



**Semi-Annual Lesson Report:  
Defense Support to Stabilization (DSS)  
Volume II**

## Table of Contents

	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	3
<b>Promote security sector governance</b>	4
<u>Core Roles for the Military in a Changing Security Environment</u>	4
<u>Fix Their Armies to Fix Fragile Countries' Stability?</u>	8
<b>Manage rival powers</b>	13
<u>Stabilization Assistance as a Geopolitical Competition Asset</u>	13
<u>US Policy Shortfalls—Case Study, Afghanistan</u>	17
<u>Leverage Relevant Research to Prepare for Defense Support to Stabilization</u>	20
<u>PKSOI Lesson Reports, SOLLIMS Samplers, and Case Studies (2009-2021)</u>	23

## Introduction

The Global Fragility Act of 2019<sup>1</sup> outlined a US strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability in countries identified by the Department of State in partnership with other federal agencies. Among those agencies is the Department of Defense (DOD) with its relatively new interagency support authority, the *Defense Support to Stabilization*, or DSS.<sup>2</sup> As Stephanie Hammond, then Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs, indicated

This new authority allows DOD to provide logistical support, supplies and services to other federal agencies conducting stabilization activities... [so that] ... critical civilian expertise can get into hard-to-reach areas more quickly and efficiently and with more effective resources, creating a unity of effort that the agencies have lacked in the past.<sup>3</sup>

The intent of this lesson collection is to offer some insight into topics and concepts DOD should recognize or consider as it plans and programs itself to partner with other federal agencies across the stabilization spectrum. Therefore, it is appropriate that the lessons here reflect the “integrated policy responses that advance multiple Administration priorities,” as described in the *2022 Prologue of the US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, to wit:

- Elevate Democracy, Human Rights and Governance
- Mitigate Climate Change and Strengthen Environmental Security
- Pursue equity and equality based on gender and other factors
- Promote security sector governance
- Manage rival powers<sup>4</sup>

As outlined, there is at least one lesson in this two-volume collection for each Administration priority listed. This is the second volume of this lesson collection, and it focuses on the last two Administration priorities: *Promote security sector governance* and *Manage rival powers*, with a concluding lesson that reminds stabilization practitioners about the [usefulness of academic research](#) and publications when in plan and/or program development or implementation.

The first volume provides lessons associated with the first three priorities: *Elevate Democracy, Human Rights and Governance*; *Mitigate Climate Change and Strengthen Environmental Security*; and *Pursue equity and equality* based on gender and other factors. In addition, the first section of that volume shares a lesson collection focused on interagency history, from the Clinton Administration’s Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 56 to US and NATO lessons from the Afghanistan decades, and a concern of future interagency resource balance. In other words, *what’s past is prologue*.<sup>5</sup>

Please note that in no way are these lesson collections comprehensive. Instead, they are a beginning DSS external discourse—and, perhaps, internally as well. Also note that while the first section of the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Global Fragility Act (GFA) of 2019, H.R. 2116/ S.727, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2116> (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> David Vergun, “Government Officials Announce U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict, Promote Stability,” *DOD News*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2452604/government-officials-announce-us-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-promote-stability/source/government-officials-announce-us-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-promote-stability/> (accessed March 20, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, *2022 Prologue to the United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* (April 1, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/2022-prologue-to-the-united-states-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability/> (accessed May 15, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, as seen at <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/what-s-past-is-prologue/m04n3q2f?hl=en>.

first volume and the last lesson of this second volume do not reflect an Administration priority, they may be relevant to greater understanding of stabilization complexities.

PKSOI's Lessons Learned Analyst, Colonel Lorelei Coplen (US Army, Retired), prepared and authored the lessons in both volumes between November 2021 and June 2022, unless otherwise indicated. Each of these lessons are also found in the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS) database, identified by the JLLIS number adjacent to each lesson title. Footnotes in these documents indicated any edits, changes, or updates to the JLLIS-based lessons. JLLIS access is at <https://www.jllis.mil> and required a Department of Defense Common Access Card (CAC) for registration.

## Promote security sector governance

### Core Roles for the Military in a Changing Security Environment (JLLIS 232946)

#### Observation

In November 2021<sup>6</sup>, researchers and authors Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom of Lund University, Sweden<sup>7</sup>, published a paper in the *European Journal of International Security* to answer these questions:

- (1) what role does the military play in contemporary industrialized, democratic societies?
- (2) what type of civil-military relations arise from these roles?

After their study of 70 National White Papers and Security Strategies from 37 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>8</sup> member states (and a few non-OECD states), they identify three core military roles—*collective defense*, *collective security*, and *aid to the nation*. Each of the roles have sub-divisions as well, summarized in the Discussion below.

In conclusion, they assert:

while the military remains a highly hierarchical and stable institution characterised [sic] by continuity and tradition, it has also proven to be malleable in the face of having to adapt to new circumstances, and to the society it is tasked to protect, in order to remain relevant. Roles and tasks are thus likely to continue to evolve, to reflect contemporary understandings of what and whom the armed forces are for.<sup>9</sup>

They suggest this *military malleability* is necessary in the contemporary global security environment. To make that point, they quote another author, Rita Brooks, who states: “We need

---

<sup>6</sup> This paper was written and published prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late winter-early spring 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Wilén is with the Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden. She is also Director of Africa Program, Egmont Institute, Brussels, Belgium and with the Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Norway. Lisa Strömbom is also of the Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden.

<sup>8</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organization with 38 member countries, to include the United States. It was founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. See <https://www.oecd.org/about/>.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Wilén and Lisa Strömbom, *A versatile organisation: Mapping the military's core roles in a changing security environment*, *European Journal of International Security*, 7(1), 18-37.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/versatile-organisation-mapping-the-militarys-core-roles-in-a-changing-security-environment/F08835A0F3AEB2258BDF80313B5C5009> (accessed 19 March 2022).

an army, in other words, that can do everything, everywhere – in a world where war may be everywhere, and forever.”<sup>10</sup>

## Discussion

The authors assert early in their paper:

The military institution is one of the state's core institutions. With the defence [sic] of the territorial integrity of the state as its main role, some even consider it *the* most important of all state institutions.<sup>11</sup>

They further argue the military “is shaped both by a functional imperative stemming from the threats to society's security, and a social imperative arising from the social forces, ideologies, and institutions dominant within the society.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the military roles and tasks and missions are *socially constructed*, defined by conceptions and environment of the various actors.<sup>13</sup>

To standardize their observations, the authors provide definitions for terms commonly used to describe the militaries’ actions: roles, tasks, and missions. Evolved from a significant literature review, the authors offer the term *role* as ‘a broad and enduring purpose’ compared to *tasks* or *missions*, “which might change over time within the remits of one role.”<sup>14</sup> As example, according to the authors, peacekeeping is a military role, but its contribution of troops to a peacekeeping mission is a task. However, they also acknowledge “The two categories are thus distinct, yet their relationship is complex, as some tasks or missions can transform into roles over time, sometimes through novel legislation.”<sup>15</sup>

The authors determined the many changes in military requirements since the mid-point of last century: “a changing geopolitical threat picture, globalization [sic], and...blurred boundaries between internal and external security.”<sup>16</sup> However, they categorized the three contemporary roles—collective defense, collective security, and aid to the nation—with these subroles: warfighting, military assistance, international crisis management, national disaster relief, support to internal security forces, and epidemic support. (See table below)

Table. Military roles and tasks.

(Collective) Defence	Collective Security	Aid to the nation
<i>Warfighting &amp; Irregular warfare</i>	<i>Military Assistance</i>	<i>Disaster Relief</i>
	<i>International Crisis Management</i>	<i>Military Support to Internal Security Forces</i>
		<i>Epidemics support</i>

<sup>10</sup> Rosa Brooks, *How Everything became War and the Military became Everything* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2016), p. 156.

<sup>11</sup> Wilén and Strömbom, *A versatile organisation*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

They define *national defense* as *defense of national territory against external threats* and note:

All the official documents analysed [sic] for this study identified the defence [sic] of national territory and the safeguard of national sovereignty and independence as the main role of the military. There were nevertheless obvious differences in the way that this primary role was formulated. Smaller states stressed for example their membership and loyalty to an international organisation [sic], showcasing the importance of coalitions and allies for national territorial defence [sic], while collective defence [sic] was most clearly manifested in NATO allies' evocation of Article 5.<sup>17</sup>

They further note that Baltic and Scandinavian states have updated and upgraded their military structures and increased the number of annual military exercises. In addition, many nations have returned to conscription after less than a decade of volunteer forces.

Yet, the authors highlight that little territorial defense between OECD nations occurred in the past several decades. Instead, most military defense of the nation is expeditionary. That is, "deployed to contexts of (irregular) warfare in an effort to quell violent non-state organisations [sic], and thereby also defend the state, or to international crises..."<sup>18</sup> They further note their analysis indicates the "absence of waging war as an accepted task... is also evident in the official documents, which talk about *avoiding* war or maintaining peace and stability, but rarely about the task of fighting wars."<sup>19</sup>[original emphasis] They also categorize Irregular Warfare (IW) as part of warfighting (in concert with Information- and/or Cyber Warfare), while noting that many of the OECD militaries do not.

National-level official military documents frequently highlight *collective security*, according to the authors, of which *international crisis management* (such as peace operations, disaster relief, and humanitarian aid missions) and *military assistance* (MA) appear most often. In their categorization, they include a broad group of security cooperation activities in the MA subset, from military-capacity and capabilities improvement to "fostering democratisation [sic] efforts by helping to develop merits-based institutions."<sup>20</sup>

The *aid to the nation* category of military roles is where the authors assert there is much contemporary change with related increased tension in the civil-military relationship spectrum. Included in this category are the subsets labelled *disaster relief*, *military support to internal security forces*, and *support during epidemics* (which can be generalized to public health support). The authors acknowledge that these types of domestic engagement are traditional for many—if not most—militaries. However, they contend that such domestic missions "have assumed a new urgency as subnational threats have grown, either reinforcing or expanding older roles, or pushing the military into new roles."<sup>21</sup> This is especially the case with *military support to internal security forces* given

---

<sup>17</sup> Wilén and Strömbom, *A versatile organisation*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

As traditional distinctions between crime, terrorism, and war are fading, the military has also increasingly been used for immigration control and relatedly for fighting transnational criminality, epitomised in the concept of 'war on drugs'.<sup>22</sup>

A similar tension attaches to the military *support during epidemics*. While there was little mentioned about this role in military documents pre-COVID-19 pandemic, the last two years put the military on the public health "frontline" in many nations. Yet, as the authors point out

In most European states, this military support is not threatening the civil-military balance, as other state institutions are capable of maintaining their authority in respective domains. Yet, in some states with important precedents of military rule and relatively nascent democratic structures, the military's prominent role during the pandemic may have wider implications, which outlast the course of the pandemic. In case the military is performing unpopular tasks, such as enforcing the quarantine, or preventing civilians from doing what they feel they need to do, it may also result in deteriorating civil-military relations.<sup>23</sup>

While the authors mention "the vast differences in civil-military relations between various states," they still determined two trends that were common: 1) increased visibility (of the military by the public); and 2) high levels of trust (by the public of the military)<sup>24</sup>. They caution: "Together, these two trends raise questions concerning governance of the military and points to complex issues regarding accountability and legitimacy. As such, they provoke classical questions about the military's relationship to society in a swiftly changing context."<sup>25</sup>

## Recommendations

The authors do not provide specific recommendations for policy makers or military leaders. Instead, they alert the military profession and its political leadership to recognize "diversity and proliferation of military roles and tasks reveal both internal and external tensions and questions."<sup>26</sup> They point out several reasons for the tensions, to include, but not limited to, the following:

- The military takes on more responsibilities with fewer resources (to include personnel).
- The trend to utilize small elite forces, rather than traditional military.
- Increasing reliance on a civilian workforce in military operations (government or contract).

---

<sup>22</sup> Wilén and Strömbom, *A versatile organisation*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. They further state: Somewhat counterintuitively, however, this popularity does not always translate into a personal willingness to serve in the military or to encourage one's child to serve.... This may be linked to a general sociocultural shift during the past decades, whereby individual rights have increasingly been emphasized [sic], and traditional values, which used to be prominent in the military institution, such as work ethic and religious values have taken a backseat to working conditions and financial and material incentives.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. The authors elaborate: ...as the military has acquired new domestic roles closer to the civilian sphere, and as politicians in states that previously respected the military's apolitical nature, have attempted to politicise [sic] the military, this debate has resuscitated...While the practices of politicising [sic] the military and militarising [sic] politics are not new phenomena in many states (most notably African countries that have witnessed a high number of military coups over the past decades), it is a relatively recent trend in some Western states. This development occurs in a period where many previously military functions have been civilianised [sic] and where civilians are increasingly integrated in the military, thus blurring the boundaries between the two spheres further. Whereas some observers take a clear stance against the military's involvement in politics, others open up for a new debate about the limits and conditions of such involvement in order to update and adapt principles to contemporary challenges.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

- “...newer tasks contradict traditional ones...and provoke questions about identity.”<sup>27</sup>

They highlight a few examples of contradictory tasks: peacekeeping, “where the soldier-warrior identity is, at least partially, to be replaced by the soldier-diplomat identity”; counterterrorism, which “blur established boundaries between internal and external security forces’ responsibilities”; and public health support, such as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

In reminder, the authors state

As one of the central state institutions, with the capacity and mandate to use lethal violence, the military is a powerful organisation [sic]. In spite of post-Cold War declining defence [sic] budgets in some regions, and the restructuration of the armed forces during the 1990s leading to smaller organisations [sic], it still represents one of the largest employers in most societies, with a significant number of associated industries, such as research and development, and military industries, generating further employment. Understanding what such a key state institution does, and what it *should* do, is crucial to hold it accountable, to evaluate its performance and to assess its needs. It is also essential in order to analyse [sic] the evolution of civil-military relations in society, which, inherently, is imprinted by the nature of the roles and tasks that are assigned to the military.<sup>29</sup>

### **Fix Their Armies to Fix Fragile Countries’ Stability? (JLLIS 234140)**

#### **Observation**

In a May 2022 online article, Enrica Picco, the Central Africa Project Director for International Crisis Group, argues as her article is titled: *Fixing the army is key for CAR’s* [Central African Republic] *stability*. She states. “Failure to create an army that is representative of the population and financially sustainable could undermine soldiers’ loyalty to the state and push them to rise up or join a new rebellion, as they have in the past.”<sup>30</sup>

While her subsequent notes are specific to CAR’s contemporary situation, her overarching observation is not unique to CAR—or to the African continent. Over the centuries, most researchers and practitioners identify the stability requirement for any nation of a trustworthy and professional security apparatus, such as a military and/or police force. For example, of the Colombian military officials, Admiral Craig Faller (US Navy, Retired), a previous Commander for US Southern Command and now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security (among other fellowships and advisory boards), writes that they

---

<sup>27</sup> Wilén and Strömbom, *A versatile organisation*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Enrica Picco, “Fixing the army is key for CAR’s stability,” *The Africa Report*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/203143/fixing-the-army-is-key-for-cars-stability/> (accessed May 20, 2022). This online article is based on her commentary found at: Enrica Picco, “Central African Republic: Averting Further Fragmentation of the Armed Forces,” *International Crisis Group*, May 10, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/centrafrique-eviter-une-nouvelle-desintegration-de-larmee> (accessed May 20, 2022).



understand that strong, professional, corruption-free institutions are the best bulwark against insecurity and instability [and] Among professional militaries, trust is the foundation to build the ethically-based [sic] military skills necessary to deter and defeat threats.<sup>31</sup>

He further notes “Nations must invest sufficient resources in people, processes, and programs to build trusted security relationships.”<sup>32</sup> Yet, doing so in fragile countries often requires external aid, such as that provided by the US in its plethora of security foreign assistance programs, because of the lack of funding, capacity, or general knowledge among the countries’ governments and institutions.

Security Force Assistance (SFA), and any related terms and programs, may be the most likely means in which the US Defense Department supports US fragile state stabilization efforts. As Admiral Craig Faller (US Navy, Retired) states “Democracy must deliver to all people. Professional militaries are a fundamental part of this.”<sup>33</sup> However, US policy makers and military members tasked with those missions must consider the assistance implementation cautions for each engagement in both large- and small-scale, and for both near- and long-term effects. As important, they must recognize the uniqueness of each engagement (Columbia is not CAR, e.g.) and the possible unintended consequences of their security assistance.

## Discussion

In November 2021, a panel met at the United States Military Academy to discuss the future of Security Force Assistance (SFA). In the subsequent online article, the authors note

Done well, SFA offers [the US] the putative promise of bolstering deterrence in great power competition, improving access to and influence over foreign partners, and enhancing the effectiveness of partner militaries.... [it] can provide options for policymakers in irregular warfare contexts at a fraction of the cost of large-scale military operations.... [it] can be a source of stability and reduce the probability of major conflict around the world.<sup>34</sup>

However, they further note the US’ experience in Iraq and Afghanistan of the past two decades may allow “doubts about its utility.”<sup>35</sup> Yet they counter

It would be a mistake to look at these high-profile failures and conclude that SFA should play no future role in US foreign policy. SFA will almost certainly be here to stay. But understanding when, where, and how it can be most effective requires a deeper understanding of its limitations.<sup>36</sup>

A research group in a December 2021 journal article took this discussion further, noting that

SFA [Security Force Assistance] sits at the intersection of important considerations, such as how authority is exercised and the role that outsiders’ efforts to increase their

---

<sup>31</sup> Craig Faller, “Invest in our military relationship,” Atlantic Council, May 31, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/books/allies-invest-in-our-military-relationship/> (accessed June 1, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Faller, “Invest in our military relationship.”

<sup>34</sup> Renanah Joyce, Max Margulies, and Tucker Chase, “The Future of US Security Force Assistance,” Modern War Institute at West Point, November 23, 2021, <https://mwi.usma.edu/the-future-of-us-security-force-assistance/> (accessed December 12, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

coercive capacities play in that domestic political process. The influence that SFA has in the domestic affairs of these states also means that it plays an increasingly significant role as great powers intensify their competition for influence in these states.<sup>37</sup>

Both these author groups—among many others—identify the need to better understand the near- and long-term policy goals as well as the unique environment in each engagement. One area to explore may be the dichotomy sometimes inherent between “fixing the army”—as Enrica Picco enjoins for foreign assistance in CAR—and democratic principles. With the 1979 Liberia “rice riots” as a case study, a 2022 research effort offers a caution to both US policy makers and military service members tasked with foreign military training.

Of almost two decades in duration prior to 1979, the US’ foreign military training in Liberia was designed “to create a disciplined, democratic force...training the military to both respect human rights and obey civilian authority.”<sup>38</sup> Further, the author notes that in foreign military training—or security assistance—the “U.S. policy expectation is that trained militaries will *prioritize human rights over obedience to civilian authorities.*”<sup>39</sup> [emphasis added]

Such was the intent in Liberia. Yet, despite almost twenty years of US military training to convey “a set of professional norms or ideas about standards of appropriate behavior,”<sup>40</sup> the Liberian military killed several unarmed protestors at the order of its civil (government) authorities.<sup>41</sup> This case study—among others in the research—leads the author to conclude

norm-abiding behavior often does not follow from liberal<sup>42</sup> foreign military training. Existing explanations ascribe norm violations either to insufficient socialization or to interest misalignment between providers and recipients.<sup>43</sup>...Results provide preliminary evidence that norm conflict weakens support for human rights and democracy. *Results are strongest among soldiers with more U.S. training.*<sup>44</sup> [emphasis added]

As another research group noted in 2021 “further research is needed to see if SFA [Security Force Assistance] in fact empowers groups that are effective at increasing state capacities to control territory and people.... these may turn out to be highly coercive and authoritarian pathways in which SFA play unintended parts.”<sup>45</sup> A May 2022 online paper echoes this concern. Focused on the African continent, the author acknowledges African national histories of government military

---

<sup>37</sup> Øystein H. Rolandsen, Maggie Dwyer and William Reno, “Security Force Assistance to Fragile States: A Framework of Analysis,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 15:5 (2021): 563-579, DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2021.1988224](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1988224) (accessed May 15, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Renanah Joyce, “Soldiers’ Dilemma: Foreign Military Training and Liberal Norm Conflict.” *International Security* 46, no. 4 (2022): 48-90. [muse.jhu.edu/article/855432](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/855432) (accessed May 30, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> A contemporary account stated: “...at least 41 demonstrators protesting a proposed increase in the price of rice were shot and killed by army and police forces here, triggering a wave of anarchy that resulted in property damage estimated at \$35 million. More than 400 people were injured.” Carey Winfrey, “After Liberia’s Costly Rioting, Great Soul-Searching,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/30/archives/after-liberias-costly-rioting-great-soulsearching-personally.html> (accessed June 3, 2022).

<sup>42</sup> The word *liberal* in this paper’s context alludes to democratic principles, such as human rights and civil authority, not normally found in autocratic governments.

<sup>43</sup> Joyce, “Soldiers’ Dilemma.” The author also postulates another reason the dichotomy exists: “...a third norm of cohesion, which refers to the bonds that enable military forces to operate in a unified, group- and mission oriented way. Cohesion functions as both a military norm (particularly at the individual level) and an interest (particularly at the institutional level). If a military prioritizes cohesion, then it will choose the path that best serves its organization, which may entail violating human rights, civilian control, or both.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Rolandsen, Dwyer, and Reno, “Security Force Assistance to Fragile States.”

forces' atrocities against their populations. Given this history, as well as contemporary examples, the author argues

US security assistance and security cooperation programs overly focused on training and equipping while not addressing the political context in which African militaries function, at best will just serve to reinforce this status quo, at worst can make human rights atrocities much worse and instigate destabilization.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the author asserts, US "security assistance and security cooperation under the guise of capacity building efforts" should instead focus on the ethics and civil controls of a professional military to "prevent future atrocities [and] promote stabilization" as well as better support long-term US national security objectives.<sup>47</sup>

From a personal perspective, a US military officer, born in Africa, provides this insight (edited for clarity, grammar, and privacy):

During my time working with the [country name] National Defense Force, there was training to professionalize the force that also taught that the defense force is responsible to the nation, not to a particular leader or ethnic group. While it was well-received by the military members, the senior defense leaders never emphasized it nor did they ensure it was implemented. Because of this vacuum, a simmering grievance was very prevalent because [a population subset] benefited the most from being members of the defense forces. A change in senior leadership brought more attention to the situation, however, as the political situation in the country began to deteriorate after the accession to power of the current Prime Minister, the military cohesion also began to deteriorate with individuals beginning to support politicians and policies of their ethnic groups. Today I can honestly say there is no National Defense force but a bunch of armed ethnic forces vying for power. Can this even be fixed? It can, but it will take some time of political stability and a lot of investment in indoctrinating members of the military on the responsibilities they should foster.<sup>48</sup>

## Recommendation

"Training other countries' armed forces is a go-to foreign policy tool for the United States and other states," asserts a research team from Université de Montréal (Canada).<sup>49</sup> They quote

Between 1999 and 2016, across 34 different programs, the USA trained some 2,395,272 trainees from virtually every country in the world, peaking at 292,753 in 2008. Iraq and Afghanistan accounted for over half of these trainees, but even leaving these two countries aside, the total figure was 971,054, with as many as 78,722 individuals in a single year (2016). The United States spent some \$14.8 billion worldwide on its training efforts and

---

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Salera, "Adding Fuel to the Fire? American Security Cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa," May 19, 2022, <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/05/19/adding-fuel-to-the-fire-american-security-cooperation-in-sub-saharan-africa/> (accessed May 24, 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Salera, "Adding Fuel to the Fire?"

<sup>48</sup> Shared in email with lesson author, Colonel Coplen (US Army, retired), on or about June 20, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Theodore McLauchlin, Lee JM Seymour, and Simon Pierre Boulanger Martel, "Tracking the rise of United States foreign military training: IMTAD-USA, a new dataset and research agenda," *Journal of Peace Research* 59, no. 2 (2022): 286–296. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00223433211047715#> (accessed May 3, 2022).

sold training worth another \$4.9 billion, leaving aside the larger expenses of equipping and paying client forces in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup>

Yet they believe little measurement and analysis is done to determine foreign military training's overall value to either the US, or its allies and partners, or the recipient country or region writ large. Their 2022 paper offers a data set called the International Military Training Activities Database-USA (IMTAD-USA) to begin this analysis but also offer six questions for further policy and program research. Paraphrased and summarized here:

1. "The US military is the most important agent in diffusing a particular global 'military culture' shaping norms and ideas."<sup>51</sup> How effective is it?
2. Does the US get what it wants from their security assistance programs?
3. "Does [US] training help to contain security challenges at lower expense than direct intervention?"
4. Do "Divergent providers of training may lead to divergent outcomes, even when the trainers are allies"?<sup>52</sup> How about the influence of military contractors?
5. "...why do some countries rather than others receive training, why does the USA work with particular units in partner states, and why does training takes particular forms...Conversely: Why and how do governments choose to partner with the USA or designate particular units to receive training?"<sup>53</sup>
6. "How does [foreign military] training influence democracy and civil–military relations in the USA?"<sup>54</sup>

While these six questions are esoteric, the answers may prove helpful when determining policy outcomes and program designs in the future. Meanwhile, Admiral Faller (US Navy, Retired) offers more concrete recommendations to improve the US-Colombia military relationship. Paraphrased here are those that can be extrapolated to a global context:

- *Overhaul the US system of foreign military sales, financing, and US Department of Defense (DoD) security cooperation.* He points out that "Current systems and processes are inadequate for the tempo of conflict and competition the world now faces. They are under-resourced and often held hostage to annual budgeting exercises."<sup>55</sup>
- *Double the US global international military education and training and exercise budget and authorize human rights training billets at all US combatant commands.* He asserts "Now is the time to increase investments in professionalism as the bedrock of our global partnerships."<sup>56</sup>

On a practitioner—rather than policy-maker—level, at least one author suggests the US Defense Department needs to "reexamine its doctrine considering the changing nature of conflict, the

---

<sup>50</sup> McLaughlin, Seymour, and Martel, "Tracking the rise of United States foreign military training."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. The authors highlight other research which shows "that Tunisian officers differ in their attitudes about civil–military relations depending on whether they trained in the United States or in France."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Faller, "Invest in our military relationship."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

increased prevalence of noninternational [sic] armed conflicts, and the need to be legally and doctrinally aligned with its allies and partner nations.”<sup>57</sup> Specifically, the author emphasizes

DOD regulations and manuals provide little guidance on criminal law or human rights law for most U.S. military general purpose forces. As a result, few in the Armed Forces understand the differences among LOAC [Law of Armed Conflict], criminal, and human rights law or how to operationalize human rights for contemporary conflicts. When training and advising partner-nation forces, these legal gray areas place U.S. military units in a tenuous position; they may be tactically unprepared to advise partners on operations that fall below conventional armed conflicts.

The author concludes

From the perspective of U.S. security cooperation programs, the requirement for an updated use-of-force doctrine is even more urgent because the United States frequently provides training and equipment to partners who operate in the law enforcement paradigm, not the conduct-of-hostilities paradigm.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, the US military needs to prepare to fix itself before it can fix a fragile country’s army.

## **Manage rival powers**

### **Stabilization Assistance as a Geopolitical Competition Asset (JLLIS 231522)**

#### **Observation**

Over a year ago, two authors<sup>59</sup> shared a comparative analysis of stabilization assistance programs of three nation-states involved in eastern Syria—the United States (US), Russia, and Iran. In the compare-contrast format, the authors shared programs and other actions that appeared successful—and which appear unsuccessful or offer other challenges. Their main argument, however, expresses the observation that stabilization assistance may be an under-appreciated tool in the US’s international engagement arsenal—especially in the grey-zone of global competition, but “using stabilization aid in the context of geopolitical competition can generate deep moral dilemmas and policy tensions that must be adjudicated.”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps most importantly, stabilization assistance and its policy cannot be considered separate from other deliberations about global competition with rival powers.

---

<sup>57</sup> Patrick Paterson, “Fog of Warfare: Broadening U.S. Military Use-of-Force Training for Security Cooperation,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 105, 2 (April 14, 2022): 14-22. <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2999156/fog-of-warfare-broadening-us-military-use-of-force-training-for-security-cooper/> (accessed May 3, 2022).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Daphne McCurdy is a senior associate (non-resident) with the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. Frances Z. Brown is a senior fellow with the Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<sup>60</sup> Daphne McCurdy and Frances Z. Brown, *Stabilization Assistance amid Geopolitical Competition: A Case Study of Eastern Syria*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (January 12, 2021). <https://www.csis.org/analysis/stabilization-assistance-amid-geopolitical-competition-case-study-eastern-syria> (accessed October 30, 2021).

## Discussion

The authors note the US stabilization strategy in Syria at the time focused on counter- or defeat of the Islamic State (ISIS) (at times known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). However, even then US senior policymakers apparently recognized the assistance might also counter Russian or Iranian influence.<sup>61</sup> As the authors point out:

By coupling U.S. troop presence—albeit one that is legally authorized only for a D-ISIS [Defeat-ISIS] mission—with soft-power engagement, the United States has in effect denied its adversaries territory and potentially blocked them from projecting influence in large swathes of Syria.<sup>62</sup>

In their comparison of the nation-states' stabilization programs and actions, the authors found a few key lessons, paraphrased and summarized here:

*Service delivery must go hand in hand with sustained engagement on local governance to be effective at winning support, especially in contested spaces.* The US'—and rival powers'—delivery of services to contested areas can be a means to establish influence. However, the eastern Syria examples show “that service delivery alone does not always win support for either side.” In practice, while residents in selected areas may have accepted the services from any—or all—of the nation-states operating in their area, it was merely because they needed the assistance. Certainly not from any notion of allegiance or support. The areas where the US' service delivery experienced an increase in local support coincided with areas where more representative local government could be found.

*The disconnect between the United States' political strategy in the northeast and its political engagement on Syria as a whole has hindered U.S. efforts to project influence. On the other hand, Iran and Russia's reliance on sectarianism or force may also be ineffective.* The US' desired end state for eastern Syria was unclear. Without such clarity, the US cannot get local “buy-in.” Further, the US focused on only one part of Syria, while its competitor rivals (Iran, Russia) included all of Syria. Finally

Locals are hesitant to unequivocally side with a foreign patron whose commitment is so uncertain and whose decision in October 2019, in particular, enabled a Turkish incursion that led to over 100,000 displaced and was widely seen as a betrayal of its partners. Indeed, Russia capitalized on the U.S. withdrawal at that time to further project its own soft power.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> McCurdy and Brown, *Stabilization Assistance amid Geopolitical Competition*, 2. The authors note: “Although Iran is not a great power by any conventional definition—and some would argue that a U.S. preoccupation with Iran comes at the expense of effectively countering genuine great powers—the NDS has identified Iran as a regional competitor that “is competing across all dimensions of power.” Further, Iran's close cooperation with Russia and the two countries' overlapping, though not identical, goals in Syria mean that examining Syria's stabilization through the prism of nation-state competition can be informative.”

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 5.

In contrast, Iran and Russia may have been “too forceful in projecting their political intentions onto the area.”<sup>64</sup> Iran’s military provides services, which are accepted because of threats against the population. Russia faced similar challenges.

*Successful tribal engagement requires a long-term, robust approach.* The US has not appeared “willing to pursue” the long-term approach, which would require more consistent civilian engagement. Iran, however, has some traditional ties with certain tribes. This naturally puts the US at a disadvantage in this context.

*For the United States, the objectives of pursuing stabilization and competing against geopolitical rivals are sometimes in tension, and a lack of prioritization undermined both goals.* While thwarting global competitors was the US’ secondary goal in Syria, the US’ leader rhetoric skewed the local perception of US priorities. Local Syrians did not want to be “pawns in a great power game” and feared retaliation if considered aligned with the US. Others used the Iranian or Russian actions to draw more US attention (and related resources) to them.

Either way, the emphasis on geopolitical competition risked distracting U.S. assistance providers from the predominant goal of stabilization: promoting conditions in which locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence.<sup>65</sup>

Most importantly

the case study shows that, in practice, the dual U.S. policy priorities of advancing its position in geopolitical competition and achieving stabilization objectives are not always mutually reinforcing—at least in the immediate term. Under the stabilization heading, the United States has aimed to prevent an Islamic State resurgence and push for a political transition with a modicum of inclusive governance and human rights protection. Under a geopolitical competition rubric, it aimed to marginalize Russian and Iranian influence. But achieving this second goal has been challenging because both Iran and Russia often rely on ruthless means to advance their narrower goal of keeping Assad in power. Counteracting these Russian and Iranian inroads could potentially tempt U.S. policymakers to employ overly aggressive approaches that inadvertently undermine efforts to expand locally legitimate governance under a stabilization heading.<sup>66</sup>

## **Recommendations.**

In summary review, the authors note:

In principle, U.S. stabilization activities potentially could have counteracted Iranian and Russian influence, thus demonstrating how stabilization represents a valuable, under-appreciated tool for American policymakers grappling with gray-zone competition. But in practice, the record has been mixed.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> McCurdy and Brown, *Stabilization Assistance amid Geopolitical Competition*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Despite the mixed success thus far in Syria, the authors assert their comparative highlights five US foreign policy implications, paraphrased and summarized here<sup>68</sup>:

- *Effectively harnessing stabilization assistance in the context of geopolitical competition would require a persistent and dependable on-the-ground US civilian presence.* Episodic engagement with local counterparts can only allow for limited inroads for increasing US influence—the US needs civilians who can build relationships with local counterparts and develop institutional memory about local dynamics.
- *For stabilization assistance to be effective in achieving gray-zone competition objectives, a long-term, seriously conveyed US commitment to supporting legitimate governing authorities is necessary.* For the US and adversaries alike, service delivery did not necessarily win them enduring influence. Instead, service delivery needed to be embedded in a longer-term objective to support a politically legitimate governing arrangement.
- *Using civilian stabilization assistance for geopolitical competition ushers in deep moral dilemmas.* There are real questions about whether civilian assistance should be used in contested space when there is a lack of clarity about security support. Providing civilian aid, aligned with US interests in contested areas, puts local implementing partners at risk; therefore, adequate, and clear U.S. security support is essential. The ambiguity that often accompanies gray-zone environments—from differing threat perceptions and thresholds as far as what constitutes a hostile act, to a lack of clarity as to the motivations and identities behind attacks—can lead to inadvertent escalation.
- *Senior policymakers must acknowledge and adjudicate tensions between geopolitical competition and stabilization objectives when they arise.* US policy priorities vis-à-vis rival powers in a given country may conflict with stabilization objectives. While some adversaries project their influence in ways that undermine local stability, the US should not. Instead, it “should recall that its primary source of strength lies in its values and its ability to support a more just and prosperous local governance arrangement.”<sup>69</sup>
- *Partnering with non-state actors presents new complications to pursuing a viable political end state, which is critical for stabilization assistance to be effective.* In part, geopolitical competition is a battle of narratives regarding who can offer local counterparts the more attractive vision for the future in Syria, the US’ legitimacy was hindered by the decision to partner with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a non-state actor to whom the US would not confer political authority, while Russia and Iran supported the sovereign government. While there were benefits for that partner choice, the authors note “a military strategy that is not aligned with a political one is insufficient and risks being upended the moment U.S. troops withdraw. This is not to suggest that the United States should never partner with non-state actors. But if it chooses to do so and also aims to win the great power game, it is crucial that stabilization assistance be geared toward cultivating a viable and legitimate alternative to the sovereign government.”<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> McCurdy and Brown, *Stabilization Assistance amid Geopolitical Competition*, 7-8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



## US Policy Shortfalls—Case Study, Afghanistan (JLLIS 232070)

### Observation

Dr. Nazanin Azizian<sup>71</sup> of the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs observes

Despite its predominantly benevolent intentions, American post-Cold War foreign policy has suffered repeated failures in achieving U.S. objectives in numerous conflicts abroad.... It is imperative to ensure that recurring mistakes in open-ended wars that are viewed as unwinnable do not become an enduring feature of the U.S. foreign policy system.<sup>72</sup>

Specific to the US military, she notes:

If the U.S. military is going to intervene in a conflict, U.S. policy must ensure that there are clearly defined objectives, that the role of the military is well-defined, and additionally that adequate resources are allocated for the mission. Moreover, if the mission changes, as it did in Somalia under President Bill Clinton, and in Iraq under President George W. Bush, will there be proportionate change in the resources? U.S. policy must ensure that its aspirations and capabilities are aligned. The long-term instability challenge in Afghanistan required a long-term U.S strategy at an acceptable cost, however the U.S. pursued short-term policies, one-year at a time with many shifts.<sup>73</sup>

While many military or foreign policy historians may find these observations trite, rather than astute, Dr. Azizian suggests current policymakers have yet to learn the inherent lessons. She points out the *parallel policy shortfalls* in effect contemporarily, such as those directed to ongoing actions Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. Again, specific to the US military, she notes:

poor planning and insufficient resources, can trap the U.S. military in open-ended occupations. Overambitious aspirations such permanent defeat of terrorism is unattainable, unmeasurable, and ill-defined. A light-footprint of service members tasked to topple a government by weaponizing opposition forces in unstable war-torn countries that are exploited by U.S. adversaries and terrorist organizations is a recipe for policy and strategy failure. Furthermore, these policy errors lead to a waste of U.S. taxpayer dollars, a tragic loss of American lives, and give rise to anti-Americanism and the emergence of new terrorist groups. Learning lessons from these situations so that the U.S. does not repeat these past errors is an imperative.<sup>74</sup>

### Discussion

In her paper, Dr. Azizian provides an overview of US post-Cold War foreign policy which led to existing foreign policy norms. She says, in part

---

<sup>71</sup> Nazanin Azizian, "Easier to Get into War Than to Get Out: The Case of Afghanistan," Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (August 2021). <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/easier-get-war-get-out-case-afghanistan> (accessed October 30, 2021). Paper published in August 2021, as the US withdrew its remaining military assets from Afghanistan.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 46.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union effectively ended the Cold War and left the United States as the most powerful, secure, and prosperous nation in the world. The resulting military superiority, lack of rivals, and vast wealth provided the U.S. with unparalleled freedom to indulge in well-intended global missions to shape the world without seemingly incurring significant risks or consequences.<sup>75</sup>

She reminds the reader of the US foreign policies of the 1990s, which promoted democratic governance, free market economies, and human rights protections. While these advocations remained in the 2000s, the attacks on US soil on September 11, 2001, saw foreign policy attention transferred to combatting and defeating terrorism.

She acknowledges the US foreign policy terrorism focus met some success. Most importantly, perhaps, it “prevented another large-scale terrorist attack on U.S. soil.”<sup>76</sup> She also notes:

While there have been flaws in U.S. policies and imperfections in the way that the missions have been carried out, U.S. interventions have resulted in enormous humanitarian, economic, political, and security gains in many countries around the world.<sup>77</sup>

Where there were—and are—flaws in US foreign policy, she asserts, is “due to shortcomings of U.S. foreign policies themselves,” rather than “more powerful and strategically savvy enemies,” or “insufficient expenditure of resources, nor to a lack of war-fighting experience.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the US must learn the lessons of the failures of policy to improve future policy.

## Recommendations

Dr. Azizian offers several recommendations for US foreign policy improvements, from the broad to the specific. She suggests:

First and foremost, the United States must identify its interests, goals, and objectives as clearly and narrowly as possible. Second, U.S. policy should ensure that its plans and strategy are sufficiently resourced, coherent, and well-coordinated across the whole-of-government, and with international partners. Additionally, U.S. must *revamp the culture of its military and nonmilitary institutes*, ensure sufficient regional expertise, assess the risks, implications, and efficacy of its foreign policy by regional experts, and put mechanisms in place to overcome and mitigate distortive effect of preconceptions, predispositions, and assumptions.<sup>79</sup> [emphasis added]

She encapsulates further, “the U.S. must exert effective diplomacy, modestly apply financial aid and employ the U.S. military, as necessary.”<sup>80</sup> Contrary to some other observers in this field, she does not suggest keeping the US military as a “last resort.” Instead, she argues that US foreign

---

<sup>75</sup> Nazanin Azizian, “The Case of Afghanistan,” 1. On page 11, she expands on this perspective: “With no viable alternative to Western support, Asian and European allies were content adhering to U.S. hegemony. In the absence of the Soviet Union, most developing countries turned to the liberal international system of alliance and institutions led by the U.S. for security, economic goods, and political support. With such primacy, wealth, and influence, the U.S. established ambitious goals to shape the world without significant risk or consequences. In the absence of threatening rivals, no one could stop the United States.”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 47.

policy should “tailor the military dimension of the solution as balanced and integrative way as possible” in conjunction with the other national power tools.<sup>81</sup>

The author outlines six broad recommendations: *Re-envision Counterterrorism Strategy*, *[Develop] Policy Based on Hierarchy of National Interests*, *Emphasize Diplomatic and Economic Instruments of Power*, *Employ Effective Communication Plan*, *Monitor Progress of Policy and Adapt as Needed*, and *[Develop or Retain] Partner-Focused Regional Security Architecture*. While each of the six include detailed components, this lesson concentrates on the re-envisioned counterterrorism strategy and the partner-focused regional security architecture.

According to the author, the present counterterrorism strategy directs resources to actively troubled regions as they exist or emerge. She calls this *kinetic intervention* and reminds policymakers of its cost—and the unintended consequences. While she recognizes a 9/11 style attack may appropriately demand a direct response, she believes more effective policies support *non-kinetic interventions* and “suppress the rise of conflict before it manifests” in six lines of effort (LOEs), outlined here:

- Identify and Prioritize Fragile States.
- Develop Trust.
- Eliminate Terrorist Leaders.
- Employ Socio Economic Reforms.
- Secure Long-Term Funding and Interagency Cooperation.
- Prevent Extremism at the Root.<sup>82</sup>

She also recognizes the *Partner-Focused Regional Security Architecture* already exists in many global regions within or adjacent to the US military’s Combatant Commands’ operational areas. These relationships with the Combatant Commands provides the US military resources to the security architecture, as well as perspective. However, “The design, development and enforcement of the arrangement must be regionally owned, enforced, however coordinated on with the U.S.” and “should not recreate nor reorganize partners into an American image.”<sup>83</sup>

The author outlines ten US foreign policy components to an improved regional security architecture, condensed as necessary here:

- Identify U.S. interests by region and continuously reassess those interests as the threat landscape evolves.
- Distinguish between its own interests and the objectives of the regional partners, and clearly communicate them with regional stakeholders.
- Even though the U.S. has Senate approved alliances with certain countries, while not with others, U.S. policy should actively engage all countries in each region, including those regarded as adversaries.
- For each region, the U.S. and regional states should cooperatively adapt a diplomatic mechanism that enables members to come together in a multilateral forum to communicate and have dialogue about regional issues and interests.
- Incentivize countries that provide constructive mediation to the region while reducing assistance and political support for states that pursue aggressive and reckless actions.
- Assess its policy of arms sales across all regions and ensure that such sales do not place U.S. foreign policy objectives at risk.

---

<sup>81</sup> Azizian, “The Case of Afghanistan.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 48-9.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 53.

- Advocate for regional agreements that put restrictions on the import and export of arms in order to prevent weapons from falling into the hands of terrorist groups.
- Advocate for multilateral agreements for intelligence collection and sharing as well as security cooperation agreements to strengthen fragile countries.
- Promote respect for human rights across all regions.
- Should the U.S. need to intervene militarily, U.S. policy must first determine whether there is a capable local partner whom the United States can support to provide security.... If U.S. military presence is absolutely required, then the right size of a sustainable force structure that would achieve U.S. objectives in each region must be determined early on.<sup>84</sup>

As Dr. Azizian summarizes:

This proposed policy is less dependent on U.S. maintenance of balance of power by heavy military presence, military assistance, and arms sales, and more reliant on diplomacy, therefore understanding of regional politics is imperative.<sup>85</sup>

### **Leverage Relevant Research to Prepare for Defense Support to Stabilization (JLLIS 234361)**

#### **Observation**

Practitioners of foreign policy implementation routinely overlook a critical resource: academic scholarship. Although not often written for an audience outside its own community, the peer-reviewed products of academic research offer context, framing, and depth that mainstream media pieces lack and are underpinned by rigorous research methodology rarely found in journalistic pieces of the same topic.

Academic scholarship or literary works are available for every country in which American diplomatic and military establishments are present. While 101 resources such as the Air Force Culture and Language Center's Expeditionary Culture Field Guides<sup>86</sup> might be helpful for surge or short-term engagements, the onus should be on individual personnel as part of their professional practice to have contextual literacy, easily drawn from advanced scholarship available in the public domain. This is not a call for the proliferation of soldier-scholars as frontline actors; it is instead acknowledgement of due diligence on the part of anyone traveling to a foreign state as a US Government employee.

#### **Discussion**

The author had the opportunity to integrate her professional subject matter practice with doctoral research grounding through work as an embedded advisor with the Somali Ministry of Defense in a Department of State contract. It is from this perspective that she offers commentary on the usefulness of academic resources in understanding mission dynamics and framing interventions for operational success.

Although reading literature – academic or otherwise – on varied facets of the Somali context does not an expert make, it is a critical undertaking for anyone who wants to hit the ground running.

---

<sup>84</sup> Azizian, "The Case of Afghanistan," 53-5.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>86</sup> "Expeditionary Culture Field Guides," Air Force Culture and Language Center, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/expeditionary-readiness-training/Field-Guides/> (accessed June 15, 2022)

While the practice of undertaking a literature review is standard for any academic beginning a research undertaking, the same expectation should be instituted for the military professionals deploying outside of the continental US (OCONUS). Many observers suggest simply, “you don’t know if you don’t go,” implying that physical experience is the best means to understand the mission environment. However, if policy implementers do not read before arrival on mission, then they waste an opportunity to anchor their eventual experience within a contextual understanding and informed situational awareness.

The contemporary situation in Somalia is a case in point. After the withdrawal of significant DoD presence under the Trump administration in late 2020<sup>87</sup>, Somalia returned to headlines in 2021 with the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) airstrikes within its borders to counter al-Shabaab.<sup>88</sup> Now that the Biden Administration announced the redeployment of a similar number of troops into the country<sup>89</sup> (after multiple rotations of advisors teleworking or “commuting” from elsewhere<sup>90</sup>), have any of the personnel read recent accounts of the human experience on the ground? Do the operators trickling back into Somalia understand how such strikes intending to decapitate the group’s leadership have the potential to affect the subsequent al-Shabaab deployment of suicide bombers, as found in research published in 2020?<sup>91</sup>

Ranging from historic evaluations of Somalia’s military to later reconstitution attempts to evaluations of international assistance efforts, there is no dearth of literature about military activities in Somalia. Scholarship (as well as oft-unreleased studies conducted by private research firms for the international community) has also investigated public confidence in security institutions in different areas of the country, as well as the flip side of the coin—why many nonstate military organizations provide a range of social services to those living under their rule.

As security activities alone will not position Somalia for future success, field research also provides insights into gender dynamics and social structures within al-Shabaab, as well as the ways in which al-Shabaab’s relationship with women is not limited to its own borders and has its own security implications.<sup>92</sup> These broader interpretations of security and gender perspectives are, notably, in line with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security concerns.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Phil Stewart and Steve Holland, “Trump to withdraw most troops from Somalia as part of global pullback,” Reuters, December 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-trump-somalia/trump-to-withdraw-most-troops-from-somalia-as-part-of-global-pullback-idUSKBN28F04C> (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>88</sup> Carla Babb, Jeff Seldin, and Harun Maruf, “US Lends More Airpower to Somalia’s Fight vs. al-Shabab,” Voice of America, July 23, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/africa-us-lends-more-airpower-somalias-fight-vs-al-shabab/6208634.html> (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>89</sup> Charlie Savage and Eric Schmitt, “Biden Approves Plan to Redeploy Several Hundred Ground Forces Into Somalia,” The New York Times, May 16, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/us/politics/biden-military-somalia.html> (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>90</sup> Meghann Myers, “US troops now ‘commuting to work’ to help Somalia fight al-Shabab,” The Military Times, April 27, 2021, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/04/27/us-troops-now-commuting-to-work-to-help-somalia-fight-al-shabab/> (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>91</sup> Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, “How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings? The Case of Al-Shabaab,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2020), DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780021](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780021) (accessed June 15, 2022).

<sup>92</sup> The author cites two related articles regarding “the world’s oldest profession” and a sex-worker spy network that al-Shabaab leverages, found at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335939046\\_Worth\\_many\\_sins\\_Al-Shabaab's\\_shifting\\_relationship\\_with\\_Kenyan\\_women](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335939046_Worth_many_sins_Al-Shabaab's_shifting_relationship_with_Kenyan_women) (2019) and <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/al-shabaabs-mata-hari-network/> (2018).

<sup>93</sup> United Nations, Security Council. Resolution 1325. New York, NY: UN Headquarters, 2020. <https://safe.menlosecurity.com/doc/docview/viewer/docNC7D511654674bcf8ba854d558e09bd508b6ebfc0348b23eb93583d87fb4ce12b843bd2ea977b> (accessed June 15, 2022).

On activities on the Kenyan border, the proliferation of trafficking of cows, charcoal, and cocaine as a threat to the sovereignty of state structures has been catalogued. Further to other liberties taken and abuses made to its land, there is evidence of dumping of radioactive waste within Somali territory and waters and significant interest in environmental stability and water security as components of peacebuilding in Somalia.<sup>94</sup>

International entities are not the only actors producing policy (and program) relevant scholarship. The breadth of scholarship runs from the Hiraal Institute's work on how to counter al-Shabaab's financial system, to the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies' analysis of the justice system's shortcomings.<sup>95</sup> Such host-nation produced scholarship also offers valuable nuance that outside scholarship is inherently challenged to capture.

## Recommendation

There remain skeptics that see negligible value in review of academic or literary works. Yet, it is no coincidence that some of the greatest thinkers of the Global War on Terror (GWOt) era were also academics trained to effectively situate contexts in broader frameworks and understood the value of interdisciplinary approaches to complex problem sets.

Support of policy-relevant scholarship development through programs like *Bridging the Gap* and DoD-specific research priorities such as found at the *Minerva program* are easy steps.<sup>96</sup> At the individual level, one can follow—and contribute to—professional military education (PME) topics such as those found at the *Strategic Studies Institute (SSI)*, the *Joint Special Operations University (JSOU)*, or academic communities such as the *International Studies Association (ISA)*.<sup>97</sup> There are a plethora of region- or topic-specific groups such as the *African Studies Association (ASA)* or the *World Economic Forum (WEF)*, as well as various journals and quarterly newsletters, which can be both actively reviewed or passively received through Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds or alerts.<sup>98</sup> For more enterprising professionals, authoring book reviews of contemporary scholarship is a useful – and brief – way to engage with academia from a practitioner perspective.

Regardless of intent, it is inevitable that certain academic works will remain impenetrable or unengaging for some readers. In that case, following the leads of General Mattis or Admiral Stravridis remains an option to have a broadening intellectual experience, as does reading literature from authors outside of our own home cultures.<sup>99</sup>

*Author Whitney Grespin is Postdoctoral Researcher at the U.S. Air Force Academy's Institute for Future Conflict. The views expressed here are the author's and do not represent the U.S. Air Force Academy, Department of the Air Force, or the Department of Defense. Dr. Grespin holds a PhD from King's College London's Defence Studies Department at the United Kingdom Joint*

---

<sup>94</sup> See the JLLIS entry, ID# 234361, for the various references' hyperlinks.

<sup>95</sup> See: <https://hiraalinstitute.org/> and <https://heritageinstitute.org/>.

<sup>96</sup> See: <https://bridgingthegapproject.org/> and <https://minerva.defense.gov/>.

<sup>97</sup> See: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/key-strategic-issues-list-ksil/>; <https://jsou.libguides.com/jsoupublications/researchtopics>; and <https://www.isanet.org/>.

<sup>98</sup> When in active research, be aware that other authors/entities may not use the terms of reference that are found in the researchers' own organizations or doctrine/policy documents. Be open to insights available from other-than-security disciplines as well. For example, a psychology journal may share relevant research to address violent extremism that may not be found in an article about non-state actors in a particular region.

<sup>99</sup> The author's examples may be found at: <https://taskandpurpose.com/leadership/30-books-mattis-thinks-every-good-leader-needs-read/>; <https://www.usni.org/press/books/leaders-bookshelf>; and <https://africanarguments.org/2020/12/the-top-20-african-books-of-2020/>.

Services Command & Staff College. She has worked in contingency contracting, educational programming, and stabilization efforts on five continents, including time as an embedded advisor with the Somali Ministry of Defense and a capacity building advisor for United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Somalia. PKSOI's Lessons Learned Analyst lightly edited this lesson for clarity and format.

## **PKSOI Lesson Reports and SOLLIMS Samplers (2010-2021)**

### **2021**

- [PKSOI Semiannual Lesson Report Multinational Interoperability Command and Control and Transitions \(November 2021\)](#)
- [PKSOI Semiannual Lesson Report Setting the Stage \(May 2021\)](#)

### **2020**

- [PKSOI Semiannual Lesson Report Multinational Interoperability \(November 2020\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report Consolidating Gains \(March 2020\)](#)

### **2019**

- [PKSOI Lesson Report Partnering \(December 2019\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report Strategic Planning \(September 2019\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report Conflict Prevention \(June 2019\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report SSR and DDR \(January 2019\)](#)

### **2018**

- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 10 Issue 1 Transitional Public Security \(December 2018\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 9 Issue 4 Foreign Humanitarian Assistance \(September 2018\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 9 Issue 3 PKSO Complexities and Challenges \(July 2018\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report Right-Sizing and Stage-Setting \(July 2018\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 9 Issue 2 Inclusive Peacebuilding \(May 2018\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 9 Issue 1 Monitoring and Evaluation \(January 2018\)](#)

### **2010-17**

- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 8 Issue 2 Operationalizing WPS \(November 2017\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Sp Ed Leadership in Crisis and Complex Operations \(May 2017\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 8 Issue 1 Civil Affairs in Stability Operations \(March 2017\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Sp Ed Internal Displaced Persons \(IDP\) \(January 2017\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 7 Issue 4 Strategic Communication in PSO \(November 2016\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 7 Issue 3 Stabilization and Transition \(August 2016\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 1 Issue 2 Investing in Training \(June 2016\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 7 Issue 1 Building Stable Governance \(March 2016\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 6 Issue 4 Shifts in UN Peacekeeping \(February 2016\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 6 Issue 3 FHA Concepts, Principles and Applications \(December 2015\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 6 Issue 2 FHA Complexities \(September 2015\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Sp Ed Cross Cutting Guidelines for Stability Operations \(July 2015\)](#)

- [SOLLIMS Sampler Sp Ed Lessons from US Army War College Students \(May 2015\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Report MONUSCO Lessons Learned \(December 2014\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 5 Issue 4 Reconstruction and Development \(November 2014\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 5 Issue 2 Overcoming Spoilers \(April 2014\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Vol 5 Issue 1 Host Nation Security \(January 2014\)](#)
- [SOLLIMS Sampler Sp Ed Lessons from US Army War College Students \(August 2013\)](#)
- [PKSOI Lesson Summary Understanding Security Sector Reform and Security Force Assistance \(July 2010\)](#)

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government. All content in this document, to include any publication provided through digital link, is considered unclassified, for open access. This compendium contains no restriction on sharing/distribution within the public domain. Existing research and publishing norms and formats should be used when citing Report content.