adequately govern themselves or secure their own territory. Dealing with such fractured or failing states is, in many ways, the main security challenge of this time. For the Defense Department and the entire US government, it is also a complex institutional challenge. The effectiveness and credibility of the US will only be as good as the effectiveness, credibility, and sustainability of its local partners. This strategic reality demands that the US government get better at what is called "building partner capacity": helping other countries defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside US forces by providing them with equipment, training, or other forms of security assistance. Helping other countries better provide for their own security will be a key and enduring test of US global leadership and a critical part of protecting US security, as well.

In the decades to come, the most lethal threats to the United States' safety and security - a city poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack - are likely to emanate from states that cannot adequately govern themselves or secure their own territory. Dealing with such fractured or failing states is, in many ways, the main security challenge of our time.

For the Defense Department and the entire U.S. government, it is also a complex institutional challenge. The United States is unlikely to repeat a mission on the scale of those in Afghanistan or Iraq anytime soon - that is, forced regime change followed by nation building under fire. But as the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review recently concluded, the United States is still likely to face requiring a familiar tool kit of capabilities, albeit on a smaller scale. In these situations, the effectiveness and credibility of the United States will only be as good as the effectiveness, credibility, and sustainability of its local partners.

This strategic reality demands that the U. S. government get better at what is called "building partner capacity": helping other countries defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside U.S. forces by providing them with equipment, training, or other forms of security assistance. This is something that the United States has been doing in various ways for nearly three-quarters of a century. It dates back to the period before the United States entered World War II, when Winston Churchill famously said, "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job." Through the Lend-Lease program, the United States sent some \$31 billion worth of supplies (in 1940s dollars) to the United Kingdom over the course of the war. U.S. aid to the Soviet Union during those years exceeded \$11 billion, including hundreds of thousands of trucks and thousands of tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces.

Building up the military and security forces of key allies and local partners was also a major component of U.S. strategy in the Cold War, first in Western Europe, then in Greece, South Korea, and elsewhere. One of the major tenets of President Richard Nixon's national security strategy, the Nixon Doctrine, was to use military and economic assistance to help U.S. partners and allies resist Soviet-sponsored insurgencies without using U.S. troops in the kind of military interventions that had proved so costly and controversial in Korea and Vietnam.

ADVISORY DUTY

The global security environment has changed radically since then, and today it is more complex, more unpredictable, and, even without a superpower adversary, in many ways more dangerous. The U.S. military, although resilient in spirit and magnificent in performance, is under stress and strain fighting two wars and confronting diffuse challenges around the globe. More broadly, there continues to be a struggle for legitimacy, loyalty, and power across the Islamic world between modernizing, moderate forces and the violent, extremist organizations epitomized by al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other such groups. In these situations, building the governance and security capacity of other countries must be a critical element of U.S. national security strategy.

For the most part, however, the United States' instruments of national power - military and civilian - were set up in a different era for a very different set of threats. The U.S. military was designed to defeat other armies, navies, and air forces, not to advise, train, and equip them. Likewise, the United States' civilian instruments of power were designed primarily to manage relationships between states, rather than to help build states from within.

The recent history of U.S. dealings with Afghanistan and Pakistan exemplifies the challenges the United States faces. In the decade before 9/11, the United States essentially abandoned Afghanistan to its fate. At the same time, Washington cut off military-to-military exchange and training programs with Pakistan, for wellintentioned but ultimately shortsighted-and strategically damaging - reasons.

In the weeks and months following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government faced a number of delays in getting crucial efforts off the ground - from reimbursing the Pakistanis for their support (such as their provision of overflight rights to U.S. military aircraft) to putting in place a formal Afghan military. The security assistance system, which was designed for the more predictable requirements of the Cold War, proved unequal to the task. The U.S. government had to quickly assemble from scratch various urgently needed resources and programs. And even after establishing funding streams and authorities, the military services did not prioritize efforts to train the Afghan and, later, the Iraqi security forces, since such assignments were not considered career enhancing for ambitious young officers. Instead, the military relied heavily on contractors and reservists for these tasks.

More recently, the advisory missions in both the Afghan and the Iraqi campaigns have received the attention they deserve-in leadership, resources, and personnel. Within the military, advising and mentoring indigenous security forces is moving from the periphery of institutional priorities, where it was considered the province of the Special Forces, to being a key mission for the armed forces as a whole. The U.S. Army has established specialized Advisory and Assistance Brigades

- now the main forces in Iraq - and is adjusting its promotion and assignment procedures to account for the importance of this mission; the U.S. Air Force is fielding a fleet of fighter jets and transport aircraft optimized to train and assist local partners, and it recently opened a school to train U.S. airmen to advise other nations' air forces; and the U.S. Navy is working with African countries to improve their ability to combat smuggling, piracy, and other threats to maritime security.

One institutional challenge we face at the Pentagon is that the various functions for building partner capacity are scattered across different parts of the military. An exception is the air force, where most of these functions - from foreign military sales to military training exchanges - are grouped under one civilian executive (the equivalent of a three-star general) to better coordinate them with larger goals and national strategy. This more integrated and consolidated approach makes better sense for the Pentagon and for the government as a whole.

The United States has made great strides in building up the operational capacity of its partners by training and equipping troops and mentoring them in the field. But there has not been enough attention paid to building the institutional capacity (such as defense ministries) or the human capital (including leadership skills and attitudes) needed to sustain security over the long term.

The United States now recognizes that the security sectors of at-risk countries are really systems of systems tying together the military, the police, the justice system, and other governance and oversight mechanisms. As such, building a partner's overall governance and security capacity is a shared responsibility across multiple agencies and departments of the U.S. national security apparatus - and one that requires flexible, responsive tools that provide incentives for cooperations. Operations against extremist groups in the Philippines and, more recently, Yemen have shown how well-integrated training and assistance efforts can achieve real success,

But for all the improvements of recent years, the United States' interagency tool kit is still a hodgepodge of jury-rigged arrangements constrained by a dated and complex patchwork of authorities, persistent shortfalls in resources, and unwieldy processes. The National Security Act that created most of the current interagency structure was passed in 1947, the last major legislation structuring how Washington dispenses foreign assistance was signed by President John F. Kennedy, and the law governing U. S. exports of military equipment was passed in 1976. All the while, other countries that do not suffer from such encumbrances have been more quickly funding projects, selling weapons, and building relationships.

BRIDGING THE POTOMAC

In 2005, to address the country's most pressing needs, the Defense Department obtained authorities that enable the military to respond to unforeseen threats and opportunities by providing training and equipment to other countries with urgent security needs. These new tools came with an important innovation: their use requires the concurrence of both the secretary of defense and the secretary of state in what is called a "dual key" decision-making process. In recent years, the secretaries have used these authorities to assist the Lebanese army, the Pakistani special forces, and the navies and maritime security forces of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Those authorities and programs - and the role of the Defense Department in foreign assistance writ large - have stirred debates across Washington. I never miss an opportunity to call for more funding for diplomacy and development and for a greater emphasis on civilian programs. I also once warned publicly of a "creeping militarization" of aspects of U.S. foreign policy if imbalances within the national security system were not addressed. As a career CIA officer who watched the military's role in intelligence grow ever larger, I am keenly aware that the Defense Department, because of its sheer size, is not only the 800-pound gorilla of the U.S. government but one with a sometimes very active pituitary gland.

Nonetheless, it is time to move beyond the ideological debates and bureaucratic squabbles that have in the past characterized the issue of building partner capacity and move forward with a set of solutions that can address what will be a persistent and enduring challenge. Last year, I sent Secretary of State Hillary Clinton one proposal that I see as a starting point for discussion of the way ahead. It would involve pooled funds set up for security capacity building, stabilization, and conflict prevention. Both the State Department and the Defense Department would contribute to these funds, and no project could move forward without the approval of both agencies. A number of other countries - in particular the United Kingdom, the primary model for this proposal - have found that using pooled funds from different ministries is an effective way of dealing with fragile or failing states. What I find compelling about this approach is that it would create incentives for collaboration between different agencies of the government, unlike the existing structure and processes left over from the Cold War, which often conspire to hinder true whole-of-government approaches.

Whatever approach we take to reforming and modernizing the United States' apparatus for building partner capacity, it should be informed by several principles. First, it must provide agility and flexibility. Under normal budgeting and programming cycles, a budget is put together one year, considered and passed by Congress in the next, and then executed in the third. This is appropriate and manageable for predictable, ongoing requirements. But as recent history suggests, it is not well suited to dealing with the emerging and unforeseen threats - or opportunities - often found in failed and failing states.

Second, there must be effective oversight mechanisms that allow Congress to carry out its constitutional responsibility to ensure that these funds are spent properly. Tools that foster cooperation across the executive branch could also enhance cooperation across the jurisdictional boundaries of congressional committees - thereby actually strengthening congressional oversight in the national security arena.

Third, security assistance efforts must be conducted steadily and over the long term so as to provide some measure of predictability and planning for the U.S. government and, what is more significant, for its partners abroad. Convincing other countries and leaders to be partners of the United States, often at great political and physical risk, ultimately depends on proving that the United States is capable of being a reliable partner over time. To be blunt, this means that the United States cannot cut off assistance and relationships every time a country does something Washington dislikes or disagrees with.

Fourth, any government decision in this area should reinforce the State Department's leading role in crafting and conducting U.S. foreign policy, including the provision of foreign assistance, of which building security capacity is a key part. Proper coordination procedures will ensure that urgent requirements for military capacity building do not undermine the United States' overarching foreign policy priorities.

Finally, everything must be suffused with strong doses of modesty and realism. When all is said and done, there are limits to what the United States can do to influence the direction of radically different countries and cultures. And even the most enlightened and modernized interagency apparatus is still a bureaucracy, prone to the same parochial and self-serving tendencies as the system it has replaced.

Helping other countries better provide for their own security will be a key and enduring test of U.S. global leadership and a critical part of protecting U.S. security as well. Improving the way the U.S. government executes this vital mission must be an important national priority.