

# Getting American Security Force Assistance Right: Political Context Matters

By Jahara Matissek and William Reno  
Joint Force Quarterly 92

[PRINT](#) | [E-MAIL](#)



7

Jan. 23, 2019 —

[Download PDF](#)

Major Jahara Matissek, USAF, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Military and Strategic Studies at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Dr. William Reno is a Professor in the Political Science Department at Northwestern University.

If one accepts that the American military is the most powerful armed force in human history, why does it have a mixed record when it comes to building up foreign armies in weak states? With immense experience, capability, and resources, the United States should be able to train and develop competent armed forces in any host nation. Yet evidence over the past several decades has shown how difficult this task is. When a Senegalese general was asked why the United States struggled to create effective militaries throughout Africa, despite the United States (and other countries) committing tremendous resources (for example, funding, equipment, trainers/advisors, among others), he explained, “The logic of their politics will show you the quality of their military.”<sup>1</sup> His remark should not come as surprise, yet in interviews with officials that oversee (and conduct) security force assistance (SFA), there is a massive disconnect between what is believed possible and what can actually be accomplished given the political context within each country.<sup>2</sup> This highlights a substantial problem with Western SFA: it is too focused on building an army in the absence of a

viable state that has the institutional capacity and political willpower to sustain that army.

There are several sides to the SFA debate. First, there are critics who view SFA as enabling host-nation militaries to engage in more violence and human rights abuses—an increase in capacity, but without proper discipline in its use.<sup>3</sup> In this vein, some argue that SFA in the form of International Military Education and Training and the Countering Terrorism Fellowship program leads to an increase in coups d'état.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that military assistance to Colombia played a role in increasing political violence and undermined domestic political institutions as pro-government paramilitaries indirectly benefited from this assistance.<sup>5</sup> These arguments rest on the assumption that any aid to militaries in weak states does more harm than good.

Other scholars are less critical of SFA and emphasize the ways that it can be used judiciously as an incentive for desired performance. Kristen Harkness, for instance, contends that SFA should be provided on a “carrots-and-sticks” basis, where host-nation governments are conduced into not politicizing their armed forces by reforming them to be meritocratic in place of recruitment and promotion on the basis of loyalty and patronage.<sup>6</sup> This approach relies on assumptions that recipients of SFA will respond to incentives in predictable and beneficial ways. Others contend that SFA is effective only when there is a substantial donor commitment (from the United States, for example) alongside a host-nation government that has national interests closely aligned with the donor patron state.<sup>7</sup> There are valid concerns, however, that all the money and energy spent on SFA without addressing internal political problems in a weak state will just result in the creation of a Fabergé egg army: expensive to

build but easy to crack.<sup>8</sup> While SFA may promote desired outcomes in some recipient states, the resources and advice that donors provide in weak states just exacerbate the underlying problems already present.

The Fabergé egg army problem points to the central importance of political context: weak states have governments that lack legitimacy and a national sense of identity. Such regimes usually provide few public goods and services and are prone to significant internal violence.<sup>9</sup> The political environment encountered in this type of weak state is notable for numerous embedded contradictions between national- and local-level politics. This is where the formalities of the state shift into the informal, as state authority is exercised through a series of bargains with local powerbrokers rather than on the basis of performance legitimacy gained through providing services and protection to citizens. These alliances with various powerbrokers such as local strongmen, warlords, and militias usually are precarious. In some countries, these bargains extend into the realm of illicit commercial activities, such as drug-trafficking and financial frauds, as high officials turn a blind eye to (and themselves profit from) these activities in return for political support.<sup>10</sup> These opaque relationships dictate—to varying extents—the development of political coalitions and negotiations that leads to the mobilization of power bases that are coordinated through different forms of authority and legitimacy.

A substantial problem develops within this context when Western militaries attempt to provide SFA and expect their partners to undertake reforms as a condition for this support. Many times, the actual SFA providers on the ground have to navigate local politics that make by-the-book operational

procedures impossible. This leads many SFA troops on the ground to develop ad hoc relations between various armed actors and government factions to achieve order and maintain relative safety. This is a particularly difficult situation for the SFA provider when some of the government officials who are supposed to play central roles in assistance programs are themselves implicated in the kinds of activities that SFA is meant to address.<sup>11</sup> SFA is made worse when there is a strategic disconnect from this on-the-ground experience, which can range along the spectrum from merely establishing military-to-military relations all the way to building a new standalone army. Each presents its own particular costs, risks, and benefits. Various elites from the national down to local level, including people whose behavior and interests contribute to the problems that SFA is supposed to address, have an incentive to utilize SFA for their own purposes, either as patronage to reward loyalists or to eliminate rivals.

Almost by definition, many of the weak state's government officials, military officers, police, and others who are the formal state's main interlocutors with the United States and other SFA providers can at the same time be involved in the very activities and organizations that SFA troops identify as the problem. It is problematic when Western advisors have to train Iraqi police and personnel who are connected to sectarian militias. This frustration is expressed well in a video of a U.S. Army sergeant berating Iraqi police trainees for their loyalties to sectarian militias instead of to their country.<sup>12</sup> SFA in the hands of these people may have the effect of increasing the power of particular militias at the expense of the effectiveness and legitimacy of the police or army as a whole. Likewise, local government officials who oversee SFA program beneficiaries in some cases are the same people

who are involved in criminal networks and large-scale corruption.<sup>13</sup> The risk is that their SFA connections likely empower these people and their informal strategies that weak state officials use to exercise authority at the expense of long-term donor aims. The critical problem for SFA in these cases is that success would have to involve a massive overhaul of the way the recipient state is structured, not just a few key reforms. This would amount to a state-building enterprise, whether it is acknowledged or not.

# Challenges of Improving SFA

The United States and its allies, such as the United Kingdom (UK), are not interested in huge state-building projects. Instead, they are adapting to the demand for more SFA in these difficult political contexts. Each has recently created a specific unit: the United States is standing up six security force assistance brigades (SFABs) and the British are developing two new specialised infantry battalions (SIBs)—designed around strengthening their SFA abilities.<sup>14</sup> These programs essentially focus their training and assistance on creating pockets (“enclaves”) of effective local forces focused on specific tasks. Despite these well-intentioned efforts, SFABs and SIBs will struggle in future SFA efforts for three reasons.

First, there are substantial bureaucratic hurdles impeding SFA as an important mission set. Western militaries rarely allow their best military personnel to be involved in SFA activities because it is treated as a “backwater” that damages career

advancement and promotion opportunities. Spending long periods of time in sub-Saharan African countries in an advisory role is not a good formula for rapid advancement through the ranks. Historically, there has been a tendency to treat such SFA efforts as a low priority relative to conventional warfare. Worse, military personnel systems in the United States and UK are unwilling to reward those who excel in their SFA duties.<sup>15</sup> Even the well-intentioned AfPak Hands program, with an emphasis on nation-building and improving SFA to Afghanistan and Pakistan, was mismanaged, and many Servicemembers who volunteered for it lamented how it hurt their careers.<sup>16</sup>

Second, military advisor units are not designed to deal with the “bad” politics in a fragile state. Despite what Western politicians might say, the problems of a weak state in the periphery are not treated as an existential threat, leading to half-hearted attempts at SFA to contain a security problem instead of addressing the root causes (for example, bad host-nation governance). The average Western military would rather worry more about developing AirLand Battle concepts and practicing combined arms maneuver for war with a near-peer than to concern its military with the parochial problem of SFA. This is because tactics and capabilities must be carefully adapted to the social milieu of a failed state, which requires Western advisors on the ground to know the language and culture so that they can read the “political terrain.” This can take years to properly develop. Those who do spend time to meet local people, acquire a local language, and learn about the intricacies of politics do so at the risk of not tending to other priorities that will help them advance up the career ladder. Moreover, the dedicated operator may be

surrounded by “bad apples” who are assigned to these lower priority missions.

Third, little strategic thinking is put into SFA. It is assumed that resources, in terms of advisors provided and host-nation troops trained and equipped, will generate the desired product—a host-nation army capable of marching and shooting straight. However, such SFA efforts to provide the “ABCs” of military training to an army in a fragile state is a dubious effort because the organization of politics in a weak state has considerable overlap. There are numerous unconventional ways of asserting authority and legitimacy in political and military affairs. Instead of formal government structures dictating politics, the exertion of control is informally conducted through networks, surveillance, and kinship. The destabilizing aspect of SFA is that Western militaries typically try to create an apolitical host-nation military designed for a liberalized democratic state. However, this can create substantial problems for the viability of the host-nation government, especially if the newly trained military believes itself to be better at governing. This problem arose in Gambia with the aborted coup of Lamin Sanneh, a reform-minded Gambian officer who earned a master’s degree at the National Defense University in Washington, DC. Upon returning to Gambia, Lieutenant Colonel Sanneh concluded that serving his president, who was involved in massive corruption and drug-trafficking, was at odds with his professional military education.<sup>17</sup>

In this article we argue that successful SFA has little to do with doctrinal approaches or the type or form of training provided to host-nation militaries. Instead, effective SFA requires overt signals of commitment from Western governments to a targeted set of elites in the weak state. This

requires a willingness by Western leaders to provide long-term support to reform-minded people in fragile governments as long as reforms are undertaken. Such actions facilitate the removal of these militaries from the bad politics of the state. Successful SFA must be tied to strengthening the state and its politics toward its own efforts at long-term state-building without trying to forcefully push democratization, which can promote violence and destabilization.<sup>18</sup> This is precisely why an Ethiopian general relayed in an interview, “If we copied your military [U.S. Armed Forces] it would be dangerous to Ethiopia.”<sup>19</sup> Learning about and acting on the nuances of a complicated political context is an information-intensive exercise and requires adjusting SFA to fit specific contexts so that a more capable military is viewed as compatible to political and societal elites. Pursuing such an alternative path may mean accommodating some of the practices and priorities of local elites that are not in total alignment with the way the United States wants to conduct SFA.

Finally, Western ideas of a subservient military in such a weak state context might do more harm than good. Due to the nature of violence and politics in this context, known as limited access orders, military elites generally behave as co-equals with other political actors and societal elites.<sup>20</sup> Any attempt to make these actors subservient without stronger institutions, including checks and balances, may tip the balance of power, leading to fragmentation in the government and military. If the United States can adapt SFA to the realities of such a political context—specifically avoiding the common pitfalls of building an army in a weak state—then smarter SFA could be provided to build a stronger state with an effective military.



# Weak State or Weak Army? The Three SFA Traps

Engaging weak states is in America's national interest. As first identified in the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), "weak states . . . pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states."<sup>21</sup> Such language about weak states was recently updated by the Trump administration in the 2017 NSS to indicate that the United States "will give priority to strengthening states where state weaknesses or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland."<sup>22</sup> Weak states provide environments conducive to insurgency and terrorism and can create humanitarian crises (for example, refugees) that contribute to domestic political instability (extremist domestic politics caused by an immigration influx).<sup>23</sup> Yet there is almost an inherent moral hazard with helping prop up an army that the host-nation government cannot afford, sees as a threat, or is treated as something to manipulate toward its own consolidation of power. This observation points to three types of SFA traps, which are best illustrated with the cases of Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq.

***Unaffordable.*** Afghanistan encapsulates the issues facing a country that cannot afford an army it needs to maintain the illusion of control and stability. A 2014 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report noted that without Western combat troops, the Afghan government

would need to maintain a security force of over 370,000 personnel to control and defend the country from Taliban infiltration. The report also indicated that it would cost over \$5 billion annually for the Afghan government to maintain a military that large. This is highly problematic given that this would take up the majority of the Afghan budget, leaving only enough to fund one-third of other government functions (for example, infrastructure, civil servants, among others).<sup>24</sup> More realistically, the Afghan army will only exist if the United States and other donors pay for it. Open-ended foreign financing means Afghans have no incentive to make sacrifices and reforms needed to sustain such a security force. The smart Afghan will just sit back, letting the West subsidize bad governance. An Afghan military without a state is not a viable future or desirable outcome, yet current policies do not provide incentives for Afghans to create a stronger state.

The United States and its allies have learned that the Afghan National Army (ANA) can be effective when Western combat troops are attached, but these ANA units become militarily ineffective when operating on their own. In short, the ANA works well when Western troops operate alongside as “co-combatants.” When the ANA must operate independently, they fall apart. The only exception are the U.S.-trained Afghan army commandos, who are elite soldiers capable of rapidly deploying and handling crises.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, this is not enough for the vast expanses and rough terrain of Afghanistan. The harsh reality is that, as of late 2017, the Afghan government only controls 30 percent of the country, which are districts with Western troops assigned to ANA units.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the survival of Kabul depends on foreign troops being attached to as many ANA units as possible and its few

elite commando units. But there are long-term implications because few (if any) Western governments are willing to make such an open-ended commitment of SFA to an Afghan government that is perceived as weak, corrupt, and incapable.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Afghan government cannot afford the sizable army needed to maintain order and stability or have an ANA operate independently makes the viability of the Afghan state tenuous at best for the foreseeable future.

***Threatening.*** It makes sense that most governments, weak ones especially, are most worried about soldiers with guns. This problem is the *civil-military problematique*, where the “military [is] strong enough to do anything the civilians ask them to with a military subordinate enough to do only what civilians authorize them to do.”<sup>28</sup> In practical terms, this is a serious issue in Somalia, where clan politics dominate how different components of the Somali National Army (SNA) and other security organizations are configured. The problem becomes more complex when one acknowledges the reality that many Somali politicians perceive different factions of the military as a threat to their personal rule and their family clan ties. In response to perceived threats, they empower their favored armed groups (state-sanctioned and nonstate) to attack other components of the government and security institutions. This problem persists despite American military assistance, from 2007 to present, totaling over \$2 billion, with over 1,500 SNA troops trained.<sup>29</sup> Since 2010, the European Union Training Mission in Somalia has been providing mentoring and advising to the SNA.<sup>30</sup> Despite such aid, pathological “clannism” politics continues to pervade Somali security institutions, where various SNA factions are more loyal to their kinship groups than the national government.<sup>31</sup>

The establishment of a Turkish military training base in Mogadishu further complicates SFA matters.<sup>32</sup> Turkey's presence provides a different venue for the politicization of the SNA with ties to Turkish strategic interests. Subsequent interest in Somalia's military on the part of the governments of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and others complicates the situation even more, especially as ideological and strategic strains develop among these various funders. For example, SNA troops assaulted UAE troops at their military training center in Mogadishu, partially under the premise to loot—but also to send a signal to the UAE about its decision to build a military base and port in the secessionist state of Somaliland.<sup>33</sup>

The only credible Somali partner on the ground appears to be the Danab (“Lightning”), an elite Somali commando unit specifically trained by U.S. Special Forces. Its military effectiveness against al-Shabaab appears to correlate with its ability to transcend bad Somali politics by having a meritocratic mixed-clan organization.<sup>34</sup> However, its ability to operate as an enclave outside of predatory Somali politics is only possible with the presence of U.S. military trainers. Danab troops are housed in a compound separate from Somali politics and society. Thus, Danab military effectiveness is a function of its removal from the negative influences of what is the façade of a government in Mogadishu and the clan-based politicians who serve in official posts. Is this sustainable, or does the United States and its allies have to make the entire SNA like the Danab? That would simply make this militia an extension of U.S. military training and advising rather than a part of a real Somali security force. Worse, what will the Danab do if the U.S. military leaves? Will the Danab be a threat to the Somali government if it is the only

competent organization in Somalia? Already, there have been multiple incidents of SNA components and other Somali security institutions getting into gunfights with one another and against the Danab.<sup>35</sup> This problem reflects the on-the-ground reality that each armed faction is vying for control of the government and also that each faction regards others as more of a threat than a viable component of a collective Somali state-building effort. Providing SFA to Somalia, when there is so much in-fighting, is troubling when al-Shabaab should be viewed as the bigger threat since it “still controls large swathes of Somalia” as of April 2018.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it appears that al-Shabaab is the most effective military force and state-builder in Somalia, particularly considering the limited resources at its disposal.

***Politicized.*** The failure and eventual collapse of the Iraqi military after U.S. trainers left in 2011 is not an indictment against Iraqi soldiers and their willingness to fight the so-called Islamic State (IS), but highlights a failed political system. The Iraqi prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, started packing the military with loyalists and politicized (and personalized) different components of the Iraqi security forces.<sup>37</sup> Such sectarian favoritism led to fragmentation of the Iraqi military when IS started conquering territory in 2013, as Iraqi army units chose to flee instead of fighting small contingents of IS fighters.<sup>38</sup> Since Maliki explicitly chose Shia constituents over Sunnis, this undermined Iraqi military cohesion.<sup>39</sup> Disenfranchised Sunnis found it relatively easy—besides for basic survival—to swap alliances from Baghdad to IS because they had been abandoned politically and materially.<sup>40</sup>

When the U.S. military finally came to the rescue of the Iraqi government, it was only because IS fighters were within 15

miles of the Baghdad airport in late 2014.<sup>41</sup> When the United States (and other Western allies) deployed their combat troops and advisors alongside Iraqi military units, they were able to help the Iraqi army overcome politicized and sectarian splits. This improvement in Iraqi military effectiveness was a function of these troops operating outside of the corrosive sphere of sectarian politics that had undermined unit cohesion, loyalty, and morale. Beyond politicians helping to hollow out the Iraqi army, various commanders were pocketing funds meant for their units.<sup>42</sup> For instance, an American advisor working in Baghdad in early 2015 was appalled to discover that most Iraqi troops hurt in anti-IS combat operations were “kicked out of the military because their commanders did not want to pay their medical bills out of their own pockets.”<sup>43</sup> No wonder so many Iraqi troops fled when faced with the prospect of fighting IS.

The greater failure of the Iraqi army was based on Maliki’s decision to target Sunni protestors in Anbar Province who complained that their government was attacking them and reneging on earlier agreements to incorporate more Sunnis into the Iraqi security forces.<sup>44</sup> Given that these forces were attacking them, some people allowed their neighborhoods to fall into the hands of IS fighters. This outcome was more a product of bad political decisions by Maliki to empower loyalty over competence, which meant aggressive behavior toward a sectarian community rather than empowering the fighting abilities of the Iraqi army.<sup>45</sup>

The only bright spot was the emergence of the “Golden Division” in Iraq’s Counter-Terrorism Service, which played a substantial role in liberating IS-held territories in Iraq with minimal U.S. assistance. The Golden Division was effective because its origins were based on being trained outside of the

contentious political environment after 2003. Moreover, its leadership, specifically Lieutenant General Abdul-Wahab al-Saadi, had “zero tolerance for sectarianism,” which prevented his units from being politicized and personalized by corrupt Iraqi politicians.<sup>46</sup> The performance of the Iraqi military during the rise and fall of the IS “caliphate” (2013–2017) suggests that the Iraqi military is capable of being effective in its own enclave when separated from corrosive Baghdad politics.

However, positive Iraqi military outcomes either requires “babysitting” by foreign military personnel or exemplary leadership as seen in the Iraqi Golden Division. How can the Iraqi military institutionalize such nonsectarianism and robust leadership? Or is the Iraqi military only bound to be further politicized by ambitious Iraqi politicians seeking to consolidate their own power through divide-and-rule strategies? The future looks difficult as Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), have been integrated into the formal structures of the Iraqi military.<sup>47</sup> The PMF will likely play a disruptive role in building Iraqi security institutions devoid of politics.

The PMF represent a considerable challenge, as some Iraqis perceive them as serving the interests of sectarian political parties and individual strongmen rather than a broad Iraqi national interest. Some PMF units even fly the flags of sectarian political parties alongside the national flag, which raises concerns among some Iraqis that these elements of the national army are interested in protecting only their supporters, as opposed to all Iraqi citizens.<sup>48</sup> The problem for SFA in this context concerns how to ensure that skills and supplies are not transferred from the army to sectarian militias. This is a hard distinction to make when the United

States, Iran, and many neighboring countries are all vying to influence Baghdad in different directions.

# Adjusting SFA to the Weak State Paradigm

Each of these specific (and overlapping) problems in the armies of Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq is illustrative of the American SFA-paradox: helping weak governments create effective security institutions that will remain strong without American involvement. If history is any guide, the success of American SFA hinges on long-term commitments to support state institutions alongside the building up of a host-nation military. However, with the rise of globalized insurgencies and collapsed states, domestic audiences in the West are unwilling to back politicians who suggest open-ended commitments to countries that seem so dissimilar to their own.<sup>49</sup> The idea of a contemporary American strategy that emulates a post-1945 commitment seems untenable and unsellable. At the same time, experience shows us that the stationing of substantial numbers of U.S. troops—with no timeline for withdrawal—in Germany, Italy, and Japan (and South Korea after the Korean War) illustrates a path toward success that no politician or military leader dares now suggest.

The alternative solution is a bitter pill to swallow, but is more grounded on the harsh realities of politics in weak and fragile states. While interviewing American and British military personnel who conducted SFA in weak states, they consistently talked about their roles in helping develop tactical



capabilities and how important they believed it was for these militaries to develop self-sufficiency and military effectiveness.<sup>50</sup> However, there is substantial naiveté in believing that Western SFA can overcome deep-rooted political problems that prevent long-term defense-institution building (DIB). In fact, an overemphasis on tactical expertise and operational education and training in SFA does a disservice to most militaries in a weak state precisely because this may not be sustainable given the political context—whether for budgetary reasons, issues of civil-military relations, and/or politicization of security forces. What good is a tactically proficient military, with expensive weaponry and considerable training, in a context where state officials lack political willpower and capacity to support such a force? This is a recipe for the expensive to build, yet easy-to-break Fabergé egg army. These problems suggest that American SFA in weak states needs to be just as focused on doing politics as that of providing specific military training.<sup>51</sup>

Without developing the necessary political and social space for militaries to professionalize free from the political pathologies of most weak states, no amount of aid or assistance will remake this context, short of a massive state-building effort. Context matters and SFA should be adapted to it. If we return to the thoughts of the Senegalese general, the U.S. military must be willing to play a positive role in developing good politics in the host nation so as to produce a positive outcome—a competent and effective host-nation military that behaves in a benign fashion. This is a discomfiting position for Western military personnel who are taught to remain apolitical. Yet in underdeveloped weak states, political cohesion is at a premium, and if this requires the development of militaries that are more politically involved

in state-building, it is better to have them engaged in positive state-building rather than being used as tools against domestic rivals. Such a blended form of civil-military relations might upset those who subscribe to Samuel Huntington's vision for dichotomous relations between the Soldier and the State.<sup>52</sup> However, some weak African states, such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Ethiopia, have managed to develop highly effective militaries precisely because their armies have "partnerships" with the state and are strategically integrated into the "shared vision" for state-building.<sup>53</sup>

# Conclusion

The basic dilemma for providing SFA to weak governments is that the beneficiaries are often implicated in the activities that this assistance is meant to address. In Iraq, sectarian militias undermine national unity and Baghdad's legitimacy. SFA cannot build a sustainable Iraqi military (or properly conduct DIB) in such a context. Corrupt officials in Afghanistan do not need the ANA to defend them from the Taliban because America subsidizes it through SFA. Practitioners can think of any number of examples of this sort occurring right now throughout Africa and the Middle East.

It is tremendously hard to sustain a Western-styled military that is professional and capable in a fragile state. Many host-nation leaders lack the political willpower and capacity to utilize the benefits of SFA in this context, at least beyond distributing SFA as patronage. At present, the best the U.S. military can do in these situations is to build a militia that is insulated from the bad politics of the state and to use that militia for counterterrorism or other specific tasks that serve

American national interests. Moving beyond this situation requires a much more intensive political engagement with these states. It would include more coercive measures to force reforms and to install honest partners. This comes with dangers because the American public is reluctant to return to the failed politics of state-building. Attempts to install Western-friendly officials in weak states will become an American-made problem, and these leaders will likely be criticized by opponents for serving Western interests.

These problems present real risks. But there are some pathways out of this dilemma, through limited engagements, savvy political maneuvering, and patience on the part of U.S. officials and practitioners. This requires deep knowledge of local political contexts and familiarity with key actors. These qualities in turn rest on the willingness of U.S. planners and politicians to remain focused on these countries, pursue consistent policies, and provide the necessary career rewards to the professionals on the ground who devote substantial time and energy to getting this job done.

This sounds easy on paper, but success will only come with national security leadership making SFA a priority, which seems unlikely since the 2015 shuttering of the *DISAM Journal of International Security Cooperation Management*, a Defense Department–funded journal that focused on improving SFA.<sup>54</sup> Future SFA success rests on supporting the necessary intellectual foundations and frameworks needed to develop and sustain commitments to militaries *and* politicians in weak states. Failure to do so will only lead to America building more expensive Fabergé egg armies that easily break when the U.S. military leaves. **JFQ**

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Authors' interview, Dakar, Senegal, August 14, 2017.
- <sup>2</sup> Authors' interviews, Pentagon, July 26–29, 2017; authors' interviews, U.S. Africa Command (Stuttgart, Germany), August 1–5, 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> Kersti Larsdotter, "Security Assistance in Africa: The Case for Less," *Parameters* 45, no. 2 (2015), 25–34.
- <sup>4</sup> Jesse Dillon Savage and Jonathan D. Caverley, "When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol: Foreign Aid in the Form of Military Training and Coups," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 4 (2017), 542–557.
- <sup>5</sup> Oeindra Dube and Suresh Naidu, "Bases, Bullets, and Ballots: The Effect of U.S. Military Aid on Political Conflict in Colombia," *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (2015), 249–267.
- <sup>6</sup> Kristen A. Harkness, "Security Assistance in Africa: The Case for More," *Parameters* 45, no. 2 (2015), 13–24.
- <sup>7</sup> Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, nos. 1–2 (2018), 89–142.
- <sup>8</sup> Jahara Matisek, "The Crisis of American Military Assistance: Strategic Dithering and *Fabergé Egg Armies*," *Defense & Security Analysis* 34, no. 3 (2018), 267–290.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).
- <sup>10</sup> William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); Vanda Felbab-Brown, Harold Trinkunas, and Shadi Hamid, *Militants, Criminals, and*

*Warlords: The Challenge of Local Governance in an Age of Disorder* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

<sup>11</sup>William Reno, “The Politics of Security Assistance in the Horn of Africa,” *Defence Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018), 498–513, available at <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14702436.2018.14638](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14702436.2018.14638)>

<sup>12</sup>“U.S. Army Sgt. Gives Iraqi Police a Telling Off,” video, 5:36, November 25, 2010, available at <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj6AXvkBnv4&t=10s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj6AXvkBnv4&t=10s)>.

<sup>13</sup>Fieldwork, Baghdad, Iraq, and Kurdistan, April 9–26, 2018.

<sup>14</sup>U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Army Creates Security Force Assistance Brigade and Military Advisor Training Academy at Fort Benning,” *Army.mil*, February 16, 2017, available at <[www.army.mil/article/182646/army\\_creates\\_security\\_force\\_a](http://www.army.mil/article/182646/army_creates_security_force_a)>  
Michael Fallon, “Strategic Defence and Security Review—Army: Written Statement—HCWS367,” *UKParliament.uk*, December 15, 2016, available at <[www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-12-15/HCWS367](http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-12-15/HCWS367)>.

<sup>15</sup>Authors’ interviews with American and British personnel involved with Security Force Assistance, February 7, 2018, and July 17, 2018.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas E. Ricks, “It May Be the Top Personnel Priority of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs—But Is the AfPak Hands Program Flopping?” *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2011, available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/08/it-may-be-the-top-personnel-priority-of-the-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-but-is-the-afpak-hands-program-flopping/>>; Hans Winkler and Robert Kerr, “AFPAK Hands: Time for Strategic Review?” *Small Wars Journal*, June 4, 2018, available at

<<http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/afpak-hands-time-strategic-review>>; authors' interviews with AfPak Hands members, 2015–2018.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Meiser, “The Dilemma of an African Soldier,” *War on the Rocks*, January 26, 2015, available at <<https://warontherocks.com/2015/01/the-dilemma-of-an-african-soldier/>>.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Leininger, Sonja Grimm, and Tina Freyburg, eds., *Conflicting Objectives in Democracy Promotion: Do All Good Things Go Together?* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Authors' interview, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 7, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Douglass C. North et al., eds., *In the Shadow of Violence: Politics, Economics, and the Problems of Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 17, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 39–40.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Newman, “Weak States, State Failure, and Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 4 (2007), 463–488.

<sup>24</sup> John F. Sopko, *Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction: Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, VA: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, July 30, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Shashank Bengali, “These Are Afghanistan’s Best Troops: The U.S. Is Backing a Plan to Create Many More of Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2017, available at

<[www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-afghanistan-special-operations-20171209-htmllstory.html](http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-afghanistan-special-operations-20171209-htmllstory.html)>.

<sup>26</sup> Shoaib Sharifi and Louise Adamou, “Taliban Threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC Finds,” BBC, January 31, 2018, available at <[www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42863116](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42863116)>.

<sup>27</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Weak, the Bad, and the Ugly: Policy Options in Afghanistan,” Brookings blog, October 28, 2008, available at <[www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-weak-the-bad-and-the-ugly-policy-options-in-afghanistan/](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-weak-the-bad-and-the-ugly-policy-options-in-afghanistan/)>; Alicia P.Q. Wittmeyer, “What Went Wrong in Afghanistan?” *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2013, available at <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/what-went-wrong-in-afghanistan/>>; R. Jeffrey Smith, “American Leaders Persistently Ignored Warnings That Afghan Government Corruption Would Undo Rebuilding,” Public Radio International, October 18, 2016, available at <[www.pri.org/stories/2016-10-18/american-leaders-persistently-ignored-warnings-afghan-government-corruption-would](http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-10-18/american-leaders-persistently-ignored-warnings-afghan-government-corruption-would)>.

<sup>28</sup> Peter D. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control,” *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996), 149–178.

<sup>29</sup> “Security Aid Data,” Security Assistance Monitor, April 1, 2018, available at <<http://securityassistance.org/data/country/military/country/200>> “Trainees Data,” Security Assistance Monitor, April 1, 2018, available at <<http://securityassistance.org/data/country/trainee/country/200>>

<sup>30</sup> Common Security and Defence Policy, “European Union Training Mission–Somalia,” European Union External Action,

March 2018, available at <[www.eutm-somalia.eu/download/1125/](http://www.eutm-somalia.eu/download/1125/)>.

<sup>31</sup> Colin D. Robinson, “The Somali National Army: An Assessment,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> Tom O’Connor, “Turkey’s Military to Move into Somalia after Backing Qatar in Gulf Crisis,” *Newsweek*, August 7, 2017, available at <[www.newsweek.com/turkey-military-move-somalia-backing-qatar-gulf-crisis-646836](http://www.newsweek.com/turkey-military-move-somalia-backing-qatar-gulf-crisis-646836)>.

<sup>33</sup> “UAE to Train Somaliland Forces Amid Somalia Rift,” *Middle East Monitor* (London), March 16, 2018, available at <[www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180316-uae-to-train-somaliland-forces-amid-somalia-rift/](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180316-uae-to-train-somaliland-forces-amid-somalia-rift/)>; “Somali Forces Clash with UAE Troops,” *Middle East Monitor*, March 16, 2018, available at <[www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180424-somali-forces-clash-with-uae-troops/](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180424-somali-forces-clash-with-uae-troops/)>.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Steigman, “Logistics at the Edge of the Empire: U.S. Army Logistics Trainers in Somalia,” *Small Wars Journal*, February 7, 2018, available at <[www.hiiraan.com/op4/2018/feb/146795/logistics\\_at\\_the\\_edge](http://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2018/feb/146795/logistics_at_the_edge)>

<sup>35</sup> Ismail Akwei, “Somali Security Forces Turn Against Each Other, 6 Killed in Shootout,” *Africa News* (Pointe-Noire, Congo), July 27, 2017, available at <[www.africanews.com/2017/07/27/somali-security-forces-turn-against-each-other-6-killed-in-shootout/](http://www.africanews.com/2017/07/27/somali-security-forces-turn-against-each-other-6-killed-in-shootout/)>; Mohamed Olad Hassan, “At Least Six Killed as Rival Somali Troops Clash in Mogadishu,” VOA News, September 16, 2017, available at <[www.voanews.com/a/at-least-six-killed-as-rival-somali-troops-clash-in-mogadishu/4031788.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/at-least-six-killed-as-rival-somali-troops-clash-in-mogadishu/4031788.html)>; “Somalia: NISA, Military Soldiers Clash in the Capital Mogadishu,” *Garowe Online* (Puntland, Somalia), October 10, 2017, available at



<[www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-nisa-military-soldiers-clash-in-the-capital-mogadishu](http://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-nisa-military-soldiers-clash-in-the-capital-mogadishu)>.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Ferguson, “Trump’s Military Escalation in Somalia Is Spurring Hope and Fear,” *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2018, available at <[www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-military-escalation-in-somalia-is-spurring-hope-and-fear](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-military-escalation-in-somalia-is-spurring-hope-and-fear)>.

<sup>37</sup> Derek Harvey and Michael Pregent, “Who’s to Blame for Iraq Crisis,” CNN, June 12, 2014, available at <[www.cnn.com/2014/06/12/opinion/pregent-harvey-northern-iraq-collapse/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/12/opinion/pregent-harvey-northern-iraq-collapse/index.html)>.

<sup>38</sup> John Beck, “Iraqi Soldiers Fleeing ISIS Claim They Were ‘Abandoned’ by Senior Officers,” VICE News, June 15, 2014, available at <<https://news.vice.com/article/iraqi-soldiers-fleeing-isis-claim-they-were-abandoned-by-senior-officers>>.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Lister, “One Move Too Far: How Iraq’s Nuri al-Maliki Overreached in Anbar,” CNN, January 7, 2014, available at <[www.cnn.com/2014/01/07/opinion/iraq-anbar-crisis-lister/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/07/opinion/iraq-anbar-crisis-lister/index.html)>.

<sup>40</sup> Zachary Laub, “The Islamic State,” Council on Foreign Relations, August 10, 2016, available at <[www.cfr.org/background/islamic-state](http://www.cfr.org/background/islamic-state)>.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Grace Lucas, “ISIS Nearly Made It to Baghdad Airport, Top U.S. Military Leader Says,” CNN, October 13, 2014, available at <[www.cnn.com/2014/10/12/politics/isis-baghdad-martin-dempsey/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/12/politics/isis-baghdad-martin-dempsey/index.html)>.

<sup>42</sup> Ned Parker and Missy Ryan, “Iraqi Military Breakdown Fueled by Corruption, Politics,” Reuters, June 13, 2014, available at <[www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-military-analysis/iraqi-military-breakdown-fueled-by-corruption-politics-idUSKBN0EO2FK20140614](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-military-analysis/iraqi-military-breakdown-fueled-by-corruption-politics-idUSKBN0EO2FK20140614)>.

- <sup>43</sup> Authors' interview, U.S. military officer, April 13, 2015.
- <sup>44</sup> Authors' interviews, Baghdad, Iraq, April 10–16, 2018.
- <sup>45</sup> Elise Labott, "5 Questions: What's Going on in Iraq?" CNN, January 6, 2014, available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/01/06/politics/iraq-qa/>.
- <sup>46</sup> Peter Bergen, "Bergen: It Wasn't Trump but This General's Elite Soldiers Who Defeated ISIS," CNN, December 16, 2017, available at [www.cnn.com/2017/12/15/opinions/it-wasnt-trump-but-this-generals-elite-soldiers-who-defeated-isis-bergen/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/15/opinions/it-wasnt-trump-but-this-generals-elite-soldiers-who-defeated-isis-bergen/index.html).
- <sup>47</sup> Renad Mansour, "More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here to Stay," *War on the Rocks*, April 3, 2018, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/more-than-militias-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces-are-here-to-stay/>.
- <sup>48</sup> Authors' interviews, Baghdad, Iraq, April 10–16, 2018.
- <sup>49</sup> William Reno and Jahara Matisek, "A New Era of Insurgent Recruitment: Have 'New' Civil Wars Changed the Dynamic?" *Civil Wars* 20, no. 3 (2018), available at [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698249.2018.14973](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698249.2018.14973).
- <sup>50</sup> Authors' interviews, American and British personnel, 2017–2018.
- <sup>51</sup> Mara E. Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).
- <sup>52</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).

<sup>53</sup> Rocky Williams, “Toward the Creation of an African Civil-Military Relations Tradition,” *African Journal of Political Science/Revue Africaine de Science Politique* 3, no. 1 (1998), 20–41; Jahara Matisek, “Pathways to Military Effectiveness: Armies and Contemporary African States” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Refer to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) Web site to see its message about the journal being discontinued, available at [www.discs.dsca.mil/\\_pages/resources/default.aspx?section=publications&type=course\\_pubs](http://www.discs.dsca.mil/_pages/resources/default.aspx?section=publications&type=course_pubs). In an interview with a DSCA official (April 6, 2017), he lamented the “bad decision” made by a departing DSCA deputy director who saw “no purpose” to the *Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management [DISAM] Journal*.

---