Civilian Research Project

# Building Better Security Partners: What have we learned from the past and how it applies today

by

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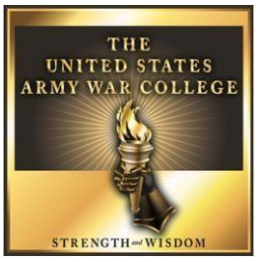


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# Building Better Security Partners: What have we learned from the past and how it applies today

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## Abstract

Building the security capacity of allies and partners around the world is a significant component to U.S. foreign policy. However, the success of ISIS in 2014 and collapse of Iraqi security forces extensively trained and equipped by the United States raises questions on the overall effectiveness of Building Partner Capacity (BPC) as a security strategy. Yet there are examples of more successful efforts to provide security assistance in U.S. military history. This paper looks at lessons learned from past efforts to asses when BPC is most effective. It also identifies key factors of security assistance that led to successful outcomes in past security assistance operations. Finally, this paper determines if current BPC operations in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq incorporate these key factors and what that means for eventual success or failure to achieve U.S. objectives in each region.

**Building Better Security Partners: What have we learned from the past and how it applies today**

The surprising defeat of Iraqi security forces in Mosul and Ramadi in 2014 at the hands of the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) sent shockwaves around the world. How could such an untested and relatively ill-quipped force defeat an organized national army trained and equipped by the United States with modern weapons, aircraft, and armored vehicles? The United States spent over 7 years training, advising, and assisting Iraqi security forces and departed the country in relative stability only a few years before the ISIS invasion. Another nation supported by a large investment of U.S. security assistance, Afghanistan, remains a fragile state after 14 years of significant military support. Responding to a request from the U.S. Commander in Kabul, President Obama agreed in 2015 to maintain larger troop levels than he previously intended in order to address the persistent Taliban threat and continued lack of capacity of the Afghan security forces to defeat it.

Central to both of these security efforts was the concept of developing an indigenous security force to take over the fight against its local counterinsurgency and allow the United States to withdraw its own troops from the conflict. However, these two examples tend to question the efficacy of this concept. Moreover, training and equipping foreign forces remains a significant tenet of U.S. foreign policy around the world, especially given current political considerations that limit the application of large-scale land forces. Given the lack of clear success reflecting on recent history using security assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan, is there truly an effective method to develop security forces in other nations in order to avoid committing large numbers of U.S.

forces? How can analysis of past efforts inform current operations? These are the questions central to this paper.

The breadth of issues surrounding assisting partner militaries precludes detailed analysis. This paper, therefore, will focus on one key aspect of security assistance—Building Partnership Capacity (BPC). Specifically, the paper will provide an overview of BPC and its antecedents, describe the importance of BPC, assess when it is likely to be most effective, identify common themes contributing to effective implementation, and finally, examine the challenges to BPC that remain in the contemporary operating environment. While the United States conducts BPC operations globally, this paper will focus on fragile or developing states, specifically current BPC efforts in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

**What is Building Partner Capacity?**

Providing military assistance to other nations is not a new idea. The U.S. provided large quantities of weapons and equipment to European powers before and during World War Two.[1] U.S. involvement with security assistance and BPC grew to help rebuild the areas affected by the last World War and to counter the emerging Soviet threat. After the Cold War, security assistance remained a priority to hedge against the instability caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and other totalitarian regimes.

Prior to September 11, 2001, U.S. engagement with foreign security forces was limited to Security Cooperation (SC) and Security Assistance (SA) programs. In general, DOD funds and manages SC programs while the DOS supports SA projects. An example of an SC program includes joint training exercises with local forces. Some

examples SA programs include Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Financing Program (FMFP) that provide military equipment and the money to purchase it. Another example is the International Military Education and Training program (IMET) recruits promising foreign military leaders to attend formal professional military education courses hosted by the U.S. and its allies.

After 2001, policy makers began to use the term BPC as a new way to differentiate SC and SA programs focused on fragile states from programs supporting traditionally stronger allies and partners. BPC tasks include more direct training, equipping, and advising security forces in these states. The theory being that strengthening foreign security services ultimately improves U.S. national security by reducing the ungoverned areas and failed states that allow transnational threats to take root. In that regard, BPC describes the core element of recent campaigns to build security forces in Iraq (both Operation Iraqi Freedom and now Operation Inherent Resolve) and Afghanistan.[2] In the interest of simplicity, the remainder of this paper will use BPC to refer to the wide range of SC, SA, and other efforts to improve the capability of foreign security services.

Top level U.S. government documents provide broad guidance for BPC. Presidential Policy Directive #23 (2013) provides guidance for U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy. The first goal of PPD-23 is to "Help partner nations build sustainable capacity to address common security challenges" which involves defeating transnational threats, self-defense, and contributions to U.S. or partner military operations among other tasks.[3] The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) reinforces the importance of BPC of other nations in order to prevent conflict among states. The NSS also outlines

the national policy of partnering with fragile states to help them prevent the spread of extremism and terrorism.[4] These foundational documents are the basis for subsequent policy directives in both DOD and DOS that establish procedures and priorities to implement BPC across the globe. This overarching guidance also informs Congress as it deliberates over funding authorizations supporting the multitude of BPC requirements.

**Why is Building Partner Capacity Important?**

In a speech given at the Nixon Center in 2010, then Defense Secretary Robert Gates summed up the strategic rationale behind Building Partner Capacity when he said, "building the governance and security capacity of other countries was a critical element of our strategy in the Cold War. But it is even more urgent in a global security environment where, unlike the Cold War, the most likely and lethal threats – an American city poisoned or reduced to rubble – will likely emanate from fractured or failing states, rather than aggressor states."[5] The Secretary emphasized his point continuing, "It (BPC) is in many ways the ideological and security challenge of our time."[6]

The specific challenge mentioned by Secretary Gates is the fact that the U.S. military simply cannot maintain a significant presence in every corner of the world to prevent armed conflict leading to failed states. Rather, the United States must develop the capacity of willing partners so that they can provide for their own security, both within their borders and among their neighbors. Strong nation states and regional security institutions deny safe havens for transnational terrorist organizations, making it difficult for them to organize, recruit, and train. Therefore denying terrorists safe havens reduces the threat they pose to the United States.

Even though BPC is a key component to its national security, the United States has a mixed track record when training and equipping foreign military forces to produce security. The following pages will consider past U.S. BPC efforts to determine when it is most effective and what recurring themes generally lead to success.

**When is BPC most effective?**

In its 2013 Report on Security Capacity Building, the International Security Advisory Board (the ISAB is part of the DOS) estimated the United States spends $25 billion annually on various security assistance programs.[7] Assessing effectiveness of this significant investment is a challenge for both practitioners and scholars. In 2015, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) produced a report to provide Congress a baseline of knowledge regarding BPC effectiveness. The CRS analysts, Kathleen McInnis and Nathan Lucas, sought to assess the wisdom of continued funding to assist fragile or failed states with little perceived return of investment. Using historical case studies, they considered seven U.S. strategic objectives as a framework to evaluate whether BPC efforts have been effective, to wit:

- **Victory in war or war termination** (exit strategy)
  - Vietnam (1954-1973)
  - Afghanistan (2001-2015)
  - Iraq (2003-2010)

- **Managing regional security challenges**
  - Support to African Union and its mission to Somalia (2005-present)
  - U.S. Assistance to Mali (2002-2015)
  - Support to Former Warsaw Pact (1994-present)
  - Security Assistance to Pakistan (2002-present)

- **Indirectly Supporting a Party to an Internal Conflict**
  - Philippines (1947-1953)
  - U.S. Intervention in Soviet-Afghan war (1980-1988)
  - U.S. Assistance to Columbia

- **Conflict mitigation**
  - Bosnia – Herzegovina (1995-2002)
  - Prevent re-emergence of conflict between Egypt and Israel)

- **Building institutional and interpersonal linkages**
  - Asia Pacific Center for security studies (1995-present)
  - International Military Education and Training (IMET)

- **Enhancing coalition participation**
  - Vietnam and "Many Flags Initiative
  - Coalition participation in OIF
  - Coalition participation in OEF/ISAF/RS

- **Alliance building**
  - BPC in Greece to support NATO (1947-1952)
  - BPC in Korea to support United Nations (1948-1950)
  - Build Alliances in former Warsaw Pact (1992-2010)[8]

As Figure 1 indicates, the analysis suggests that BPC efforts were least effective when the objective was war termination or exit strategy for U.S. forces and most likely to be effective if the objective was limited to building institutional linkages and alliance building. The figure below provides a graphic depiction of the general findings of the study:


Figure 1: When is BPC most effective?[9]

The results of this survey offer some insight into the historical perspective of various BPC operations but there are many factors that could alter the outcome of each case study. The CRS researchers acknowledged that their analysis focused primarily

on *if* the BPC was effective in achieving the strategic objective and not necessarily on *why* it may have been successful. They did however identify a few common denominators. The most successful cases involved support to legitimate and relatively effective governments. Conversely, the least successful examples involved areas of conflict with contested governance. Rarely was BPC effective without a willing and capable partner. Conversely, the presence of significant graft and corruption within a partner significantly degraded BPC effectiveness.[10]

**What factors most likely lead to the success on BPC?**

As DOD is often the primary implementation force for BPC, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Joint Staff (JS) commissioned the RAND Corporation to conduct a study to identify common factors in successful BPC operations that could inform current and future policy decisions. The RAND study considered many cases of U.S. support to partner nations, but eliminated 'high end' partners where Security Assistance was less about capacity building and more focused on interoperability and joint exercises. Additionally, they used a minimum threshold of $25 million invested from1999-2009 to identify cases of 'significant partners.' A third criteria included the number of times a partner nation deployed its military outside of its borders for regional or coalition security missions. Using these criteria, the RAND researchers settled on 29 case studies including partners from each of the regional Combatant Commands.[11] Of note, BPC efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan were not included in this study due to their complexity and inclusion of large-scale U.S. combat operations.[12] For most of these cases, BPC was successful if the efforts led to achievement of specific objectives.

The RAND report identified nine factors where BPC was likely to be more effective. Five of these factors are characteristics of the partner nation, while four are not dependent on the partner nation and are mostly within U.S. control:

- Partner Nation invests its own funds to support or sustain capacity
- Partner Nation has sufficient absorptive capacity
- Partner Nation has high governance indicators
- Partner Nation has strong economy
- Partner Nation shares security interests with the U.S.
- Spending more money on BPC
- Consistency in both funding and implementation
- Matching BPC efforts with PAN objectives and absorptive capacity
- Including a sustainment component of the BPC initiative [13]

Understanding what factors make an effective partner is useful when policy makers have the latitude to systematically select nations for BPC investment. However, most partners that already possess a strong economy and good governance do not need substantial Security Assistance. Thus, military planners typically address failed or weak states of strategic interest to the United States. Knowing what makes a good partner is still important however as planners must consider mitigation strategies to compensate for partner shortfalls.

In response to the operational need to assist less than ideal partners, the RAND team prepared a follow-on report in 2015 to identify factors of effective BPC in challenging contexts.[14] In this subsequent report, RAND conducted a more in-depth analysis of their previous case studies, focusing on where the security environment included multiple disruptive factors. These problematic factors included categories such as U.S. program goals, U.S. political will, Partner Nation political will, funding, Partner Nation trainees, U.S. trainers, equipment, logistics, facilities, and training content.[15] In the end, this additional analysis validated eight of their nine earlier findings outlined

above. The one previous observation not validated as contributing to BPC success was “spending more money”.[16] This further analysis suggests that in some cases even an unconstrained money supply will not lead to successful outcomes and the other main eight factors should be applicable across the spectrum of BPC operations.

In addition to affirming or invalidating previous conclusions, the study identified several new findings. The authors found additional evidence to emphasize two findings in particular. On the one hand, *consistency* is key: not just funding but consistent objectives, agreements, and relationships.[17] Second, without a plan for *sustainment* and *maintenance*, capacity atrophies.[18] On the other hand, the follow-on study also uncovered a few additional factors that have a significant impact on effective BPC:

- Lack of Partner willingness
- Progress can be highly personality dependent (Partner Nation)
- Ministerial capacity is extremely important[19]

Again, some of these additional issues are solely dependent on the partner nation and doubtful that any external power could change them. These issues are often unavoidable when U.S. strategic interests require involvement with failed or fragile states.

Doctor Marla Karlin, currently serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development, also addressed the issue of what provides for effective BPC. In her 2012 doctoral dissertation, Dr. Karlin conducted a detailed analysis of U.S. security assistance efforts in three cases studies involving fragile states: Greece after World War II, South Vietnam in the late 1950s, and two missions in Lebanon (early 1980s and mid-2000s).[20] Dr. Karlin asserts that traditional U.S. emphasis on merely training and equipping foreign militaries while avoiding involvement

in key political issues is “fundamentally flawed”.[21] Rather than limiting itself to a narrow train and equip mentality, the United States should seek to “transform partner militaries” through deep involvement in their military affairs.[22] More specifically, she explains that BPC efforts were more likely to succeed under three conditions: “when the U.S. was involved in the partner state military’s sensitive affairs – influencing personnel and organization,” when the United States refrained from becoming a “co-combatant”, and when “unhelpful external actors played a diminishing role.”[23]

Each of Dr. Karlin’s recommendations, however, brings its own challenges. Too visible of a U.S. influence in making key personnel decisions runs the risk of degrading the domestic legitimacy of the military partner. Avoiding direct U.S. combat may be difficult early on in a failed state. Finally, active efforts to diminish the role and influence of unhelpful external actors requires significant U.S. and partner political will and may not be effective.

Collectively, these three studies offer a baseline of key factors for policy makers and planners to weigh when considering BPC operations. Several of these factors are completely dependent on characteristics and actions of the partner nation that can have a tremendous impact on the success or failure of BPC. However, there are political and strategic imperatives that compel the United States to support nations that lack the desirable characteristics of a good partner. Therefore, the remainder of this paper will focus on aspects that the U.S. government can directly influence. Taking the key validated findings from the second RAND study and Dr. Karlin’s research, the paper will examine the following issues in more detail:

- **Consistency** in both funding and implementation
- Including a **sustainment** component of the BPC initiative

- Developing **Ministerial capacity** is extremely important
- Significant **involvement in Partner Nation sensitive affairs** (personnel and organization)
- **Avoiding co-combatant** role
- **Matching** BPC efforts with Partner Nation objectives and absorptive capacity

Using these insights, the rest of this paper will determine whether current BPC policy, planning, and implementation in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq actually incorporate some of these best practices learned from previous research and what challenges remain.

Although these elements of successful BPC derived from research on U.S. led security assistance operations, there are important parallels with studies regarding capacity development among the civilian international aid community. In his article *Capacity Development in Fragile States*, Dr. Derick Brinkerhoff outlined similar aspects of effective capacity development outside of the security sector. A noted expert on international development and Distinguished Fellow of International Public Management with the RTI Institute,[24] Dr. Brinkerhoff's paper provides the following key elements of capacity development in fragile states:

- The need to consider sustainability and reinforcement of indigenous capacity
- Long timeframe
- Importance of Change agents and champions
- Importance of adaptation of intervention templates
- Systems perspective to capture complexity and interconnections[25]

While the wording is different the underlying concepts are very close. The theme of sustainability is clearly evident. Long timeframes lines up with consistency. Working with change agents is similar to influencing partner nation personnel policies to identify receptive local leadership. Systems perspective speaks to developing ministerial capacity. Adapting intervention templates is another way to describe matching BPC objectives to the partner nation. These parallels suggest that certain aspects of

capacity building are somewhat universal and applicable to both the security sector and public sector development.

**Consistency:**

Consistency in funding and implementation describes the mechanics of how the U.S. government funds BPC initiatives and the mechanisms and organizations used to actually deliver the assistance. There are three main components of consistency discussed in much of the existing literature and identified as a common theme among those interviewed for this project. They include funding, interagency coordination, and personnel policies of those assigned to perform BPC functions.

**Funding:** According to the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) Security Cooperation handbook approximately 103 different funding authorities are available for BPC projects.[26] The principal funding authority derives from legislative action like the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) as well as appropriations within the budgets of the Department of Defense (mostly Title 10 funds) and Department of State (Title 22). Most BPC funding for the DOD varies annually based on congressional legislation and budget approval. This condition results in short term initiatives that can spend money quickly or inconsistent supply of funding available for longer term projects. In addition, each authorization supports very specific aspects of BPC and resources are not available for other requirements, even if the BPC project is for the same capability within a nation. For instance, a project to assist a foreign counter-terrorist unit may require approval from three different authorities: one to provide training, one to provide equipment, and still another for sustainment training and maintenance[27].

In their 2013 report for the DOD, RAND analysts described this patchwork of authorities and approvals as a “tangled web, with holes, overlaps, and confusions.”[28] Personnel involved in security assistance, whether from DOD, or DOS or the Embassy level thru the GCC must navigate this complex system and patch together multiple programs to achieve their desired effect.

Larger operations in Afghanistan and Iraq tend to have dedicated funds for the bulk of BPC. The Afghanistan Security Forces Fund and Iraqi Security Forces Fund are comprehensive and multiyear sources of funding approved by congress. These dedicated authorizations provide an element of consistency and predictably within the approved timeframe.

Despite recommendations from RAND and others to streamline the authorities process, it appears to remain a significant problem today.[29] In the words of one State Department official, the existing authorities process often “drives” the objectives a GCC Commander chooses to pursue based on what is available for BPC rather than starting with PN requirements and working back through the system to integrate requirements and then acquire funding.[30] Other officials within the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the organization responsible for packaging BPC requests for DOD and Congressional approval, describe continuing challenges in terms of timeliness and responsiveness. The lack of a definitive BPC planning and resourcing timeline, coupled with multiple authorities and approvals, often creates such delays that lead to a BPC project being ready for implementation only after the originator of the requirement has moved on and their replacement is not aware of the initiative.[31]

**Interagency Coordination:** The diverse authorities and approvals for Security Assistance planning and implementation require significant interagency coordination between DOD and DOS. One of the focal points of interagency coordination is the DSCA within DOD that takes requirements from the GCCMs and works to coordinate interagency support with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Political Military Bureau within the DOS. One BPC funding authorization in particular, the 1206 Counter Terrorism Global Train and Equip program, mandated DOD and DOS concurrence before funding approval.[32] However, other programs do not require such coordination, therefore, the majority of interagency communication relies on informal coordination through methods such as regional Security Cooperation conferences with the relevant stakeholders.[33] The lack of a formal coordination mechanism can be problematic in a regional context if individual U.S. Ambassadors and other DOS officials focus on their specific nations without regard to integration into the GCC Theater Campaign Plan for Security Cooperation.[34]

Effective interagency coordination tends to vary among the DOS regional bureaus. Some bureaus work better with their respective GCC than others, usually based on the level of experience of those involved. For instance, the Near East Bureau has extensive experience coordinating BPC with its military counterpart, U.S. Central Command, gained over decades of United States focus on the region. A positive development in recent years includes a new requirement for DOS regional bureaus to develop a Joint Regional Strategy nested with the GCC Theater Campaign Plan.[35]

One of the more effective examples of interagency coordination at the GCC level includes embedding DOS officials within the GCC staff. Many of these embeds bring

experience from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and provide a complementary view of general development assistance applicable to BPC. They also provide a critical link to the U.S. State Department when developing BPC projects requiring DOS funding approval. Despite this structural answer to interagency coordination, interpersonal relationships among action officers are a large element of effective coordination and developing these relationships takes time.[36] Yet rapid personnel rotations often degrade these relationships, as the next few paragraphs will describe.

**BPC personnel policies:** One aspect of U.S. personnel policy effecting consistent BPC implementation is rapid turnover of BPC personnel at the tactical level. While there is some continuity at the national level in both DOD and DOS with BPC related positions usually held by career civil servants, the regional and country level tends to see the most turnover. As one DOS official described, “in the last three years I’ve dealt with three different Pol-Mil officers about the same issue”.[37] This is especially challenging in fragile states with one year tour limits. While twelve months seems a long time in austere or challenging environments, it is usually not enough time to develop truly effective relationships with partner nation officials and to manage most BPC programs requiring complicated funding and interagency support. One civil servant working BPC in US Africa Command (AFRICOM) explained, “Security assistance requires depth of experience rather than breadth of experience”.[38] This phrase describes the majority of military officers assigned to perform BPC functions who have a large breadth of experiences from their military careers but lack any experience with the specifics of security assistance and BPC. As the official from AFRICOM

continued, ‘military rotational policies and lack of BPC experience creates significant challenges managing BPC programs.’[39]

Based on interviews with personnel at all levels of the BPC chain, this rotation appears to be most detrimental at the GCC staff and individual country team. Possible solutions to address the negative impact of rapid personnel rotations could include longer tours and the expansion of the US Army’s Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program. While longer tours in fragile states may not be initially popular with career military or foreign service officers, the detrimental effects of longer tours could be mitigated with additional monetary incentives or more frequent opportunities for leave or vacation time. Expanding the FAO career field may be another method to develop a larger cadre of BPC professionals and reduce the number of positions filled by personnel from the general population with little knowledge or experience.

Some of the scholarship mentioned earlier includes a discussion on the significance of selection and training of those personnel implementing BPC and their impact on mission effectiveness. For example, a related RAND study, *Developing Army Strategy for BPC in Stability Operations*, compared the selection methods of BPC trainer/advisors between France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. While these three nations share a similar view about the need for BPC to shape the global security environment, they differ in trainer/advisor selection and career progression.[40] The French army links advisor duties into their career progression model. In comparison, the U.S. and UK do not have a rigorous selection process and most officers view advisor duty as generally detrimental to their career and usually filled by those not competitive for more “important, career-enhancing assignments.”[41]

A review of a special cohort of officers in the U.S. Army assigned to advisory duties in Afghanistan and Pakistan supports this observation. In 2009, the Pentagon created a Joint program to select and train officers from the conventional force to serve 3-4 years focused on Counterinsurgency and BPC in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Called the AFPAK Hands program, its members received specialized language and cultural training and served at least 2 years in theater and 1-2 years stateside in a staff role supporting Afghanistan/Pakistan operations.[42] The program took candidates out of their primary military specialty during critical mid-career years resulting in lower promotion rates for AFPAK hands compared to their peers.

In theory a specially trained cadre should provide enhanced capability and consistency to BPC efforts. Yet, the current risk for career progression associated with advisory duties appears to dissuade officers with the most promotion potential to serve in this capacity. During the FY15 promotion cycle, for example, the promotion rate for AFPAK Army officers in the grade of captain was 29 percent compared to 66 percent Army wide. Promotion rates for majors hoping to become lieutenant colonels were only 25 percent versus 63 percent for their peers across the Army.[43]

One recommendation to address this problem is to expand the military's FAO program to encompass the AFPAK Hands. This could shield AFPAK Hands from the potentially detrimental comparison to officers from their original specialty branch and put them in a pool of officers similarly focused on conducting BPC duties. The U.S. Army already instituted this for the operational force when they modified the specialty functional area program in the early 2000's. Functional areas allow officers that are less interested in advanced leadership positions to move out of their operational branch and

serve the rest of their careers within a more technical specialty field. Career progression in functional areas is unique to each specific technical field freeing the officer from competing against the standard leadership model for the operational Army.

**Sustainability:**

The sustainment component of BPC initiatives describes how a partner nation can preserve the capacity built though U.S. assistance, such as maintenance for any vehicles, equipment, and weapons provided through BPC. Sustainment also encompasses broader aspects such as training programs to maintain skill proficiency and even salaries for the security force receiving assistance.

Sustainability is especially challenging in failed states or weak states without a strong government or industrial capacity to assume the burden of maintaining a sophisticated security capability. Developing long-term sustainment capability is also more challenging and time intensive than building immediate combat capability.

Based on twelve key interviews for this paper, the importance of sustainability appears to be widely recognized among DOD and DOS practitioners of BPC.[44] Policy officials within DOD now review BPC projects with a "total program approach" to verify how the U.S. and PN will sustain the capability. Congress is also more interested and now demands more detail from Defense officials on the sustainability of each project.[45] Sustainment capability is also in high demand from some Partner Nations. One commander of U.S. forces providing BPC in Africa for nine months in 2015 observed that the most requested assistance from African partners was maintenance, medical, and logistics training.[46]

Current NATO-led assistance operations in Afghanistan also focus on sustainment capability. In 2015, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) NATO headquarters transitioned to a new mission (now called Resolute Support/RS) focused almost exclusively on the sustainability of Afghan security forces. This transition included a complete reorganization of the RS staff to advise and assist the Afghan Army and Police along eight Essential Functions (EFs). Three of these EFs are dedicated to sustainability areas such as budgeting & execution, force generation & training, and maintenance & logistics.[47]

Similar to the mission in Afghanistan, the United States built an extensive sustainment capability in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Unfortunately Iraqi leadership allowed this capacity to disintegrate after the departure of U.S. forces in 2011. The new U.S. BPC mission, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), is now re-training Iraqi security forces in support of their efforts to combat the Islamic State (IS). Initial U.S. assistance in OIR focused on only training and equipping the Iraqi army to re-take Mosul as soon as possible with no investment in their future sustainability. However, in 2015 the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) started to embed adviser teams in the Iraqi logistics headquarters to reintroduce sustainment capacity into the force. Advisors, this time, will assist Iraqis in the use of their own antiquated logistics process rather than repeating the previous mistake of forcing an unsustainable U.S. developed system on them.[48]

Based on feedback from interviews with those currently executing BPC from the department level down to the GCC and specific theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan, the concept of sustainability appears to be an important aspect of BPC planning and

operations. The preceding paragraphs illustrate how each element integrates sustainability into current operations. There is also an institutional requirement for new BPC project proposals to include a detailed sustainment plan developed by the country team and GCC prior to consideration for approval,[49] further evidence of how current policies appear to embrace the concept of including long term sustainability into BPC.

**Developing Ministerial Capacity:**

The RAND report *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity in Challenging Contexts?* noted that all of their cases "highlighted the importance of Partner Nation ministerial capacity to the effectiveness of BPC".[50] Ministerial capacity is critical for the Partner Nation to effectively employ and eventually sustain newly built capability. The RAND study also found that successful BPC programs included "effective ministerial oversight" in order to "avoid attrition of capabilities".[51] This section few paragraphs will assess the current implementation of this aspect of BPC in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa.

Current BPC efforts in Afghanistan, for example, appear to place a new and significant emphasis on ministerial capacity. In the past, the ISAF command structure relegated direct support to the main Afghan security ministries (Ministry of Defense/MoD and Ministry of Interior/MoI) to subordinate elements such as Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan and the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan. With the end of direct combat operations in 2014, however, the new RS mission shifted focus of almost the entire RS staff to Security Force Assistance operations and ministerial development through the Essential Function (EF) construct. The new RS staff structure also moved the senior advisors to both ministries out from under the

subordinate staff and into a direct reporting role to the RS commander, further reinforcing the importance of developing ministerial capacity.

On the other hand, in Iraq, initial BPC operations in 2014 and early 2015 did not include a ministerial component. The immediate focus of U.S. forces and advisors was the defense of Baghdad and stopping the advance of ISIS. But in late 2015, elements of Combined Joint Task Force – OIR (CJTF-OIR) started to advise the Iraqi security ministries about how to sustain newly trained army brigades, assist with Iraqi operational planning, and coordinate integration of coalition support.[52] Additional ministerial advising came from the U.S. Embassy based Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSCI). At present, these advising efforts go only as deep as the principle Iraqi generals at the head of service departments (Iraqi army, air force, etc.). There is no U.S. contact with lower level staff or the employees actually doing the work within the security ministries. Signifying the importance of continued ministerial engagement, CJTF-OIR recently submitted a Request for Forces (RFF) to provide additional military manpower to create a new Ministry Advisory team. This new team will include advisors from both the CJTF and OSCI working with the Iraqi security ministries in order to collaborate on effectively using the various funding authorities to achieve common objectives.[53]

In contrast, BPC planners in AFRICOM include relatively little ministerial capacity building for projects in Africa. Called Defense Institution Building (DIB), there is sensitivity not to assume a Partner Nation desires U.S. input with their Defense or Interior Ministries. Most African nations appear offended by the suggestion of putting advisors within their ministries and the GCC will only include ministerial advising if

requested by the partner nation.[54] Instead, AFRICOM officials incorporate smaller scale projects within African defense ministries tailored to sustain specific tactical level BPC projects provided to the partner nation.[55]

The level of U.S. involvement to develop the ministerial capacity of the partner nation varies. There is significant emphasis in this aspect of BPC in Afghanistan and the Afghans are willing partners and recent decisions to retain a large number of ministry advisors highlight the importance of this effort in Afghanistan. Ministry development in Iraq is not as comprehensive but may soon expand. In comparison, there is very little ministry development conducted in Africa. Using the RAND analysis of ministerial capacity as a yardstick, the BPC efforts in Afghanistan, and Iraq to a lesser degree, have a higher likelihood for long term success. However, the lack of involvement to develop and monitor defense ministries in Africa could mean that BPC projects implemented there are less likely to build long term capacity.

**Involvement in Partner Nation sensitive military affairs (personnel and organization):**

Dr. Karlin's research suggests that the United States should strongly consider influencing the personnel assignment policies and organizational structure of Partner Nation security organizations, especially in fragile states, to improve the chances of effective BPC. Having a good partner to work with can improve the overall effectiveness of the BPC initiative and in many fragile or weak states individual leaders can wield enormous influence. The RAND study also identified the importance of individuals within the partner nation hierarchy. In many case studies considered by

RAND, the “progress or failure (of a BPC program) hinged on a single partner nation counterpart”.[56]

While Dr. Karlin’s assessment makes sense when considered in the context of good personnel management practices, it can be difficult to implement. An overt U.S. influence in the selection of indigenous leaders can create significant problems in the legitimacy of these leaders among their own population. It also brings to question the sovereignty of the partner nation among their peers. Despite these concerns, a subtle and covert influence in the selection of friendly officials within the partner nation can have large impact on BPC success, as asserted by Dr. Karlin, and worth inclusion as a key factor to consider in this paper. In the case of Afghanistan, the 2014 election of Ashraf Ghani as President of GIRoA led to improved personal relations with both international donors and the key U.S. and NATO commander in Kabul. Ghani encourages closer cooperation with coalition leaders and meets with the RS commander on a regular basis. Although bound by a power sharing agreement with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Abdullah Abdullah, Ghani tends to solicit input from the coalition regarding selection of key leaders within the security ministries much more so than his predecessor.[57] It is still early to assess if this current U.S. influence over key personnel decisions truly impact BPC effectiveness. The true test of U.S. involvement and BPC legacy will be the success or failure of GIRoA in the next few years now that Afghan forces are fighting without the direct support of U.S. ground troops.

In Iraq, the U.S. ability to shape personnel policy and organizational structure is severely limited. This is troubling considering one of the main reasons cited for the collapse of the Iraqi army in 2014 was former president Malaki’s policy replacing most of

the competent U.S.-trained military leadership with his own patronage network.[58] Today the United States has little influence on personnel decisions within the Iraqi government. U.S. officials in Iraq are sensitive to the influence of tribes, families, and external actors like Iran and at this point they are very careful not to overreach when trying to shape key leader support for BPC initiatives. As one official within the OSC-I put it, "we must deal with the hand we were dealt".[59]

Outside of Afghanistan and Iraq, where the United States maintains significant military presence, there is very little direct involvement in sensitive partner military affairs. In most other countries the United States relies on the IMET program to indirectly influence the advancement of promising local partners within their own ranks. Attending a military school in the United States is a prestigious accomplishment in most partner nations and graduates of the IMET program sometimes become very senior leaders in their own country. However, IMET is a wide net and its impact effected by logistical constraints. In the case of AFRICOM, the sheer number of countries (53) and current IMET budget ($17 million) allow for only 1-2 participants per nation.

Accepting the importance of shaping Partner Nation key leader assignments, the outlook for the success of current operations is unclear. This factor may not be as significant in smaller scale BPC operations in most parts of the developing world. In large scale operations, such as OIR and RS, it is much more apparent. A resurgent Taliban may overshadow recent positive cooperation in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the lack of U.S. capability to mitigate the Sunni/Shia divide in Iraq and continued interference from "unhelpful external actors" like Iran forecast future trouble within the Iraqi security forces after the defeat of ISIS.

**Avoiding the role of co-combatant**

A classic quote from T.E. Lawrence, who helped lead the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in World War I, captures the reasoning behind the importance of avoiding direct involvement in combat operations, “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”[60] The more that U.S. forces actively participate in combat operations the more reliant the partner nation will be on the U.S. force. Additionally, the persistent presence of external troops tends to detract from the legitimacy and acceptance of local security forces by the domestic population.

The application of Dr. Karlin’s second condition for successful BPC, avoiding the role of co-combatant, is somewhat easier to assess in the contemporary operating environment. The United States currently follows this principle with nearly all BPC projects, including most of the fragile states receiving U.S. security assistance. In the two notable exceptions of Iraq and Afghanistan involving a relatively large U.S. troop presence, U.S. forces perform little unilateral direct action, with the exception of small numbers of special operations forces that sometimes participate alongside their indigenous counterparts during combat operations. Similarly in Africa, the United States refrains from deploying a large combat presence preferring to provide limited support to military formations serving the African Union in its fight against Al-Shabab.[61]

Of course staying out of the fight means that U.S. BPC efforts and expectations are at the mercy of Partner Nation capability and operational timelines. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a recognition that the United States must be willing to provide BPC

assistance for the long term if it wants to see its partners eventually succeed on their own.[62]

**Matching BPC efforts with Partner Nation objectives and absorptive capacity**

The concept of matching describes how the United States builds capability in support of Partner Nation objectives and not just U.S. goals. The concept also covers decisions about what level of technology and complexity of intended assistance the Partner Nation can realistically absorb and utilize effectively. Absorptive capacity can reflect elements of local society and government such as education levels, literacy rates, and sustainment capability.

Current BPC operations appear to take matching into consideration to some degree, mostly focusing on absorptive capacity. The OSC-I in Iraq is very aware of the long term implications for each type of security assistance provided. In the words of the U.S. chief of security assistance in Baghdad, the Iraqi military often requests "all of the newest and shiniest stuff, they want to look like Americans."[63] In these cases U.S. officials within the OSCI then make the determination on what type of equipment best matches Iraqi capacity to effectively utilize and maintain. As an example, the Iraqi military requested the latest U.S. Mine Resistant Armor Protected (MRAPs) trucks and armored fighting vehicles to replace older vehicles lost to ISIS. However OSCI officials instead determined to replace their losses with the same type of equipment (older Up-Armored HMMWVs and M113 Armored Personnel Carriers) in order to maintain a pure fleet and take advantage of existing logistics and maintenance infrastructure.

In Afghanistan, extremely low literacy rates significantly impact the absorptive capability of its security forces, to include several functionally illiterate senior generals

within the ministries.[64] Many of the automated logistics, maintenance, and budgeting systems provided by ISAF/RS advisors were simply too complicated, and most Afghans reverted to their old ledger based systems. In early 2015, RS headquarters attempted to improve absorptive capacity within the security ministries by hiring young Afghan college graduates with computer skills to work inside the ministries, as well as subordinate corps and provincial headquarters. The goal for these skilled workers is to help modernize critical systems that sustain the force and help train other Afghans within their respective ministries.

The tactical employment of the Afghan army provides another example of objective mismatch. U.S. and NATO leaders consistently urge the Afghan army to adopt an offensive mindset to pursue and defeat the Taliban. However, the Afghans prefer to disperse their troops across villages and roads manning small checkpoints vulnerable to Taliban attack. The large number of checkpoints immobilizes the army and prevents it from consolidating enough combat power to launch offensives into Taliban territory. This mismatch of objectives led to Afghan generals to largely ignore their U.S. advisors. RS leaders eventually recognized the importance of checkpoints to the Afghans and recently modified their recommendations to consolidate the smaller outposts into larger strongpoints that could maintain both a defensive and offensive capability.[65]

The preceding paragraphs provide some examples of initial mismatch with Partner Nation objectives and capacity in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the case of Iraq the Partner Nation initiated requests for equipment it could not realistically maintain. In Afghanistan the United States tended to push capacity solutions that the Partner Nation

could not effectively utilize. In both cases however, U.S. officials recognized the mismatch and took steps to modify BPC implementation to improve effectiveness. This suggests that there is a good chance for BPC efforts to succeed as long as those on the ground understand the matching principle and take steps to correct initial conflicts.

**Conclusions:**

Improving the capacity of security partners is a key component of U.S. foreign policy yet the departments and agencies responsible for implementing that policy sometime wrestle with how best to do accomplish it, especially in fragile states. Fortunately, the analysis of past operations gives us some insight into when BPC is most effective and a list of several factors that contributed the overall success of partner building efforts.

Analysis found in the Congressional Research Services Report suggests that BPC is most effective when the objective is to strengthen alliances or to build institutional linkages with partner nations. Alliances and linkages in turn help to prevent and minimize conflicts. As one commander reflected from his experience leading a recent security cooperation mission in Africa, “most countries are willing partners and desire a professional military force. These nations have a definite vision for the future and want a capable military to stabilize their own region.”[66] U.S. BPC efforts in Africa appear to support the CRS assessment, based on feedback from interviews with those currently executing BPC in Africa.

On the other side of the spectrum, the CRS report provides historical evidence suggesting that BPC is least effective as the primary means to win a war or as an exit strategy for U.S. forces. Current events in both Afghanistan and Iraq tend to support

this conclusion. Despite enormous efforts to build capacity in Afghanistan the conflict there continues to drag on into its 15th year. Similarly, the reintroduction of U.S. BPC operations into Iraq did not result in a quick response to ISIS and after two years Iraqi forces have yet to liberate the majority of territory still beyond its control.

A comparison of the historical findings of effective BPC to current operations in 2016 indicates an uneven application of the key factors within U.S. control for BPC success discussed in this paper. Specific elements are present to some degree in operations in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq and provide possible indicators to the eventual success of BPC in each operation.

In the case of Africa, the element of consistency continues to pose a challenge. AFRICOM planners still contend with applying the myriad of funding authorities to 54 different countries and personnel rotations continue to hamper the relationships necessary to conduct effective interagency coordination. Based on interviews with current staffers in the GCC and DOS Africa Bureau, sustainment and matching partner nation capacity appear to be key components of BPC in Africa. However, the lack of significant effort in developing ministerial capability to maintain newly built capacity may negate long term success of BPC projects. According to officials in AFRICOM, the United States does not exercise much influence on the personnel affairs of partner nations. However, the importance of respecting national sovereignty during normal diplomatic relations seems to outweigh any potential benefit of influencing the selection of military leaders. And lastly, current U.S. policy supports the concept of avoiding a visible co-combatant role which supports greater ownership and legitimacy of local African forces. Overall, BPC operations in Africa incorporate 3 out of the 6 main factors

identified for successful outcomes. Although only half of the key elements are present, it appears to be sufficient to achieve the strategic goals of alliance building and institutional linkages described by the CRS report.

Operations in Afghanistan include aspects of all 6 main factors of effective BPC. There is generally consistent funding allocated by Congress through the Afghan Security Forces Fund. However, personnel rotation policies still effect implementation continuity. In some cases, like the AFPAK hands program, the quality of assigned personnel is also a factor. Recent observations indicate a robust effort to incorporate sustainment into Afghan BPC and suggest the presence of improved matching efforts to Afghan absorptive capacity. There is also significant involvement to develop ministerial capacity and some influence to shape military personnel assignments. Finally, Afghan forces are now fully in the lead for security with limited support from U.S. forces in a direct combat role. The presence of all 6 main factors of effective BPC suggests eventual success of the mission. However, aspects of the partner nation outside of U.S. control such as corruption and lack of offensive combat operations continue to delay ultimate victory. A determined Taliban enemy and now elements of the Islamic State also pose a significant challenge to the eventual success of BPC in Afghanistan.

Current efforts in Iraq incorporate many of the key factors of effective BPC but to a lesser degree than more established operations in Afghanistan. In terms of consistency, the Iraqi Security Forces Fund provides improved regularity of funding. Unfortunately, 9 month military rotations and 12 month State Department tours degrades overall continuity. Matching partner nation absorptive capacity and building a sustainment capability are both key considerations for BPC planners, according to

interviews with those currently serving in Iraq. However, there is currently only minimal interaction at the ministry level and absolutely no U.S. capability to influence key leader assignments within the Iraqi security forces. On the positive side, there is minimal direct combat involving U.S. forces and the Iraqi military is clearly in the lead. The presence of only 4 out 6 of the key factors of effective BPC seems to indicate the likelihood that these efforts will ultimately be unsuccessful. The rapid infusion of U.S. weapons, vehicles, and training could lead to short term success at pushing ISIS back into Syria. But the lack of more comprehensive development within the ministry of defense and lack of influence to shape sensitive military personnel assignments to sustain this progress could result in a long term failure of the Iraqi military to fend off the breakup of the nation into separate sectarian regions.

Overall, it appears that the lessons learned from the past are well understood and used to inform planning and implementation of BPC today. Current operations in the three areas of consideration incorporate these key factors to a certain degree unless prohibited by specific conditions within the partner nation. Additionally, when taking the findings from the CRS report into account, policy decision makers should consider heavier investment into BPC in order to avoid wars rather than rely on it as a strategy to conclude a conflict once it starts. While none of the factors and examples identified in this paper will ensure 100% success, they continue to offer insights for planners and policy makers to account for when developing and executing BPC in fragile or failed states around the world.

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