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ARTICLE



Small footprint, small payoff: The military effectiveness of security force assistance

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ABSTRACT

After 15 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, many now see ‘small-footprint’ security force assistance (SFA) – training, advising and equipping allied militaries – as an alternative to large US ground-force commitments. Yet, its actual military efficacy has been little studied. This paper seeks to fill this gap. We find important limitations on SFA’s military utility, stemming from agency problems arising from systematic interest misalignment between the US and its typical partners. SFA’s achievable upper bound is modest and attainable only if US policy is intrusive and conditional, which it rarely is. For SFA, small footprints will usually mean small payoffs.

KEYWORDS Military effectiveness; strategy; defense policy; military assistance; training; advising; allies

After more than 10 years of continuous warfare with US troop deployments of up to 160,000 soldiers in Iraq and 100,000 in Afghanistan, many Americans are now tired of large land wars. Yet, the world remains a violent place, and the US has interests in many unstable parts of the world. These interests are rarely existential for a unipolar superpower surrounded by oceans and friendly neighbors, but terrorism, regional instability, humanitarian crises and economic disruption pose threats that, while limited, are real enough that few American officials will simply ignore them. The result is a dilemma that is likely to shape much of US security policy for decades: how can Americans defend real but limited security interests without sending another 100,000 soldiers to wage another decade-long war in some faraway land?

For many, the answer is US security force assistance (SFA) – that is, American help in training, equipping and advising allied or ‘partner’ militaries to enable them to defend themselves without 100,000 Americans on the ground to do it for them.¹ In fact, this idea of using ‘small footprint’ SFA to secure US interests without large ground-force deployments is now at the very forefront of the US defense debate. It is the foundation for US strategy to combat ISIL in Syria and Iraq.² It underlies Administration policy for post-2015 Afghanistan, where a small US training and advising mission is intended to enable Afghan soldiers and police to defeat the Taliban without US infantry.³ It is under active consideration for Ukraine, where former Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, among others, has favored US SFA to help the Poroshenko government fight Russian troops and pro-Russian insurgents in the country’s east.⁴ More broadly, SFA is central to US policy for Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Mauritania and many other ongoing and prospective conflicts around the world. In fact, it has become a major pillar of global US national security policy – the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance frames it as central to effective stability operations in an era in which US forces will no longer be sized to accomplish these by themselves.⁵

¹We thus define SFA more broadly than does the US Government, which distinguishes between what it calls SFA and similar activities such as security cooperation, security assistance, security sector assistance, foreign internal defense (FID) and building partner capacity: Taylor P. White, ‘Security Cooperation: How It All Fits Together’ *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 72/1 (2014), 106–8. In particular, our definition includes, but is not limited to, the mission of training indigenous government forces in the context of foreign internal defense – as we emphasize below, SFA in our definition can occur in a wide variety of settings including, but not limited to, FID. (FID is related to, but not identical to, SFA and will normally include SFA in addition to other activities such as interagency economic development aid or rule-of-law assistance not received by the host nation armed forces, *inter alia*). In principle, either SFA or FID can be conducted by either conventional or special operations forces, though SFA is sometimes seen chiefly as the domain of the former and FID as chiefly the domain of the latter. Note that in our usage, SFA missions span the range from tiny deployments of a dozen trainers to massive efforts as in Vietnam or Iraq. This broad definition enables us to assess the role of size and scope for effectiveness: many see smaller as better in SFA; this view can only be assessed if a range from small to large is examined.

²The White House, *Fact Sheet: Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)*, 10 Sept. 2014; Tanya Somanader, ‘President Obama Provides an Update on Our Strategy to Degrade and Destroy ISIL,’ The White House (blog), 6 July 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/07/06/president-obama-provides-update-our-strategy-degrade-and-destroy-isil>.

³Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, RL30588 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 27 Apr. 2015), 25–6.

⁴W.J. Hennigan and Paul Richter, ‘Defense chief nominee Ashton Carter, unlike Obama, backs arming Ukraine,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 February 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-defense-nominee-ashton-carter-20150204-story.html#page=1>.

⁵US Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington DC: GPO, January 2012), 6; Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony, 28 May 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>; Eric Schmitt, ‘U.S. Strategy to Fight Terrorism Increasingly Uses Proxies,’ *New York Times*, 29 May 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/africa/us-strategy-to-fight-terrorism-increasingly-uses-proxies.html?_r=0; idem, ‘U.S. Training Elite Antiterror Troops in Four African Nations,’ *New York Times*, 26 May 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/world/africa/us-trains-african-commandos-to-fight-terrorism.html>; U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington DC: GPO 2014), vii; The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: GPO February 2015), 9; Susan B. Epstein and K. Alan Kronstadt, *Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance*, R41856 (Washington DC: GPO 1 July 2013), 21–2.

Nor is this instrument's popularity limited to the US. Many great and regional powers use SFA of their own to pursue real but limited interests abroad. Britain and France have long sent training, equipping and advising missions to a wide range of foreign countries; Australia, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Croatia, Finland and Portugal, among many others, contributed to the Afghanistan SFA mission as of 2013; Israel undertook a long-term SFA mission with the substate South Lebanese Army in the 1980s and 1990s; Iran has long provided SFA to Hezbollah, Hamas and others and now provides SFA to the Iraqi state government; Saudi Arabia provides SFA to allies in Yemen and elsewhere; Russian SFA for separatist rebels complements apparent Russian state troop commitments in Ukraine; Rwanda has long provided SFA for Hutu rebels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶ In fact, SFA is extremely common worldwide and has been so for at least the last half century: Patrick Regan has documented over 900 individual acts of SFA globally from 1945 to 1999.⁷

SFA is conducted in a wide variety of settings. Sometimes it takes the form of a handful of trainers working with indigenous allies in a country at peace, as in the US missions in Mongolia, Bangladesh or Peru. Sometimes it can involve larger missions in countries actively fighting insurgents or terrorists, such as Yemen, Colombia or the Philippines. Sometimes it can involve remote training for fighters who will return to their countries afterwards, as in Syria. And sometimes it can comprise massive train-and-equip missions conducted by thousands of US personnel as one element of a much larger US war effort, as in Iraq, Afghanistan or Vietnam. All, however, share the same underlying military function: to improve a local ally's ability to defend itself. And the rationale is also often the same: to reduce the need for US troops to do the fighting by

⁶See, e.g., Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Celeste Ward Gventer, Stephanie Pezard and Laurence Smallman, *Lessons from U.S. Allies in Security Cooperation with Third Countries: The Cases of Australia, France, and the United Kingdom*, TR-972-AF (Santa Monica: RAND 2011); NATO, *Media Backgrounder: Afghan National Security Forces*, October 2013, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2013_10/20131018_131022-MediaBackgrounder_ANSF_en.pdf; Austin Long, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, Todd Helmus, *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond*, MG-1232-CFSOCC-A (Santa Monica: RAND 2012), ch. 7; Kenneth Katzman, *Iran, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy*, RL32048 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 28 May 2015), 33–4; 'Saudi-backed Yemeni Troops, Local Militias Gain Control of Aden, Military Officials Say,' *Washington Post*, 23 July 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2015/07/23/af6ff4ee-317b-11e5-8353-1215475949f4_story.html; David M. Herszenhorn and Peter Baker, 'Russia Steps Up Help for Rebels in Ukraine War,' *New York Times*, 25 July 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/26/world/europe/russian-artillery-fires-into-ukraine-kyiv-says.html>; Reuters, 'U.S. Says Rwanda Aids Congo Rebels,' *New York Times*, 23 July 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/24/world/africa/us-says-rwanda-aids-congo-rebels.html>.

⁷Patrick M. Regan, 'Third Party Interventions in Intrastate Conflict,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46/1 (February 2002), 55–73, counting observations where the variable 'military' was coded as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5.

improving the ally's ability to do this themselves. A wide range of apparently disparate missions thus shares a common underlying purpose.⁸

Yet for all its importance for US national security policy and its near-ubiquity in international politics, SFA has a checkered record in recent experience. A massive train-and-equip program in Iraq yielded an army that dissolved in the face of an ISIL offensive in Mosul in June 2014.⁹ Another massive program in Afghanistan produced security forces who have struggled to contain Taliban attacks following the termination of the foreign combat role in January 2014.¹⁰ Over \$7 billion in US aid to the Pakistani military has not enabled it to defeat insurgents there, and US efforts to build the South Vietnamese military were famously unsuccessful from 1965 to 1975.¹¹

This raises the question: how effective is SFA in its fundamental mission of increasing an ally's military effectiveness?¹² Does SFA really improve the recipient's military capability, and if so, when, why and how much? And, can

⁸Even in Iraq, Vietnam and Afghanistan, where over 100,000 American troops were waging an ongoing war, the purpose of SFA was to reduce the scale of US deployments needed by training the host nation's forces to shoulder more of the burden themselves; without SFA to create, train and equip an Iraqi, South Vietnamese or Afghan army, the US troop requirements in these theaters would have been much larger still, and in each theater, the intent was to enable US forces to drawn down as the host's military capability improved. As President George W. Bush put it in 2005, 'as the Iraqi security forces stand up, coalition forces can stand down' – or as Richard Nixon said in 1969, 'as South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.' See 'Transcript, Bush Speech,' *Financial Times*, 30 Nov. 2005 (<https://www.ft.com/content/799de108-61f3-11da-8470-0000779e2340>); Richard Nixon, speech delivered on national television, 3 Nov. 1969, as reprinted in George Katsiaficas, (ed.), *Vietnam Documents: American and Vietnamese Views of the War* (New York: Routledge 1992), doc. No. 33. We argue below that the determinants of success and failure, moreover, are similar across this range of situational contexts: they all pose common underlying principal-agent problems with similar underlying dynamics.

⁹Suadad Al-Salhy and Tim Arango, 'Sunni Militants Drive Iraqi Army Out of Mosul,' *New York Times*, 10 June 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/world/middleeast/militants-in-mosul.html?_r=0.

¹⁰Joseph Goldstein, 'Afghan Security Forces Struggle Just to Maintain Stalemate,' *New York Times*, 22 July 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/world/asia/afghan-security-forces-struggle-just-to-maintain-stalemate.html?_r=0; Remarks by Special Inspector General John Sopko at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13 May 2015, https://www.sigar.mil/newsroom/ReadFile.aspx?SSR=7&SubSSR=29&File=speeches/15/SIGAR_CSIS_Speech.html.

¹¹K. Alan Kronstad, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations: Issues for the 114th Congress*, R44034 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service; 14 May 2015); Austin Long, et al., *Locals Rule*, chap. 4.

¹²Our dependent variable is not victory or defeat but military effectiveness defined as proficiency: skill in the conduct of war. By this definition, it is possible for a skilled military to be defeated by a materially superior foe, and while combat outcomes can shed light on proficiency, skill and combat outcomes are separable. Hence, our dependent variable codings differ for two apparent stalemates – El Salvador and Korea – one which showed modest proficiency improvements with SFA (Salvador), the other of which displayed much greater improvements (Korea). On skill versus outcome definitions of military effectiveness, see, e.g., Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2015), 4–8; Risa Brooks, 'Introduction: The Impact of Culture, Society, Institutions, and International Forces on Military Effectiveness,' in Risa Brooks and Elizabeth Stanley, (eds.), *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 2007), 1–26; Stephen Biddle, 'Military Effectiveness,' in Robert Denemark et al., (eds.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), 5139–5156.

it be done better? Are there ways to improve its future performance, given its growing prominence in US defense policy?

Notwithstanding their importance, these questions have received surprisingly little research. A wide range of literatures bears on them but rarely tackles the real military utility of SFA in any direct way. Military intervention, foreign aid and alliance dynamics, for example, have all received sustained scholarly attention, and in each case, SFA is much of what is actually being explained – it is often the *form* that the intervention, or the aid, or the alliance assistance takes. One would expect its efficacy to shape donors' (and recipients') choices, and thus the patterns of variance to be explained in such studies. Yet, these literatures are nearly silent on the basic question of whether SFA actually works in its stated military mission. Civil warfare has been the subject of a large and growing literature in comparative politics and international relations, and many civil wars involve SFA to one or several of the combatants; whereas the civil warfare literature sometimes considers whether this assistance conduces to victory for its recipient or shapes conflict duration, there has been little attention to the nominal causal mechanism – SFA's direct effect on its recipients' military proficiency. A much smaller literature looks directly at SFA per se and its results; while this offers an important point of departure, the handful of existing studies are often more prescriptive than theoretical and pose difficult problems of measurement and identification.¹³ For all its importance, both to scholars and to policy makers, the actual military effectiveness of SFA has thus been surprisingly little studied.

The purpose of this paper is to provide such a study. In particular, we develop a systematic theory of SFA effectiveness, assess it against a carefully selected series of case studies of SFA provision under conditions of

¹³Few, for example, account for non-US SFA, confounding causal attribution; the literature also tends to be stronger in empirical observation than deductive theory construction. Among the most important of these studies are Department of Defense Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation Simulation and Analysis Center, *Security Force Assistance Skills and Capabilities Study* (Washington DC: GPO 2010); Mara E. Karlin, 'Training and Equipping Is Not Transforming: An Assessment of US Programs to Build Partner Militaries' (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University 2012); Stephen Watts, Caroline Baxter, Molly Dunigan, and Christopher Rizzi, *The Uses and Limits of Small-Scale Military Interventions*, MG-1226-RC (Santa Monica: RAND 2012); Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, Stephanie Young, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Joe Hogler, and Christine Leah, *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and under What Circumstances?*, MG-1253/1-OSD (Santa Monica: RAND 2013); Michael McNerney, Angela O'Mahony, Thomas S. Szayna, Derek Eaton, Caroline Baxter, Colin Clarke, Emma Davies, Michael McGee, Heather Peterson, Leslie Payne and Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, RR-350-A (Santa Monica: RAND 2014). Walter C. Ladwig III, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency: US Involvement in El Salvador's Civil War, 1979–92,' *International Security*, 41/1 (Summer 2016), 99–146 adopts a principal–agent lens similar to ours but focuses on counterinsurgency per se rather than the broader issue of SFA as a whole (note that we treat SFA in conventional, as well as counterinsurgent, warfare), with particular emphasis on the Salvador case. Daniel Byman, 'Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism,' *International Security*, 31/2 (Fall 2006), 79–115 similarly adopts a principal–agent framework, but like Ladwig does not focus on SFA per se and does not attempt to distinguish preconditions needed for success and failure.

particular importance for the theory's validity and draw implications from this for the conduct of US national security policy and the development of international relations theory.

Our central finding is that effective SFA is much harder in practice than often assumed and less viable as a substitute for large unilateral troop deployments. For the US in particular, the achievable upper bound is normally modest, and even this is possible only if US policy is intrusive and conditional, which it rarely is. This is because SFA is best understood as a principal-agent (PA) problem, and one whose structural conditions promote large agency losses for the SFA provider. That is, the conditions under which the US provides SFA commonly involve large interest misalignments between the provider (the principal) and the recipient (the agent), difficult monitoring challenges and difficult conditions for enforcement – a combination that typically leaves principals with limited real leverage and that promotes inefficiency in aid provision. To overcome these challenges requires atypical interest alignment between the US and its SFA partner, a larger US footprint than many would prefer, with intrusive US policies designed to monitor its ally's behavior and enable strict conditionality in aid provision, or ideally all of the above. These conditions are not impossible, but the combination has not been a common feature of US SFA in the modern era. Nor is it likely to become so in the future: in principle, US policy makers can design SFA programs to be intrusive and conditional, but it is much harder to create political interest alignment and this is often absent.

We thus see the *politics* of SFA as central for its effectiveness – differences in interests between the US and its local partners are a central underlying challenge for effectiveness, and a challenge made harder by the particular conditions in which SFA is normally provided. This counsels selective application. And where the US does choose SFA, it suggests that larger exertions will often be necessary to overcome agency losses and provide the leverage needed for more effective conditionality to realign agents' incentives. By contrast, the policy debate often sees SFA as a form of apolitical capacity building in which military aid ought to increase partner effectiveness in a simple, straightforward way, and where its apparent cost-effectiveness makes small efforts seem attractive as a cheap way to bolster allies with limited US commitment. When SFA then falls short, as it often does, this capacity-building view implies that more aid is needed to make the partner effective enough, yielding calls for increased assistance. A more intrinsically political, PA view of SFA, by contrast, would often counsel the opposite policy: if the US must work through a local agent, investing enough to create leverage and then using it by selectively reducing aid via conditionality may be more effective than the opposite.

This centrality of politics for SFA effectiveness, moreover, is a unifying feature across the diverse range of settings in which SFA is practiced. The

details of sound political management will vary between applications in sovereign states at peace, failed states in chaos or weak states at war. But the common underlying nature of SFA as a PA problem implies that the political incentives of the actors will normally trump the scale of material provided or the hours of training offered as determinants of success. This means that an apolitical approach focused on building material capacity without creating political incentives for compliant behavior will usually fail – and the challenges of aligning incentives in SFA will often be daunting, with significant agency losses as the rule and not the exception.

On balance, we thus find important limits on ‘small footprint’ SFA’s ability to solve the looming security challenges of real but limited US interests abroad. And we argue that these limitations derive from underlying agency problems that are inherent in the delegation function itself – while the difficulties will vary in degree, they will recur in some form across the variety of settings in which SFA occurs and will rarely be absent altogether. For the foreseeable future, small footprints mean small payoffs for the US – where limited US interests preclude large deployments, major results will rarely be possible from minor investments in SFA.

We present this argument in six steps. First, we develop a PA theory of SFA and counterpose this to the two most common intuitive models of SFA in the policy debate: the small-footprint ‘Salvador model’ most popular in the special operations community and the ‘FM 3-24 model’ most popular among the regular military. (This discussion is framed around US interests, but the issues involved are ubiquitous, and we extend the analysis to the broader non-US context in the conclusion section.) We then assess our theory and the competing models in three case studies of SFA programs conducted under conditions of special importance for the respective concepts: El Salvador from 1979 to 1992, Iraq from 2003 to 2014 and South Korea from 1949 to 1953.¹⁴ We conclude with summary observations and a more detailed discussion of these findings’ implications for policy and scholarship.

A PA theory of SFA

PA theory comprises a body of ideas developed originally by economists to explain interactions between parties to a contract and subsequently generalized and adapted to a wide range of situations in which one actor (the principal) delegates authority to another (the agent) to carry out actions on its behalf. In political science, it has been applied to explain interactions between elected officials and bureaucrats, legislators and committees, civil

¹⁴Our cases thus involve state recipients, but our theory’s logic also applies to many non-state recipients, such as Iraqi Kurds or the Free Syrian Army; our argument is not limited to states.

authorities and the military, domestic agencies and multinational organizations, or guerillas and state patrons, among many others.¹⁵

At their root, all such delegation decisions, and thus all of PA theory, are cost-saving strategies. They enable principals to undertake manufacturing, home repair, regulation, legislation or national defense at less cost than doing it themselves. But in exchange, the act of delegation creates problems. In particular, the principal's interests always differ from the agent's to some degree – homeowners want tireless work at low cost but carpenters want high wages for lighter work; civilians want interservice cooperation and low defense budgets, officers want generous funding for their own service and its priorities. Principals can try to overcome this *interest asymmetry* and impose their preferences through conditionality (paying only when satisfactory work is complete, or cutting budgets for Services who decline to cooperate) or other enforcement means. But enforcement requires monitoring to know whether and how well the agent is performing, and agents typically know more about their efforts and circumstances than principals do. To overcome this *information asymmetry*, principals must spend resources to gather data on the agent and their work. Yet, the more the principal spends on monitoring, the more expensive the project becomes and the less well the arrangement satisfies the original purpose of reducing cost. Payment, moreover, is a promise of future benefit if the agent 'works' (i.e., serves the principal's interests), whereas enforcement is a threat of future sanction if the agent 'shirks' (i.e., serves the agent's self-interest instead); effectiveness in either role turns on the principal's credibility. Principals must reassure agents of their promises, but the more reassurance they provide, the less credible their threat of sanctions becomes and vice versa: a principal whose commitment to support the agent is unshakable encourages the agent to take advantage and shirk with less fear of penalty. *Moral hazard* on some scale is thus inevitable in all PA transactions. Principals would prefer to work with agents of sterling integrity and exquisite proficiency, but the agent most interested in the job is likely to be the one who most needs the work – that is, the imperfect worker who is having

¹⁵See, e.g., John Ferejohn and Charles Shipan, 'Congressional Influence on Bureaucracy,' *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 6 (1990), 1–43; Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991); Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, 'Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms,' *American Journal of Political Science*, 28/1 (1984), 165–79; Mark Pollack, 'Delegation, Agency, and Agenda Setting in the European Community,' *International Organization*, 51/1 (1997), 99–134; Daniel L. Nielson and Michael Tierney, 'Delegation to International Organizations: Agency Theory and World Bank Environmental Reform,' *International Organization*, 57/2 (2003), 241–76; George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, 'Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War,' *American Journal of Political Science*, 38/2 (May, 1994), 362–380; Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003); Idean Salehyan, 'The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 54/3 (2010), 493–515.

trouble finding employment otherwise. *Adverse selection* is thus also inevitable to some degree in all PA transactions.¹⁶ These problems of interest asymmetry, information asymmetry, moral hazard and adverse selection thus impose an inherent *agency loss*, or divergence between the outcome the principal seeks and the outcome the principal obtains: delegation to an agent can reduce costs, but it typically produces imperfect performance to some degree, and often the greater the cost saving, the more imperfect is the performance.¹⁷

SFA is a classic PA problem. In SFA, the US (or other SFA provider) is the principal, the ally receiving the aid is the agent, and the principal's aim is to meet a threat to American security more cheaply than by sending a large US ground force to do the job directly. As with any other PA problem, SFA is thus subject to agency loss as a consequence of interest asymmetry, information asymmetry, moral hazard and adverse selection; unfortunately, the particular circumstances of SFA promote agency losses that are much larger than many SFA advocates expect.¹⁸

¹⁶Note that 'adverse selection' in principal-agent theory does not mean that the principal is always free to choose, or select, an agent. On the contrary, the concept of adverse selection refers to the problem of principals being *unable* to choose an agent who is highly qualified. In economics, this is typically because the principal's offer is most attractive to the least-qualified agent, encouraging better qualified agents to exit the market until offers improve. In SFA, this is because only flawed agents enter the 'market' for assistance: stable, legitimate, institutionally mature governments rarely suffer from insurgencies, or terrorist basing, or the kind of domestic unrest that invites foreign predation threats – hence, they are rarely candidates for US SFA in the first place. If SFA is under consideration, it is typically *because* the agent is flawed – which limits US freedom to choose ideal agents. This is particularly so for wartime SFA in counterinsurgencies such as Iraq, Afghanistan or Vietnam. In such wars, the agent is, necessarily, the threatened government the US wishes to preserve. The fact that they are suffering insurgencies means that they are likely to be deeply flawed – but the US is rarely free to choose some better qualified local ally than the threatened regime, as the point of the war is to preserve the regime. (On occasion, the US has tried to create an alternative ally via coup, as it did with Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam, but this hardly enabled the selection of a legitimate successor.) The central problem of adverse selection in SFA is thus the principal's *inability* to select an ideal agent. But like interest misalignment, adverse selection's effects vary in magnitude from case to case. Some insurgent-threatened regimes are worse than others; below, we argue that the US should try, where possible, to avoid assisting the worst agents by staying out of such wars altogether. But the word 'selection' in adverse selection should not be taken to mean that the US has unconstrained freedom of choice among a diverse marketplace of candidate agents.

¹⁷For more detailed treatments of PA theory, see, e.g., Jean-Jacques Laffont and David Martimort, *The Theory of Incentives: The Principal-Agent Model* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2002); Gary J. Miller, 'The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8 (2005), 203–25; Susan Shapiro, 'Agency Theory,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31 (2005), 263–84; Kathleen Eisenhardt, 'Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review,' *Academy of Management Review*, 14/1 (January 1989), 57–74. Note that in the economics literature, 'adverse selection' normally requires that the principal not know the agent's type (i.e., whether the agent is diligent or not); in our analysis, the principal can know the agent's type and still be subject to adverse selection because the principal has a limited range of agents from which to choose in meeting a given threat, and all of the potential agents will often present major interest misalignments with the principal.

¹⁸Below, we apply this logic to SFA informally, but formalizations of PA theory can readily be adapted to SFA. For an introduction to formal PA theory see, e.g., Laffont and Martimort, *The Theory of Incentives: The Principal-Agent Model*. For a formal PA model of SFA, see Eli Berman, et al., 'Deterrence with Proxies,' in progress.

Large interest asymmetries, for example, are ubiquitous in US SFA. Of course, no two states ever have identical interests. This is true even for close allies like the US and Great Britain: even in World War II, divergent US and British interests led to tension over the priority placed on campaigns in southern Europe and North Africa, for example, where British postwar geopolitical and colonial interests conflicted with America's.¹⁹ As recently as 2011, divergent British and US interests produced conflict over Libya, with an Obama Administration that wanted to stay out eventually yielding to British preferences and consenting to a bombing campaign that it clearly preferred to avoid.²⁰ US SFA, moreover, is rarely provided to allies as close as Britain. The top 15 recipients of US SFA between 1980 and 2009, for example, included states such as Pakistan, which provides safe haven for al Qaeda's global headquarters and for Taliban militants who have killed thousands of US soldiers in Afghanistan; Sudan, which has been accused of widespread ethnic cleansing against its non-Arab minority; four of the top seven state sources of foreign fighters for ISIL and of course Afghanistan, which ranks fourth on Transparency International's list of the world's most corrupt states (placing behind only Somalia, a top-25 recipient of US SFA in its own right, Sudan, a top-15 recipient, and North Korea).²¹

In fact, this is a systematic phenomenon. If we use UN voting patterns as a proxy for interest alignment, then there is a statistically significant negative correlation between US-partner interest alignment and US SFA provision: the closer the interest alignment, the less likely the US is to provide

¹⁹Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1999), 185–8; Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942–1943* (New York: Holt 2002), 11–14.

²⁰Steven Erlanger, 'France and Britain Lead Military Push on Libya,' *New York Times*, 18 Mar. 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/africa/19europe.html>; James Kitfield, 'Obama: The Reluctant Warrior on Libya,' *The Atlantic*, 18 Mar. 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/03/obama-the-reluctant-warrior-on-libya/72678/>; Patrick Hennessy, Philip Sherwell, and Andrew Gilligan, 'Barack Obama's State Visit to Britain Hit by Splits Over Libya,' *The Telegraph*, 21 May 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8528195/Barack-Obamas-state-visit-to-Britain-hit-by-splits-over-Libya.html>.

²¹These figures are based on cumulative spending on: Foreign Military Financing, the Military Assistance Program, 'Section 1206,' International Military Education and Training, and Excess Defense Articles. The data are a subset of those used in Michael McNerney, et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, and were derived from the US Agency for International Development 'Greenbook.' See also Stephen Watts, Jason H. Campbell, Patrick B. Johnston, Sameer Lalwani, Sarah H. Bana, *Countering Others' Insurgencies: Understanding U.S. Small-Footprint Interventions in Local Context*, RR-513-SRF (Santa Monica: RAND 2014), 173. On Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban, see, e.g., Kronstadt, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, 7–8; on ethnic cleansing in Sudan, see, e.g., Ted Dagne, *Sudan: The Crisis in Darfur and Status of the North-South Peace Agreement* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 15 June 2011), 23–4; on the nationality of foreign fighters in ISIL, see Aaron Y. Zelin, *ICSR Insight: Up to 11,000 foreign fighters in Syria; steep rise among Western Europeans*, International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, Dec. 2013, <http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/> (assuming the report's 'high estimate'; if the report's 'low estimate' was used, then four of the top six states would be among the top 15 recipients of US SFA); on Afghanistan, see Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2014*, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.

military aid.²² We see a similar relationship if we consider corruption: a state's rank on the Transparency International list of most corrupt states correlates directly with its rank on the list of US SFA recipients, with an ability to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship at the 0.1 level.²³

Much of this problem is attributable to adverse selection. The US rarely gives SFA to Switzerland or Canada because they don't need it; the states that need it are rarely governed as effectively as Switzerland or Canada.²⁴ And, the governance problems that give rise to the US interest in SFA often simultaneously promote interest divergence between the US and its partner.

Regional instability, terrorist infrastructure and humanitarian crises – the kinds of real-but-limited threats to US interests that SFA is often meant to address – are strongly associated with weak states and corrupt, unrepresentative, clientelist regimes. In such states, political order often requires what North, Wallis and Weingast have called a 'double balance' wherein the distribution of economic spoils matches the distribution of power among potentially violent elites.²⁵ Regimes who allow the internal balance of power to misalign with the balance of rents risk violent overthrow, and in such systems, the threat of violence from armed elites *within* the state apparatus often exceeds the real threat from foreign enemies, international terrorists or antigovernment insurgents. Rational leaders of such states thus cannot treat their militaries as disinterested defenders of the state against foreign enemies; the armed forces are natural rivals and potential threats. Order under such conditions thus requires regimes to undertake some mixture of appeasement, mutual implication and enfeeblement toward their own militaries. Appeasement strategies buy off potential rivals with economic spoils proportional to the rivals' real power; for armed forces with ready access to violence, this can create an officer class accustomed to economic privilege as the price of obedience and with little incentive to pursue disinterested expertise. Mutual implication encourages loyalty by implicating officers in criminal or unethical regime behavior, tying officers' fate to the regime's. Enfeeblement shifts the internal balance of power by deliberately weakening armed forces' ability to seize power or intimidate rivals. For example,

²²Patricia L. Sullivan, Brock F. Tessman, and Xiaojun Li, 'U.S. Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation,' *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 7 (2011), 275–294.

²³The Spearman's Rho is -0.14 with a p value of 0.09. This calculation assumes the 15 countries in NATO at the end of the Cold War received essentially no SFA from the US from 2000 to 2010. A proxy measure for SFA was derived from data used in Michael McNerney, et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*; corruption was measured using the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, available at <http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/>. The Stata code used is available from the authors upon request.

²⁴Note, again, that the word 'selection' does not imply freedom to choose an ideal agent, but in fact the opposite. On adverse selection in counterinsurgency, see Byman, 'Friends Like These,' 99–109.

²⁵Douglas North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2009), e.g., 20. For a similar analysis, see Stephen David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1991).

many such regimes create multiple, overlapping lines of military command, discourage lateral communication among officers, create redundant security organizations, discourage foreign education or training and replace foreign-trained military technocrats with reliable political loyalists.²⁶ Foreign military aid (such as US SFA) is often welcome in such settings (especially when it takes the form of financial transfers or gifts of equipment), but not for the purposes the providers often assume – instead, regimes typically see such aid as a form of largesse, an additional source of benefits to be distributed to buy political loyalty. More broadly, under the conditions common among US SFA recipients, the regime's interests are thus typically focused less on external enemies than on *internal* threats from rival elites, and especially the state military itself, which is often seen as a threat at least equal to that of foreign enemies.²⁷

By contrast, US interests in such states typically focus on *external* threats, and especially transnational terrorists or aspiring regional hegemony.²⁸ US SFA is commonly intended to strengthen partner militaries' ability to meet these ostensibly common threats by improving the partners' military proficiency. But whereas Americans often assume that these external dangers threaten the partner as well as the US, hence, strengthening the partner military will thus serve both parties' interests, this is often mistaken. In fact, the kind of powerful, politically independent, technically proficient, noncorrupt military the US seeks is often seen by the partner state as a far greater threat to their self-interest than foreign invasion or terrorist infiltration. Increased military capability destabilizes the internal balance of power; diminished cronyism and corruption weaken the regime's ability to control the empowered officers. The result is a commonplace and major divergence

²⁶See, e.g., Stephen Biddle and Robert Zirkle, 'Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 19/2 (June 1996), 171–212; Risa Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes* (New York: Oxford University Press 1998); James Quinlivan, 'Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East,' *International Security*, 24/2 (1999), 131–65; Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*, 15–18; Eliot Cohen, 'Distant Battles: Modern War in the Third World,' *International Security*, 10/4 (Spring 1986), 143–171.

²⁷On the distinction between internal and external threats and its role in regime decision making, see also Michael Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001); David Edelstein, 'Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail,' *International Security*, 29/1 (Summer 2004), 49–91; Biddle and Zirkle, 'Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World,'; Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*, ch. 1.

²⁸Cf. Andrew Boutton, 'U.S. Foreign Aid, Interstate Rivalry, and Incentives for Counterterrorism Cooperation,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 51/6 (2014), 741–754, which argues that US aid recipients prefer to arm against external rivals whereas the US prefers the opposite. Often, however, the recipients' nominal interest in arming against foreign rivals actually serves the internal interest of placating a domestic military that benefits from this, as in Pakistan: see, e.g., Azeem Ibrahim, 'How America is Funding Corruption in Pakistan,' *Foreign Policy*, 11 August 2009; Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press 2007). Our usage of internal and external is relative to the government itself: internal threats are those posed to government actors by other factions within the government (e.g., the military or other rival elites); external threats are those outside it (e.g., insurgents or neighboring states).

in US and partner interests that derives ultimately from the adverse selection problems inherent in any PA relationship.

The monitoring and enforcement strategies normally employed to mitigate interest asymmetries in PA relationships, moreover, face systematic barriers in SFA. As a cost-reduction strategy, SFA's whole purpose is to limit the US 'footprint' – that is, its presence on the ground in the partner country. Hence, by design, there will be few US monitors in the country to observe the partner's behavior. And, partners have many techniques available for using US aid to pursue the partner's interests rather than the provider's, and many such techniques are very hard for a handful of US monitors to detect. Financial and material aid are fungible: even if the nominal assistance goes to professional military purposes, this can displace state funding which can then be redirected to political allies as rents, leaving the host military no more effective militarily than before. Training can be used as a status reward for reliable loyalists, rather than a means of improving technical proficiency. Material aid can be diverted onto the black market. Aid money transferred to the state treasury can be laundered and directed to other purposes. To detect such abuses requires intrusive, labor-intensive monitoring of a nominal ally's behavior, and often a sustained presence by enough US personnel to thwart partner concealment. In other settings, principals can often rely on monitoring via independent reporting from the press, from domestic rivals of the agent or from routine overseers such as auditors or oversight agencies;²⁹ in SFA, by contrast, press freedom in the recipient state is often minimal, domestic rivals are often either repressed or complicit and the only trustworthy auditors would be the US personnel whose presence is supposed to be minimized. The lighter the US footprint, the harder effective monitoring thus becomes.³⁰

Monitoring, moreover, is useless without enforcement, which normally means conditionality – a credible US threat to withdraw aid from allies who misuse it. For SFA, however, conditionality is often very hard to implement in practice. In the economics literature, conditionality is often proposed as a means of mitigating moral hazard: agents will not exploit their information advantages by shirking if principals can condition their payments on successful completion of the work. Yet, conditionality is subject to moral hazard problems itself, and these loom particularly large for SFA.

²⁹See, e.g., Feaver, *Armed Servants*, ch. 3.

³⁰In many PA relationships, principals combat information asymmetries by sanctioning or rewarding agents based on outcomes rather than monitoring behavior directly: if the agent delivers a satisfactory product, the principal pays (and vice versa) whether the principal can observe the agent's level of effort or not. In SFA, however, outcome-based monitoring faces major causal attribution challenges: if the agent fails in combat, is this because the agent is shirking or because war is uncertain and outcomes are influenced by a host of exogenous variables beyond the agent's control? (Feaver, *Armed Servants*, ch. 3). We thus assume that to overcome information asymmetries in SFA requires direct monitoring of the agent's behavior.

Conditionality involves two promises of future action: a promise to withhold payments if the agent shirks, and a promise to pay if the agent works. Because both are promises of future action, credibility is always an issue. The credibility of the threat and the credibility of the promise are in tension, however. The more forcefully the US threatens an ally with aid withdrawal in the event of shirking, the more a rational ally will doubt the US promise to follow through with its commitment if the ally works. When a US administration threatens an ally with aid withdrawal, this often undermines US domestic support for the ally (as has been the case with Pakistan, for example). From the ally's perspective, why risk domestic instability by forcing reform on an unwilling military for the sake of an American patron whose commitment to your survival is so contingent and domestically controversial? How does the ally know that if the result is coup or internal schism that the Americans will save them, when US polls show American indifference to their fate in the aftermath of a US campaign of public pressure on your regime? Pakistanis, for example, widely believe that the US abandoned them after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; many Afghans viewed the US coupling of a withdrawal timetable with the onset of the 2009 Afghan Surge in a similar light and the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 left its Sunni allies there to fend for themselves.³¹ It is not delusional for SFA recipients to question the credibility of US promises, especially once the external threats Americans care about have been addressed, American public opinion has been turned against the ally, but the internal threats facing the ally remain. Threats of conditionality thus create a problem of moral hazard on the *principal's* part: once the allied regime has reformed as the Americans want and accepted the associated internal risks, the apparently indifferent Americans may pocket the benefits to US interests but then walk away and withhold critical assistance in the event of internal crisis.

Conversely, the more the US principal seeks to reassure the agent that US promises are good and aid will be forthcoming if only the agent accepts the internal risks of professionalizing its military, the greater is the risk of moral hazard in the other direction. To build US domestic support for aid, Administrations often frame the ally as vital to US national security; a credible promise of aid is normally built on a foundation of American assurance – both to the ally and to the US public and Congress – that the ally's survival is essential to American self-interest. The more forceful these assurances are, the more a rational ally will doubt the accompanying US threat to halt aid if the ally shirks. From the ally's perspective, why risk domestic instability by forcing reform on an unwilling military when the

³¹See, e.g., Daniel Markey, *No Exit from Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2013), 2–4; Alex Rodriguez, 'Afghans fear U.S. Drawdown will allow Taliban to regroup,' *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 2011; Dan Morse, 'Former 'Sons of Iraq' Targeted by Insurgents after U.S. Pullout,' *Washington Post*, 28 Jan. 2012.

external threat such reform is meant to meet will presumably be met by the Americans on your behalf anyway? Promises and reassurance thus create a problem of moral hazard on the *agent's* part: they encourage the agent to shirk on reforms, trading ineffectiveness against external enemies for internal stability in the belief that American aid will continue anyway and that American arms will ultimately save them if the external threat proves greater than expected.³²

And because conditionality requires both a credible threat *and* a credible promise, it is very hard in practice to overcome both problems of moral hazard at once. Success with one tends to undermine success with the other; efforts to balance the two run the risk that neither the threat *nor* the promise is fully credible. Conditionality in SFA thus poses a dual commitment problem: it is difficult for the agent to credibly commit itself to work and not shirk if the principal 'pays' the agent, but it is also difficult for the principal to credibly commit itself to pay the agent if the agent works rather than shirking.³³

This problem is compounded, moreover, if the agent has access to multiple principals and can threaten each with defection to the other if aid is withheld. For US SFA to Iraq, for example, the Iraqi agent can respond to US threats and conditions by turning instead to Iran for aid – and can use the opposite threat to reduce Iranian leverage in turn. The net result is a complex set of challenges that must be overcome for conditionality to be effective in SFA.

In domestic commerce, by contrast, contracts are enforceable by law. Legal costs give rise to agency loss even here, but the availability of legal recourse gives conditionality by contract provision a degree of inherent credibility. In SFA, there is no meaningful legal authority to enforce conditionality, hence the moral hazards inherent in delegation loom larger.

The net result is major agency loss much of the time in SFA. Adversely selected agents whose interests often focus on domestic power balancing commonly use US aid not to 'work' by professionalizing their militaries, as the US prefers, but to 'shirk' by reinforcing clientelism. Limited US monitoring often provides only ambiguous evidence of such shirking, and conditionality to enforce US preferences on the use of aid is often undermined by moral hazard rather than mitigating it. In the end, US aid then has much less

³²An anonymous reviewer referred to this as 'the paradox of SFA' – if US interests are important enough to provide SFA, the local ally has an incentive to shirk on the assumption that the US will take up the slack rather than accept mission failure. In PA theoretic terms, this represents agency loss attributable to moral hazard on the part of the agent and is very similar to the problem of banks that were 'too big to fail' in the 2008–9 financial crisis and could thus accept risk on the assumption that they would be bailed out if the risky gambles failed.

³³Both are forms of moral hazard, and both aggravate agency loss in SFA, but only the former is emphasized in most PA theoretical literature. (For an exception, see Miller, 'The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models,' 220–3). The authors thank Eli Berman and David Laitin for this insight.

ability to improve partners' real military effectiveness than the scale of US assistance would suggest.

This is not to say that aid is irrelevant (or adverse) to the partner's military performance. Even poorly used aid can be better than none at all.

And the theory above suggests that the *scale* of agency loss, while often large, will vary with local conditions. As PA theory implies, agency loss is proportional to the degree of interest misalignment between the principal and the agent: where US interests are more closely aligned with the partner's, we can thus expect greater improvement in partner military effectiveness per dollar of SFA expenditure. PA theory also implies that the greater the principal's investment in monitoring and the more conditional the aid provision, the smaller is the agency loss. Hence, we can expect that where the US monitors more intrusively and conditions aid more credibly, we should see greater military impact per dollar of SFA expenditure. The analysis above suggests that close interest alignment, intrusive monitoring and credible conditionality will be rare for US SFA, but where observed, these unusual conditions should promote greater improvements in the partner's military than in more typical cases.

Alternative views: the Salvador and FM 3-24 models

This view of SFA as a difficult PA problem is not the orthodox opinion in the policy community. Two more common perceptions might be called the Salvador and FM 3-24 models. Neither is a fully specified theory, but each implies very different expectations than the argument above.

The Salvador model is inspired by the US SFA effort in El Salvador from 1979 to 1992, wherein a small US Special Operations Force (SOF) training team, combined with financial aid and equipment transfers to the Salvadoran government, helped end the FMLN insurgency and stabilize the country. Its proponents, especially in the special forces community, hold that by keeping the US footprint in the country small, this effort avoided the moral hazard inherent in larger US deployments: the Salvadoran regime, unlike say the Thieu government in South Vietnam, understood that US forces were too small to defend them against the insurgents; hence, Salvadorans needed to defend themselves rather than depend on Americans to do the military heavy lifting for them. In this view, US aid provided the catalytic training and critical equipment the Salvadorans needed to defend themselves but never displaced indigenous forces in combat. And by limiting the US deployment to elite, highly trained commandos with language skills, cultural sensitivity and long experience in working with foreign militaries, small teams of such Americans could build relationships and achieve improvements in their host's performance that

large formations of regular US infantry would not have been able to do. Salvador model proponents see this as a template for effective SFA in the future, too.³⁴

The FM 3-24 model, by contrast, is inspired by the approach to SFA in the 2006 US counterinsurgency manual of the same name. This approach relies on the conventional Army and Marine Corps to build partner-nation militaries by teaming them with large deployments of US troops who will conduct combat operations together with their indigenous allies. Whereas the Salvador Model represents small-footprint SFA, the FM 3-24 model splits the difference between small-footprint SFA and unilateral US warfighting. Modern US counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine, as embodied in FM 3-24, stresses the importance of local forces to defeat insurgents, but unlike the Salvador Model, it assumes that the local government needs more US support early in the process. Its purpose is still to empower the ally to win its own war by building an allied military to whom the fighting will be handed off as soon as possible. But the FM 3-24 Model assumes that this task is beyond the capacity of small SOF teams, who cannot train enough partner forces fast enough to preserve a weak partner facing a major insurgency. Hence, in this view, more US troops are needed to increase training throughput, to protect the host government temporarily with a large US ground force to hold the line while the host military is built and to stiffen local forces with US combat troops as the locals learn to fight. The US presence, initially large, is then withdrawn and the local ally takes over the war with limited US assistance thereafter. The result is a larger US footprint than the Salvador Model prescribes, but a smaller US investment than a unilateral US war would require, via progressively increasing reliance on an improving allied military instead.³⁵

In different ways, the Salvador and FM 3-24 models thus each address a part of the PA challenge described above: the Salvador model seeks to mitigate the moral hazard created by over-reassurance; the FM 3-24 model provides an extensive on-the-ground presence in close daily contact with the partner military that can monitor its behavior. Neither, however, addresses more than a part of the problem. The FM 3-24 approach is built on an implicit assumption of interest alignment between the US and its

³⁴See, e.g., David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press 2007), 156, 195; Steven Metz, 'New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21st Century Insurgency,' *Parameters*, Winter 2007–8; David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 283; Austin Long, 'Small Is Beautiful: The Counterterrorism Option in Afghanistan,' *Orbis*, 54/2 (January 2010), 199–214; Carter Malkasian and J. Kael Weston, 'War Downsized: How to Accomplish More with Less,' *Foreign Affairs*, 91/2 (March/April 2012), 111–121; T. X. Hammes, 'Counterinsurgency: Not a Strategy, But a Necessary Capability,' *Joint Force Quarterly*, 65/2 (April 2012), 48–52; Howard Altman, 'SOCOM's Goal: Pre-empt Wars,' *The Tampa Tribune*, 19 May 2013, <http://www.tbo.com/list/macdill-air-force-base-news/socoms-goal-pre-empt-wars-b82486657z1>.

³⁵Department of the Army, *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington DC: US GPO, 2006), esp. ch. 6.

partner and is thus silent on conditionality or other enforcement means that are needed to discourage shirking. The Salvador model is more attentive to shirking but limits the monitoring capacity needed to detect it and creates moral hazard in the other direction by promoting uncertainty about the US commitment to the partner.

The net result is a set of sharply divergent expectations for observed outcomes. The Salvador model holds that small footprint SFA should yield disproportionate improvements in partner military effectiveness, and larger improvements with smaller investments than conventional large-footprint missions. The FM 3-24 model holds the opposite. Both expect SFA missions executed according to its model to yield major improvements in the recipient military's combat effectiveness. By contrast, the PA theory presented above is more pessimistic absent unusual degrees of interest alignment coupled with intrusive monitoring and conditionality. And, the PA approach sees the size of the US footprint as less important than relative interest alignment, monitoring effort and conditionality for results: neither small nor large US deployments will suffice to outweigh the effects of misaligned interests or imperfect monitoring and enforcement.

Case selection: El Salvador, Iraq, and Korea

To assess these contrasting ideas, a large-*n* analysis to exploit the large case universe of this very common mission would be ideal – but appropriate data do not exist, especially for non-US SFA providers.³⁶ To compile such data, moreover, would be difficult given the very size of the case universe, the covert nature of some SFA and the limited public documentation of non-US SFA activity. We thus employ a small-*n* design, with cases chosen to maximize the theoretical leverage available from a limited sample of observations. In particular, we consider three cases: El Salvador from 1979 to 1992, Iraq from 2003 to 2014, and Korea from 1949 to 1953.

El Salvador is a critical case for the special operations small-footprint school. Its centrality to the SFA debate makes it an essential case to consider: if the Salvador Model works as advertised anywhere, it should be here.

As the Salvador case is central for its namesake model, so the Iraq experience is critical for the FM 3-24 Model: Iraq was both its first explicit application and, in the minds of many, a campaign designed around the

³⁶For a partial list of such cases, see Regan's data cited in 'Third Party Interventions in Intrastate Conflict.' As large as Regan's enumeration is, it omits some cases that fit our definition of SFA and does not address our dependent variable. Other SFA datasets exclude non-US providers, risking downward bias on estimates of SFA effectiveness.

new doctrine's prescriptions after General David Petraeus, the manual's coauthor, assumed command in January 2007. As the model prescribes, there was a large deployment of US ground troops both to train a large Iraqi military and to provide security while it matured; a major transfer of weapons, equipment and financial aid to the Iraqi government; then a gradual transfer of responsibility from US forces to their host-nation counterparts.³⁷ If the apolitical capacity-building prescribed by the manual is going to work anywhere, it should work in a campaign designed so deliberately around its provisions.

South Korea presents a contrasting, large-footprint SFA mission under conditions of unusual interest alignment, with US intrusiveness and conditionality at odds with FM 3-24's provisions. The case thus offers an opportunity to assess the Salvador Model's emphasis on keeping the US footprint small, and the FM 3-24 Model's emphasis on building allied capacity rather than selectively weakening it by manipulating aid for political leverage. The case also offers an important opportunity to observe SFA in a high-intensity conventional war. Conventional warfare is extremely demanding.³⁸ It is also an important domain for US assistance: in Ukraine today, for example, SFA would aim chiefly at defeating a conventional threat, whether from a Russian invasion or conventionally armed separatists. Our theory highlights interest misalignment between externally focused principals and internally focused agents; we thus include a case where the external threat is severe to assess the associated predictions.

Taken together, these cases thus enable observation of the causal processes in two namesake cases for the contrasting orthodox views with a third case to provide variance on the critical variables of footprint size, monitoring and conditionality. Although a small sample of cases can neither prove a PA theory of SFA nor disprove its alternatives, this combination of traits illustrates the respective views under challenging conditions and offers unusual leverage to increase the relative shift in confidence obtainable from a small observational sample.

Case study: El Salvador, 1979–1992

Though the Salvador experience inspired its namesake model, the former offers at best weak support for the latter. The El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF) did improve, but they were never effective enough to defeat a

³⁷Note that whereas SFA was the primary US military activity in El Salvador, SFA was only one of multiple US military missions ongoing in Iraq after 2003. SFA can occur in a variety of specific settings, and our examination of Iraq (and also Korea) is designed in part to shed light on a range of such contexts.

³⁸This is a central argument of Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004).

numerically inferior insurgency, which ended in a negotiated compromise settlement amid mutual exhaustion as the Cold War closed. And, among the ESAF's most important unresolved shortcomings was its abusiveness toward the population in threatened areas. Although the abuse rate did decline, a Salvadoran oligarchy that was resolved to enforce class privilege by brutalizing opponents resisted US pressure to reform, and US efforts to coerce change via conditionality fell short of the intended goal in the face of limited leverage and imperfect monitoring of the ESAF. The net result was a real – but limited – payoff for Salvador Model SFA even in the Model's namesake case.

Although the Salvador SFA footprint was much smaller than in Iraq or Afghanistan, it was still an unusually large effort. From 1979 to 1991, the US provided over \$5 billion in assistance to the Salvadoran government, of which more than \$1 billion comprised military training and equipment, making El Salvador the eighth largest recipient of US military aid worldwide at the time.³⁹ The US also trained ESAF officers in the US and deployed to El Salvador a small contingent of US Special Forces trainers and advisors to work directly with the ESAF in the field and improve their ability to use the US-supplied aid. This deployment was capped by the US Congress at 55 personnel but crept upwards to an actual strength of over 150 by 1987.⁴⁰ This was still tiny by comparison with 160,000 US soldiers in Iraq, but it was much larger than most US SFA missions, which often comprise just a few dozen soldiers at a time.⁴¹

The central US objective in this effort was to defeat a Soviet-supported FMLN (Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) insurgency lest the USSR gain a client state in Central America. To this end, US policy sought

³⁹US General Accounting Office, 'El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but not Overcome the Insurgency,' April 1991, 9; Karl R. DeRouen and Uk Heo (eds.), *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 344.

⁴⁰Joint Department of State/Department of Defense Memo, 'U.S. Military Trainers in El Salvador,' 21 Sept. 1983, accession no. ES04255, Digital National Security Archive, George Washington University (DNSA); Robert D. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press 2006), 84; Richard Haggerty, *El Salvador: A Country Study* (Washington DC: Library of Congress 1990), 224, A.J. Bacevich et al., *America Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* (Washington DC: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis 1988), 5; US General Accounting Office Report, 'El Salvador: Extent of US Personnel in Country,' 9 July 1990, 10–13. Not all analysts accept the 150 figure above: Haggerty, 226, e.g., argues that the 55-person cap was maintained throughout.

⁴¹In fact, the 1984 Salvador mission still ranked in the 91st percentile of all US SFA as recently as 2009 (as measured by the sum of spending on Foreign Military Financing, the Military Assistance Program, 'Section 1206,' International Military Education and Training, and Excess Defense Articles; these data are a subset of those used in Michael McNerney, et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, and were derived from the US Agency for International Development 'Greenbook'). On typical SFA mission size, see, e.g., Craig Whitlock, 'U.S. Has Deployed Military Advisors to Somalia, Officials Say,' *Washington Post*, 10 January 2014; Schmitt, 'U.S. Training Elite Anti-terror Troops in Four African Nations.'

a combination of military expansion, professionalization, land reform, economic redistribution and respect for human rights in order to undermine both the FMLN's military prospects and its political appeal, producing a stable US-allied government that could block Soviet influence in the region.⁴²

The Salvadoran regime shared the goal of preventing its overthrow but sharply opposed economic and political reform as a means and was wary of a more technocratic officer corps. Salvadoran agrarian elites had relied for generations on an internal balance in which a handful of wealthy families shared rents from a sharply unequal economy that they controlled via repressive governance and a security apparatus that was organized along semifeudal family lines to ensure its loyalty and was bound to the regime by complicity in violence against political activists.⁴³ American proposals for economic reforms that would undermine the financial basis of the traditional elite's power thus posed existential threats to them, as did US-advocated military professionalization that would weaken plutocratic control. For the ruling oligarchy, the system of economic and social privilege it enforced and the intra-elite balance this created was thus at least as important as defeating the insurgency – in fact, for them, the counterinsurgency campaign was chiefly a means to this ultimate goal of preserving their wealth and influence, and the regime preferred to terrorize opponents rather than accepting what they saw as self-defeating reforms.⁴⁴

This interest divergence created persistent tension between the US and its ally over the conduct of the war. The US tried to use monitoring and

⁴²Embassy San Salvador to Department of State, 'Annual Integrated Assessment of Security Assistance for El Salvador,' Telegram 011 May 4151, 1983, accession no. ES03993, DNSA; David H. Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador: The Lessons and Limits of the Indirect Approach,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24/4 (2013), 671–672; William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America 1977–1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press 2000), 132; Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica: RAND 1991), 9–10, 16, 44.

⁴³Of course, no government is a unitary actor, and Salvadoran politics in this era featured rivalry between, *inter alia*, traditional landholding families (together with their military allies) and a rising urban business elite more open to American-backed reforms. See, e.g., LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 572–573; Mark Peceny and William D. Stanley, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' *Politics and Society*, 38/1 (2010), 83; Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 109–138. This rivalry made US preferences even riskier for the traditional plutocracy, consistent with our theory, but space constraints preclude an extended account here. We thus treat recipient political interests chiefly through the lens of the ruling agrarian plutocracy and its conflict of interest with the US. On the agent's interests in El Salvador, see Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 673–74; Peceny and Stanley, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 72–73; Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, 59–62; US Central Intelligence Agency, 'El Salvador: Managing the Military,' 1 April 1988, accession no. EL00233, DNSA.

⁴⁴Peceny and Stanley, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 73–75, 81–82; Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, 45–49.

conditionality to advance its agenda; the Salvadoran regime resisted reforms they saw as defeating the whole purpose of the war.⁴⁵

US official monitoring was constrained by the limited scope of the US presence. The US footprint was large by SFA standards but still small for overseeing a 56,000 strong ESAF, and the Americans were prohibited from accompanying Salvadoran troops on patrol lest the US be drawn into combat.⁴⁶ Unofficial reporting from the news media and NGOs, however, helped fill a bit of the gap in a case that attracted wide attention abroad, and at least some of the more lurid ESAF abuses were detected and publicized.

The result was a series of US threats and aid cutoffs designed to compel reform. In December 1980, the US suspended all aid following the murder of four American churchwomen. After aid was restored in January 1981, it was then cut by 30 percent in November 1983 when the Salvadorans failed to bring a verdict against the perpetrators. In December 1983, Vice President Bush threatened to halt aid unless right wing death squad violence was stopped. After 1986, the US Congress withheld \$5 million in annual aid pending resolution of the 1981 murders of two US land reform consultants. In February 1989, Vice President Quayle threatened to cut aid unless the September 1988 massacre of 10 civilians near San Sebastian was resolved. In August 1990, the State Department protested the slow investigation of the 1989 murder of six Jesuit priests by refusing to approve \$19.6 million in aid; the FY 1991 appropriations bill withheld 50 percent of the \$85 million in military assistance.⁴⁷

This combination of aid and conditionality did help – it eventually produced a stronger ESAF whose human rights abuses became less frequent. But it never produced straightforward Salvadoran cooperation, and there were important limits on its effectiveness: it never created a military strong enough to defeat the FMLN, and ESAF death squad involvement never went away.⁴⁸ By the mid-1980s, the ESAF's US-supplied firepower forced the FMLN to

⁴⁵Critics of US policy often see American calls for reform in El Salvador as insincere efforts to conceal complicity with Salvadoran abuses: see, e.g., Mayra Gomez, *Human Rights in Cuba, El Salvador, and Nicaragua* (New York NY: Routledge 2003), 123–24; William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since WWII* (London: Zed Books 2003), 357–363. See also, LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the underlying US interest was to resist Soviet influence, not to preserve plutocratic privilege per se, which implies a difference in priorities between the US and its ally. Unless all US officials valued Salvadoran plutocratic privilege as highly as the plutocrats themselves did, the result is some degree of interest divergence, as PA theory would expect, even if US motives were not pure.

⁴⁶Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 688; Cecil E. Bailey, 'OPATT: The US Army SF Advisers in El Salvador,' *Special Warfare* 17/2 (2004), 24; Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 87–88, 96.

⁴⁷US General Accounting Office, 'El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but not Overcome the Insurgency,' April 1991, 26–28; Haggerty, *El Salvador: A Country Study*, 224; Embassy San Salvador to Department of State, 'Vice President Bush's Meetings with Salvadoran Officials,' Telegram 114 December 1567, 1983, accession no. EL00815, DNSA.

⁴⁸Embassy San Salvador to Department of State, 'Human Rights Under Cristiani – The First Year,' Telegram 11 August 8338, 1990, accession no. EL01166, DNSA; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 'Military Commanders' Resentment and Opposition to U.S. Government Pressure,' 25 January 1984, document no. 0000049079, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (CERR), 2.

abandon large-unit operations and resort to more dispersed guerilla tactics, while improved ESAF skills (especially in elite airmobile units) enabled government forces to hold key positions under FMLN attack.⁴⁹ The ESAF rank and file, however, never proved capable of effective offensive maneuver, and the ESAF never outgrew a preference for large, battalion-level sweeps dependent on heavy firepower from aircraft or artillery.⁵⁰ ESAF casualties remained significant through the end of the war, ESAF leadership remained weak and the ESAF proved unable in the war's later years to deny insurgents the ability to strike targets even in El Salvador's urban core: the FMLN's second 'final offensive' in November 1989 penetrated deep into the capital of San Salvador and the cities of Miguel, Zacatecoluca and Usulután.⁵¹ In fact, the FMLN enjoyed a resurgence in the mid-80s after adapting its tactics to cope with the ESAF's new airpower and remained militarily viable through the end of the war.⁵² Nor did US pressure ever eliminate ESAF atrocities. Political murders by Salvadoran security forces fell from over 10,000 in 1981 to 109 in 1990, but as late as November 1989, the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion's murder of six Jesuit priests enraged the US Congress and led to another round of threatened aid withdrawal.⁵³ US aid produced an ESAF that could avert defeat and impose a brutal stalemate at heavy cost to both sides, but it could not end the war.

What did end it was a combination of factors largely unrelated to US SFA. The FMLN's 1989 offensive, its acquisition of sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons that could threaten the ESAF's airmobility advantages, growing tensions

⁴⁹LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 265–7; Eric Rittinger, 'Putting the Moral in "Moral Hazard": Agency, Human Rights, and United States Foreign Security Force Development,' Paper prepared for the APSA Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, 2012, SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2106748>.

⁵⁰Director of Central Intelligence, *El Salvador: Government and Insurgent Prospects* (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency 1989) Special National Intelligence Estimate, February 1989, 19; U.S. GAO, 'El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but not Overcome the Insurgency,' 24; Michael Childress, 'The Effectiveness of U.S. Training Efforts in Internal Defense and Development: The Cases of El Salvador and Honduras,' (Santa Monica: RAND 1995), 30; Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 132–133.

⁵¹Peceney and Stanley, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 82–84; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 276–7; Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 123–124; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 'El Salvador's Insurgents: Key Capabilities and Vulnerabilities,' 5 May 1990, document no. 0000530672, CERR, iv.

⁵²Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 676; Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War: A Study of Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1996), 149; Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*.

⁵³Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 139–141, 144–145; Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 676–77; Michael J. Hennelly, 'US Policy in El Salvador: Creating Beauty or the Beast?' *Parameters*, 231 (Spring 1993), 64; Embassy San Salvador to Department of State, 'ESAF Compliance Unsatisfactory on Jesuit Investigation,' Telegram 17 October 2056, 1990, accession no. EL01203, DNSA. As Schwarz put it in 1991, 'One hundred and eight murders committed by a state's armed forces and death squads connected to them is a record that no truly democratic and just society could tolerate To some degree, this reduction may arise from the adoption of a more discriminating, but no less chillingly effective, strategy for political killings and from the fact that because of past murders, there are simply fewer politically suspect persons alive and in El Salvador.' (Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, 23, 37.) Abuses certainly fell, but US pressure never completely solved the problem.

within the Salvadoran elite and the political crisis surrounding the Jesuit priests' murder all increased the regime's openness to serious peace talks, as did the end of the Cold War and the waning prospects for US support of anticommunist warmaking in Central America. At the same time, the FMLN lost important financial and diplomatic support with the fall of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, while the 1989 offensive's failure to trigger a general uprising showed that outright military victory remained as elusive for the FMLN as it was for the ESAF. With no end in sight to a costly stalemate and prospects for future support weakening on both sides, a bargaining space opened – eventually ending the conflict in the Chapultepec Peace Accords of January 1992.⁵⁴ Salvador model SFA made this possible in the sense that it preserved the Salvadoran government long enough for the Cold War to end – but it did not create a military that could defeat the FMLN insurgency nor did it provide enough leverage to align ESAF behavior with US political interests.

How could such a textbook strategy and over \$5 billion not win the war? The chief problem was interest asymmetry and its consequences. Salvadoran resistance to reform and military professionalization was rooted in deep requirements for internal power balancing and elite privilege against which US leverage paled in comparison. Americans could equip ESAF soldiers and train ESAF officers – by 1984, more than half the entire ESAF officer corps had attended military schools in the US⁵⁵ – and this could improve military performance to a degree. Both sides shared an interest in preventing an FMLN takeover, and the regime was happy to accept preferred firepower to prevent a conventional conquest of San Salvador. But to defeat the FMLN and end the war required reforms that could destabilize the internal balance underlying the agrarian elite's rule, they preferred an indefinite stalemate to that. Nor could Washington credibly threaten anything worse for them than the destabilization that compliance with US reform demands would hazard. Once the ESAF had the firepower to prevent outright collapse, even a total US aid withdrawal would probably have been tolerable. And, a total aid cutoff could easily be averted via Salvadoran satisficing and partial compliance – with limited US monitoring and the information asymmetries of any PA relationship, Salvadorans could do just enough to restore the aid without fully complying with US demands. The result was a recipe for stalemate, not victory: even in the Salvador Model's namesake case, SFA thus could not escape important agency losses and significant limits on its effectiveness.

⁵⁴See, e.g., US Central Intelligence Agency, 'El Salvador: Assessing the Impact of Rebel Surface-to-Air Missiles,' 5 May 1991, document no. 0000808523, CERR; Ucko, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 676–77; Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 87; Peceny and Stanley, 'Counterinsurgency in El Salvador,' 84; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 572–573.

⁵⁵Haggerty, *El Salvador: A Country Study*, 224.

Case study: Iraq, 2003–2014

Iraq, like El Salvador, shows important divergence from its associated model's expectations and realized outcomes. In particular, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) that emerged from the US SFA mission proved far less proficient than was hoped, and many of the ISF's shortcomings are attributable to the profound interest divergence between the US and its Iraqi ally combined with limited US monitoring and conditionality. The result was major agency loss in the form of military ineffectiveness for an institution that received massive assistance from the US.

The SFA footprint in Iraq was much larger than in El Salvador. Between 2004 and 2014, the US spent over \$25 billion (unadjusted) on the ISF, devoted tens of thousands of US personnel to training and advising Iraqi forces and by 2007 deployed over 100,000 other US troops to provide security until the ISF could take over.⁵⁶ Both conventional and SOF conducted SFA, and US forces engaged the ISF through a variety of mechanisms including embedded military transition teams (MiTTs), unit partnering in combat and formal training courses, among other means.⁵⁷ The ISF also received multiple billions of dollars' worth of military equipment from the US, including armored vehicles, artillery, aircraft, small arms, body armor and ammunition.⁵⁸

The US objective in Iraq was to build a stable democracy that would be an ally in the global war on terror and a demonstration of democracy's potential for other states in the region. This agenda required pluralistic and inclusive government. Iraq, like many states in the Gulf, combined multiple ethnic and sectarian subpopulations which had lived together more or less peacefully under autocratic rule, but whose relations were often tense based on histories of mutual grievance and perceived oppression. Saddam, a Sunni Arab, had suppressed Iraqi Shiite Arab and Kurdish aspirations via police-state repression; his removal in the American-led invasion toppled Sunni control of the government and created uncertainty among all major subpopulations over their status and safety in a newly fluid environment. This made pluralist, tolerant governance a high priority for the US: if the new government turned into an instrument of ethnic or sectarian oppression by

⁵⁶Amy Belasco, *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations since 9/11*, RL33110 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2014), 62.

⁵⁷Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*, RL34387 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2009), 67–8.

⁵⁸US Government Accountability Office, 'Stabilizing Iraq: DOD Cannot Ensure That U.S.-Funded Equipment Has Reached Iraqi Security Forces,' (Washington DC: GAO 2007). Iraq also received equipment from its neighbors, including ground vehicles from Egypt, helicopters from the UAE and Russia, and armored vehicles from Jordan. See Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Vintage Books 2012), 107; Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2014), 36.

one group over the others, this could easily discourage, not encourage, democratic reform elsewhere in the region, where ethno-sectarian divisions like Iraq's were widespread. And if ethno-sectarian score-settling and internecine violence spread across Iraq's borders, the result could become a regionwide identity war with grave consequences for US national security. To avert this, US policy thus sought an open, accountable, free-and-fair political system capable of commanding the loyalty of all Iraqis regardless of sect – and a security apparatus that reflected this via disinterested professional expertise with the military capacity to defend all Iraqis, regardless of sect, from a growing insurgency that was initially assumed to reflect the revanchist aims of the toppled Baathist elite.⁵⁹

Few Iraqi political elites shared this American agenda. In a country whose political history was dominated by violent, winner-take-all struggles for control wherein second-place finishers often faced a noose, many Iraqi elites distrusted electoral succession and saw the fluidity of the post-Saddam system as a struggle to dominate the instruments of state coercive power before their rivals could. The early elections favored by Americans reinforced these fears and fueled sectarianism by giving politicians an incentive to exploit nascent fears of the sectarian other for short-term electoral gain in a system that many elites feared would be captured and subverted by the early winners. And the resulting environment created powerful pressures for elites to seize control of arms and fighters who could advance their increasingly sectarian political factions' agendas against their internal rivals: Iraqi would-be democrats who followed the American lead and limited themselves to rule-bound electoral competition on a strictly non-sectarian nationalist platform with respect for a disinterested state security force risked lethal defeat at the hands of rivals who played by different rules.⁶⁰

The result was a generation of Iraqi political figures whose aims diverged systematically from American preferences. Iraq's first elected prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, shrugged off American concerns about the rising level of violence in Iraq and actively protected the sectarian Shiite militias operating in Baghdad and elsewhere.⁶¹ So too did Nuri al-Maliki, the next Prime Minister. Maliki's tenure lasted from 2006 until 2014 and was marked by a sectarian agenda fundamentally at odds with US interests in Iraq.⁶² Rather than work through the constitutional and legal framework the US helped

⁵⁹US National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington DC: GPO November 2005), 3; Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 31–2; Daniel Byman, 'An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle: Policy Failure or Bridge Too Far?' *Security Studies*, 17/4 (2008), 603–14; Daniel Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War* (Washington DC: Brookings 2007).

⁶⁰Byman, 'Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle,' 603–14.

⁶¹Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 144, 147, 184–5. See also James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books 2006), 12.

⁶²Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 216, 228, 290–2, 334, 360–5, 440–2, 585, 591–2, 609–10, 675, 679–80, 682–3.

create, he developed a 'shadow government' composed of extralegal, largely sectarian organizations to help him maintain power.⁶³ His administration was implicated in brutal sectarian violence, resisted the US push to expand the Sunni-led 'Awakening' movement and worked to elevate sectarian loyalists over disinterested professionals within the government and the ISF.⁶⁴

This interest asymmetry created powerful incentives for Iraqi agents to use the US principal's aid to create politicized, sectarian, clientelist security forces of a kind that served the needs of Shiite elites in an internal competition for power, rather than developing the kind of externally focused, politically disinterested, technocratic counterinsurgency force sought by Americans. To limit such shirking would have required aggressive US monitoring and systematic enforcement of US preferences via conditionality. Yet, the US SFA program displayed little of either for most of its duration.

In 2008, a standard MITT embedded with an Iraqi battalion had only 11 Americans.⁶⁵ Among partnered units, some ISF soldiers would only see their US partners once or twice a week.⁶⁶ Moreover, Maliki simply refused to allow advisors in some organizations he considered especially sensitive.⁶⁷ Such infrequent contact made it hard to monitor the performance of Iraqi units well enough to ensure consistent professional behavior. This problem only grew as the US footprint shrank after 2008, and as US forces transferred more of the responsibility for security to the ISF. Nor were US intelligence assets normally used for monitoring ISF or regime behavior. There was a major intelligence effort in the theater, but for most of the war, it was focused overwhelmingly on the *insurgency*, not on America's allies.⁶⁸

Similarly, there was little conditionality attached to US SFA. There were a few notable exceptions, particularly in 2007 and 2008 (about which more in a later section), but there was otherwise scarcely any systematic coercion of the Iraqi government or the ISF. Indeed, US military doctrine at all levels strongly discourages the use of coercive leverage when conducting SFA, preferring instead rapport building and persuasion. FM

⁶³Ibid., 361.

⁶⁴Ibid., 228, 290–2, 384–6, 446–8. On the Awakening and its role in Iraq, see Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey Friedman and Jacob Shapiro, 'Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 2007?' *International Security*, 37/1 (Summer 2012), 7–40; Austin Long, 'The Anbar Awakening,' *Survival*, 50/2 (April/May 2008), 67–94.

⁶⁵Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 67–8.

⁶⁶Seth W. B. Folsom, *In the Gray Area: A Marine Advisor Team at War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 2010), 68.

⁶⁷Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 365.

⁶⁸Ben Connable, *Military Intelligence Fusion for Complex Operations: A New Paradigm*, OP-377-RC (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation 2012), 9–10; Major General Michael T. Flynn, Captain Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security 2010), 21.

31-20-3, for example, cautions that advisors should 'not use bribery or coercion, since results achieved from these actions are only temporary'; FM 3-24 encourages advisors to be 'subtle' and 'diplomatic when correcting host-nation forces' and FM 3-22, which also counsels advisors to be subtle, argues 'foreign units are most receptive to advisor teams that teach unobtrusively'.⁶⁹ The structure of many of the advisory relationships abetted the problem, as most US advisors were junior in rank to their Iraqi counterparts.

The result was an ISF whose battlefield performance was consistently – sometimes catastrophically – poor in spite of massive US assistance. When struck by a numerically inferior Islamic State offensive at Mosul in June 2014, four full divisions of Iraqi Army troops disintegrated, leaving behind most of their US-supplied weapons and equipment in disorganized flight.⁷⁰ But the problem was much more longstanding than this. Except for a few isolated units, the ISF performed ineptly in Fallujah in 2004, Ramadi in 2006 and Baghdad in 2008.⁷¹ In the latter case, Iraqi Army units showed terrible fire discipline and could not patrol properly. One entire company simply abandoned its post and fled. The ISF were also ineffectual during the so-called Charge of the Knights episode in Basra in 2008, described as a 'colossal failure in execution' by US Brigadier General Dan Allyn.⁷² In fact, there are strikingly few examples of large elements of the ISF performing effectively in combat between 2003 and 2014, despite multiple opportunities and a massive investment of US resources.⁷³

Nor did the ISF typically pursue the nonsectarian approach advocated by their American benefactors. Even at the height of the SFA effort, US forces had trouble keeping sectarian militia groups from infiltrating the Army, and could not reliably prevent human rights abuses or other malign behavior.⁷⁴ The Iraqi National Police (INP) was particularly notorious for ignoring (at best) or (at worst) actively participating in anti-Sunni

⁶⁹US Army, *Army Support to Security Cooperation*, FM 3-22 (Washington DC: GPO 2013), 6-6; U.S. Army, *Foreign Internal Defense Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Forces*, FM 31-20-3 (Washington DC: GPO 1994), I-3; U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, table 6-5; see also U.S. Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance, *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance* (Washington DC: GPO 2008), 6, 40.

⁷⁰Eric Schmitt and Michael R. Gordon, 'The Iraqi Army Was Crumbling Long Before Its Collapse, U.S. Officials Say,' *New York Times*, 12 June 2014.

⁷¹Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 60–1, 247, 486–7, 490–4; Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books 2010), 62.

⁷²Quoted in Ricks, *The Gamble*, 283; see also Marisa Cochrane, *The Battle for Basra* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of War 2008), 15; Richard Iron, 'The Charge of the Knights,' *RUSI Journal* 158/1 (2013); Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 474–5, 477–8.

⁷³This does not mean the 2007 US 'Surge' accomplished nothing – it was necessary for a major reduction in violence by mid-2008: Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro, 'Testing the Surge,' 7–40. But it did not create an effective ISF: Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, *Stand Up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building Iraqi Security Forces*, H.R. Rep (Washington DC: GPO 2007), 104–5.

⁷⁴Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 146, 341, 542–3; Greg Jaffe, 'An Iraqi General Faces Risk From Within His Ranks,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 August 2007, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB118843607054513040>; Committee on Armed Services, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 104.

death squad activity through at least mid-2007.⁷⁵ In fact, some INP units actively cooperated with Shiite militias in violence against US forces whom Shiite militants saw as an obstacle. One of the authors observed such an episode first hand, when a US patrol in which he was traveling was nearly ambushed by Shiite Jaish al-Mahdi militiamen in Baghdad after passing an INP checkpoint that appears to have tipped off the militiamen to the Americans' approach.⁷⁶ Such behavior inflamed sectarian hostility and contributed to a civilian death toll that by some estimates approached 100,000 by the end of 2008; rather than protecting the civilian population and stabilizing the country under pluralistic rule, ISF methods actively threatened the Sunni population and promoted the aims of nongovernment Shiite militias.⁷⁷ More broadly, the congressionally chartered Jones Commission established to assess the ISF concluded in 2007 that 'The challenge for the [Iraqi] Army is its limited operational effectiveness, caused primarily by deficiencies in leadership, lack of disciplinary standards, and logistics shortfalls.' Iraqi police rated even harsher assessments:

In general, the Iraqi Police Service is incapable today of providing security at a level sufficient to protect Iraqi neighborhoods from insurgents and sectarian violence.... The National Police have proven operationally ineffective, and sectarianism in these units may fundamentally undermine their ability to provide security. The force is not viable in its current form.⁷⁸

How is it possible that more than 10 years, thousands of trainers and \$25 billion could not produce a passable military? As in El Salvador, interest divergence was at the root of the problem. The US and Iraqi governments had two very different visions for the ISF. The US wanted a technically proficient force capable of defending all sects' interests and focused on counterinsurgency warfare against both Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias. By contrast, the Jaafari and Maliki regimes were focused on preserving their position in a mostly intra-Shiite struggle for political power in which the ISF was seen as a potentially decisive arbiter in a potentially lethal internal contest. For the regime's purposes, a politically disinterested technocratic military of the kind the Americans sought would have been a danger, not an asset: not only would Jaafari or Maliki have been unable to ensure such officers' personal loyalty in internal political jockeying, but also both men

⁷⁵See, e.g., Baker and Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, 9–10; Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 146–9, 185–7.

⁷⁶25 March 2007, en route to a Joint Security Station in Khadamiya.

⁷⁷Estimate based on iraqbodycount.org data. See also Hannah Fischer, *Iraq Casualties: U.S. Military Forces and Iraqi Civilians, Police, and Security Forces* (Washington DC: GPO 2010).

⁷⁸Gen. James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps, chairman, *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 Sept. 2007), 9–10. The Commission saw the ISF as improving, but far from effective, in 2007; post-2007 experience displayed little of the improvement the Commission hoped for.

would be likely to see American-trained technocrats as a kind of Trojan Horse – a tool of American influence and interference that might undermine the consolidation of power in Jaafari's or Maliki's office. By consistently elevating sectarian loyalists over those more professionally inclined, the Iraqi government created strong incentives for members of the military to learn only those skills required to be a good loyalist militia – which does not include the ability to conduct modern, large-scale combat operations.⁷⁹ By cultivating deliberate corruption in the officer corps, the regime created a financial incentive for military cooperation, and by turning a blind eye to death squad activity by government forces the regime tied the complicit officers to its own fate.⁸⁰ The results created an ISF whose performance was largely insensitive to US aid and training: Americans could provide weapons and teach tactics, but a corrupt, politicized officer corps could neither absorb the training nor generate the combat motivation needed to persuade troops to risk their lives on behalf of such a project. As a result, the ISF never gained the ability to independently plan and conduct even medium-scale combat operations effectively. And when US leverage diminished with the progressive withdrawal of US combat forces, regime incentives that had been an important brake on military proficiency all along now had free reign with even less US interference: particularly after the violence began to wind down after 2007, and the number of US troops on the ground began to shrink, Maliki began to systematically replace the few apolitical officers the US had managed to install.⁸¹ Realistic training became less frequent and corruption even more common, the combination of which thoroughly undermined the SFA program in which the Americans had invested so heavily.

Case study: South Korea, 1949–53

SFA was much more successful in South Korea from 1949 to 1953 than it was in either El Salvador or Iraq: the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) that emerged from the US training and equipping effort by 1953 was radically superior to its 1950 predecessor, and much of the difference is attributable to US SFA. The reason for this success, however, was not simply a bigger budget, more equipment or more trainers – in Iraq, SFA received more of

⁷⁹On ISF cronyism, see, e.g., Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, 101.

⁸⁰On ISF corruption, see, e.g., Stuart W. Bowen, *Learning from Iraq: A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office [GPO] 2013), e.g., 95, 99; on death squad activity, see, e.g., Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame*, 146–8, 185–7, 367, 542–3; Baker and Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report*, 9–10.

⁸¹Kenneth M. Pollack, 'Iraq Military Situation Report' *Up-Front* (blog), *Brookings Institution*, 14 June 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2014/06/14-iraq-military-situation-pollack>; Yasir Abbas and Dan Trombly, 'Inside the Collapse of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Division,' *War on the Rocks* (blog), 1 July 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/inside-the-collapse-of-the-iraqi-armys-2nd-division/>.

each with worse results. Nor does the difference lie in a small footprint that would reduce dependence – the Salvador case involved a much smaller presence but yielded smaller improvements in the allied military's proficiency. Instead, the critical difference lay in an unusual degree of interest alignment between the US and its ally, coupled with an unusually intrusive and conditional assistance mission that reinforced the Korean regime's incentives to limit clientelism and professionalize the ROKA, reducing agency losses in the process and ultimately transforming the remarkably maladroit army of 1950 into a skilled, respected force in just 3 years.

The US had provided military aid to the Republic of Korea in relatively limited forms as early as 1945, but the Korean SFA mission began in earnest on 1 July 1949 with the establishment of the US Military Advisory Group to the Republic of Korea (KMAG). KMAG was originally authorized at 500 personnel, with \$10,200,000 in military aid allocated to South Korea for the 1950 fiscal year.⁸² This was subsequently raised to \$10,970,000 on 15 March 1950.⁸³ The US government initially provided the ROKA supplies and equipment sufficient for 50,000 men.⁸⁴ KMAG also established a Korean military school system, with 13 different schools in operation by the end of 1949. South Korean officers were sent to study at service schools in the US, and to Japan to observe the US Eighth Army. By 15 June 1950, KMAG-established ROK army schools had graduated a total of 9126 officers and 11,112 enlisted men to form the backbone of the South Korean military.⁸⁵

The prewar SFA mission then expanded dramatically when North Korean forces invaded the South beginning on 25 June 1950. Accelerated arms shipments began as early as June 26, and by the end of 1950, more than 70 M-10 tank destroyers, 2000 M-101A1 105 mm towed guns, 1500 M-114A1 155 mm towed guns, 100 M-4 Sherman tanks and 200 M-8 Greyhound armored cars had been ordered for transfer to South Korea.⁸⁶ By December 1952, the ROKA deployed 40 battalions of 105 and 155-mm artillery, with enough to support each division with a four-battalion artillery group; when the fighting stopped 7 months later, the ROKA had 72 battalions of modern howitzers.⁸⁷

⁸²Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington DC: US Army Center for Military History 1962), 48–50, 98.

⁸³Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years 1947–50* (Washington DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense 1984), 264, 503; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 101–03.

⁸⁴Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 100.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 88–90.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 141; SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 'Transfer of major conventional weapons: sorted by supplier (United States). Deals with deliveries or orders made for year range 1950 to 1953.' Available at: <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

⁸⁷Bryan Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War: The American Advisory Mission from 1946–53' (PhD Diss., Ohio State University 2004), 309–310.

At the same time, the KMAG advisory group was expanded. By the end of 1950, it had grown from 470 to 746 men; by 1953, it reached a strength of almost 2900.⁸⁸ This increased capacity enabled the advisory group to establish five Replacement Training Centers and to resume officer schooling after the front stabilized. KMAG also sent ROK officers to attend US service schools from late 1951.⁸⁹ By 1952, the advisory effort had produced school and training programs that handled large groups of students and trainees, the field training camps provided refresher instruction and a logistical system had been trained and fielded to support the ROKA's combat maneuver forces.⁹⁰

The US interests to be served by this mission changed with the North Korean invasion. Prior to this, American policy aimed at helping Seoul defeat a growing Communist insurgency in the south while simultaneously restraining South Korean President Syngman Rhee from pursuing expansionist ambitions in the North. Rhee hoped to reunify Korea under his own leadership and wanted a military that could underwrite this agenda; Americans preferred the status quo and sought mostly to preserve it against a perceived threat of insurgent subversion. The original, 1949 SFA plan thus emphasized light arms and a small army oriented toward containing a guerilla threat.⁹¹

When North Korean troops crossed the border, this US policy collapsed. With a Communist conventional army streaming southward against minimal resistance, the US priority immediately became regime preservation and the survival of an independent South Korea in the face of an existential threat. American aims then expanded once the front stabilized and the military balance tipped against the North; by late September 1950, US ambitions had shifted from restoration of the status quo to reunification under a pro-American government.⁹² Chinese intervention in October 1950 then forced yet another shift in US preferences, which now retrenched from conquest of

⁸⁸Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 10; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 160, 161, 178–9. Note that this manpower increase was accompanied by substantially increased financial costs, though separating SFA from the general war effort is extremely difficult. A 2008 CRS report comparing the costs of major US wars (focusing on military operations only) places Korea at 320 billion in USD2008: Stephen Daggett, 'Costs of Major U.S. Wars,' CRS Report to Congress RS224 July 2926, 2008.

⁸⁹Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 180–81.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 185.

⁹¹Jongnam Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers: The Americanization of the South Korean Army, 1945–1955' (PhD Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 2006), 60–62; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 9, 112–13; Allan Millett, 'Understanding is Better than Remembering: The Korean War 1945–54,' Dwight D. Eisenhower Lectures in War and Peace (Manhattan: Kansas State University 1997). Note that this American unwillingness to build more than a light, 'constabulary' military in the south was based on a failure to understand the gravity of the North Korean threat and created a ROKA that was ill-equipped for the conventional invasion in 1950; this surely reduced the ROKA's ability to deter invasion. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

⁹²James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction – The First Year* (Washington DC: Center for Military History 1992), 180, 182, 194.

the North back to an end to the war under something like the territorial status quo *ante bellum*.⁹³

Rhee's interests initially diverged from the Americans'. In part, this was due to his expansionist aspirations, but it was also influenced by the unstable nature of his position as President. In a new polity with little history of electoral succession, Rhee turned to a variety of authoritarian means to secure his tenure – including the cultivation of a large and corrupt army whose officers' personal loyalty to Rhee would be underwritten by economic privilege. Prior to the invasion, Rhee's interests thus combined vague territorial aspirations for the North with a more concrete concern for preservation of his own rule via a politicized military loyal to him personally, neither of which were American priorities.⁹⁴

The invasion refocused Rhee's concerns as well as his patron's – the threat of North Korean conquest quickly dominated any other concerns Rhee might have had for the stability of his tenure in office. And, it brought Rhee's interests and the Americans' into unusually close alignment.⁹⁵ The Communist advance quickly overran most of South Korea; by August 1950, allied forces were clinging to a small enclave around the port city of Pusan.⁹⁶ The circumstances left Rhee and the Americans clearly and mutually dependent on each other for survival of the allied position on the peninsula – neither could safely assume that the other would carry the load, neither could safely free ride on the other while pursuing unilateral interests and both were necessarily focused on a shared goal of survival.

Once the crisis passed after the Inchon Landing in September, a degree of interest misalignment reemerged, but only at the margin.

⁹³Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 353; Bryan Gibby, *The Will to Win: American Military Advisors in Korea 1946–53* (Montgomery, AL: University of Alabama Press 2012), 175. Revised US objectives were articulated in spring 1951 in a document known as NSC 48/5. This acknowledged that the Chinese Communist forces' entry into the Korean conflict made a military solution to the political question of Korean unification impossible and it called for a negotiated settlement and the eventual disengagement of the US from its military commitment in Korea.

⁹⁴National Archives and Records Administration, College Park MD, henceforth NARA: Department of Defense Office of Public Information, Press Branch Fact Sheet on Military Assistance to the Republic of Korea, 6 July 1950. This document states clearly that 'military assistance was provided by the US to the Republic of Korea to support a force designed to prevent border raids and to preserve internal security.' See also Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 60–62. On reports of ROKA corruption, see NARA: US Military Advisory to the Republic of Korea, Office of the Chief, Semi-Annual Report Period Ending 31 December 1949, 3–4.

⁹⁵The speed and scale of the post-invasion interest alignment between Rhee and the US were also facilitated by the historical US role in establishing the military government in Seoul following World War II, the prior US assistance in building the ROKA, the ongoing relationships these policies facilitated, and the ethnic homogeneity of South Korea (by contrast with the sectarian heterogeneity of Iraq) – though the invasion itself played an especially powerful role.

⁹⁶On the campaign's early phases, see Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 7–9; also Paul M. Edwards, *Combat Operations of the Korean War* (NC: McFarland and Company 2010); Center for Military History, 'U.S. Army Campaigns: Korean War.' Available at: http://www.history.army.mil/html/reference/army_flag/kw.html.

With the threat of annihilation lifted, Rhee could safely experiment once again with a more politicized officer corps loyal to him personally; this put him at odds with American preferences for a politically disinterested, technocratic military. But his earlier disagreement with his American patrons over reunification was now moot: Rhee's expansionism came to be shared by his US ally, which adopted Rhee's original position and sought reunification under Rhee.⁹⁷ And, Rhee's interest in a clientelist military was itself muted by the Chinese invasion and the renewed sense of military crisis this brought by the winter of 1950. The eventual military stalemate then brought renewed misalignment in allied preferences, as US willingness to accept a status quo compromise conflicted with Rhee's continued ambitions – but Rhee's inability to pursue these without American cooperation again muted the real difference.⁹⁸

Yet while the allies' interests were thus on balance much better aligned than in El Salvador or Iraq, the US SFA mission nevertheless devoted unusual effort to monitoring its ally's behavior and enforcing even closer alignment via conditionality. The US insisted on assuming command of ROKA forces in 1950 and assigned KMAC advisors to embed with ROKA units at the battalion, regiment, division and training school level.⁹⁹ During the war, KMAC acted as a fact-gathering agency for the US command by reporting on Korean unit behavior and capabilities.¹⁰⁰ KMAC advisors were given control of ROKA units' budgets and were expected to oversee expenditures to ensure against black-market diversion of funds.¹⁰¹ KMAC took control of the ROK army's personnel policy from early 1951, preventing old factions from operating and allowing young, competent officers to assume leadership positions. These young leaders adopted American military practices and reinforced the new emphasis on professionalism and meritocracy.¹⁰²

Rhee's dependence on the US and the scale of American assistance provided the US with significant leverage during the war, which it used. In addition to emphasizing the need for a more professional military, US leaders underscored their reluctance to furnish any more equipment and weapons to the ROK until the Koreans demonstrated leadership and training

⁹⁷Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 180, 182, 194.

⁹⁸Ramsey, 'Advising Indigenous Forces,' 8–9; Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 102–03; General Paik Sun Yup, *From Pusan to Panmunjom* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc 1999), 161. Rhee continued to push for a larger army and more equipment, resisting the US emphasis on professionalization and training through mid-1951. The ROKA's continued poor performance in the face of North Korean and Chinese assaults in April and May 1951, however, provided renewed incentive for Rhee to cooperate with US demands for intensive training programs.

⁹⁹Ramsey, 'Advising Indigenous Forces,' 10, 18–19.

¹⁰⁰HQ Eighth US Army Korea (EUSAK), 'Special Problems in the Korean Conflict,' US Army Military History Research Collection (Carlisle PA: Army War College 1952), 8.

¹⁰¹Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 65–66.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 141–42.

worthy of that support.¹⁰³ And when Rhee tried to refuse the US-preferred armistice deal in June 1953, US negotiators indicated that if Rhee refused to comply, the US would withdraw its forces from South Korea.¹⁰⁴ In the face of this stark ultimatum, President Rhee acquiesced.¹⁰⁵

The net result was a radical improvement in the ROKA's military proficiency between the 1950 invasion and the 1953 armistice. At the time of the invasion, no ROKA unit had progressed beyond regimental-level training, and the army was almost totally devoid of heavy equipment. Employment of the available machine guns and mortars was systematically substandard, with mortars commonly deployed on exposed ridge lines and crew-served automatic weapons parceled out like rifles along uniform linear dispositions. Basic marksmanship and fire discipline were systematically poor, reflecting junior leaders' failure to ensure range qualification for their troops.¹⁰⁶ Operations and intelligence maps were haphazard.¹⁰⁷ Korean commanders failed to use their staffs effectively, and dissension within poorly organized staff sections was commonplace. Fighting position preparation, combat maneuver and fire support coordination were all systematically deficient. When struck by Communist assault forces, many such units shattered, abandoning positions and equipment in rearward flight.¹⁰⁸

US advisor assessments from this period were often harshly critical of ROKA performance: training inspections held for all units of the Army during the early summer of 1949 revealed numerous deficiencies in small unit training, particularly in weapons marksmanship.¹⁰⁹ An advisor's assessment of the 1st Korean Infantry Division, 12th Regiment in May 1949, stated that the unit was 'unsatisfactory in training of all echelons. [The regiment had] practically no

¹⁰³Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War,' 173–74. Note that these policies represent conditionality even under unusual interest alignment between the principal and the agent: interest alignment does not preclude conditionality, and conditionality is advisable under all but perfect interest alignment. Note also that the intrusiveness of US monitoring of ROKA behavior might have obtained even without SFA, given the scale of US interests in winning the war – we note the role intrusive monitoring played in SFA efficiency in this case, but we do not assume that the US monitored intrusively only because it was providing SFA. Note, finally, that the efficacy of US conditionality in Korea was improved by rigid ROK press censorship, which mitigated the danger of nationalist backlash from Koreans – and enabled the US military to threaten Rhee and his forces without undermining US domestic support for Rhee's government. On wartime censorship in the ROK, see, e.g., Louise Williams and Roland Rich (eds.), *Losing Control: Freedom of Press in Asia* (Canberra, ANU Press 2000), 194–195; Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2005), 347; Kyu Ho Youm, *Press Law in South Korea* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press 1996), 46; Kyu Ho Youm, 'Press Freedom under Constraints: The Case of South Korea,' *Asian Survey*, 26/8 (Aug., 1986), 870.

¹⁰⁴Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 159, 160–161.

¹⁰⁵In exchange for economic and military aid, and the promise of a mutual defense treaty: Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War,' 291.

¹⁰⁶Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 48, 52.

¹⁰⁷Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War,' 106.

¹⁰⁸Na, 'Making Cold War Soldiers,' 48–49; Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 134.

¹⁰⁹NARA: US Military Advisory Group To the Republic of Korea, Semi-Annual Report 1949, 12–13.

knowledge of company formations and tactics. The individual soldier was weak in all aspects of security, use of concealment and cover, crawling etc.¹¹⁰ An inspection of the 2nd Battalion of the ROKA 7th Brigade showed 'a definite lack of knowledge concerning the characteristics of weapons, terrain appreciation and evaluation, issuance of orders and control.'¹¹¹ The 17th Regiment inspection reports 'dirty weapons, no flank patrols in advance march, lack of control of platoons after crossing line of departure, limited reconnaissance, crew-served weapons displaced forward too soon before the objective was taken by rifle platoon'¹¹² The 9th Regiment inspection revealed a 'general lack of squad and platoon training', and 'officers and NCOs [who] lacked ability and understanding of American tactics'.¹¹³ Other advisors reported combat effectiveness rates as low as 15 percent for some divisions, with the majority of units lacking training at the platoon, company and battalion level.¹¹⁴

By 1953, by contrast, all ROKA forces had been fully reequipped and had received division-level training – many of them in several iterations of up to 11 weeks total duration.¹¹⁵ Combat proficiency improved accordingly. In October 1952, for example, the ROK 9th Division reached a turning point in a 10-day battle against the Chinese Thirty-Eighth Army. In the Battle of White Horse Mountain, Korean battalions fought in coherent units, gave ground only when necessary and counterattacked with skill and motivation.¹¹⁶ Although the ROK 9th Division suffered over 3500 casualties over this period, it managed to hold its ground against 28 different attacks by over 23,000 Chinese soldiers.¹¹⁷ ROK Divisions continued to have success in meeting Chinese attacks through the first half of 1953, exhibiting greater tactical flexibility and sophistication at all level of operations.¹¹⁸ During the Summer Offensive along the Eighth Army lines in May 1953, the ROK Capital Division and the 9th Division both fought hard to keep the Chinese attackers at bay in three separate engagements. Timely intelligence, accurate artillery and an efficiently planned counterattack inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese.¹¹⁹ And even when outnumbered and pushed back by Chinese forces, the ROK army's performance demonstrated a great

¹¹⁰NARA: US Military Advisory Group To the Republic of Korea, Semi-Annual Report 1 January 1950, Annex No. 9, Status of Training, 1st Korean Infantry Division.

¹¹¹NARA: US Military Advisory Group To the Republic of Korea, Semi-Annual Report 1949, 2nd Bn, 17th Regiment, Korean Army 16 May 1949.

¹¹²NARA: Ibid., 17th Regiment, 7th Brigade, Korean Army 23 May 1949.

¹¹³NARA: Ibid., 9th regiment, 7th Brigade, Korean Army 16 May 1949.

¹¹⁴NARA: US Military Advisory Group To the Republic of Korea, Semi-Annual Report 1 January 1950, Annex No. 9, Status of Training, 1st Korean Infantry Division.

¹¹⁵Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 181.

¹¹⁶Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War,' 243.

¹¹⁷Ramsey, 'Advising Indigenous Forces,' 9.

¹¹⁸Gibby, 'Fighting in a Korean War,' 288.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 269–70.

improvement over ROK units under comparable conditions in the spring of 1951.¹²⁰

Assessments from US advisors reflected this improvement: reports from 1952 to 1953 frequently commented on the ROKA's increased competence, noting that ROK soldiers had 'showed improvement in every field of military endeavor'.¹²¹ ROK soldiers received high marks even when their equipment was substandard: Capt. William H. Davis, assigned to the 62nd Field Artillery Battalion, reported that his battalion's gun tubes were so old and worn that accurate indirect fire was unlikely, but that his unit showed good leadership and was trained and competent in all basic artillery tasks.¹²² Other KMAG advisors agreed that the Korean artillery was excellent,

they like fire direction and survey and they are good at laying pieces (setting up the guns to fire on a pre-determined azimuth or direction). They get six months of training [from an American unit], including three months on the line. There is no attrition ... and they need few replacements.¹²³

By January 1953, ROKA units occupied 59 percent of the front line, met 87 percent of the enemy's probes and attacks and inflicted 50 percent of the enemy casualties.¹²⁴ All units benefited from the KMAG training program by returning to the front with more skill, and confidence, and by losing 50 percent less equipment and men than did units without the training.¹²⁵ The comparison with the 1949–50 assessments was stark.

The results suggest that SFA thus *can* catalyze important improvements in recipients' military effectiveness. But this does not happen simply because the patron provides resources. The ROKA had received substantial aid (albeit limited to light weapons), and training in its use prior to the invasion, yet showed little ability to use the assistance competently in the field until the military crisis of 1950 created appropriate incentives. Once an existential outside threat turned military competence into a life-and-death matter for the South Korean regime and brought US and regime incentives into alignment, US aid became

¹²⁰Richard W. Steward (ed.), *American Military History Volume II: The US Army in a Global Era, 1917–2003* (Center of Military History, US Army, Washington DC 2005), 245.

¹²¹KMAG Command Report, December 1952, Section I, 1. Quoted in Gibby, *Will to Win*, e-Reader location 4826.

¹²²Gibby, *Will to Win*, e-Reader location 4913.

¹²³Alfred, H. Hausrath, *Problems in the Development of a Local National Army Based on Experience with the Republic of Korea Army* (Chevy Chase, MD: Operations Research Office, Johns Hopkins University 1956), 218. Quoted in Gibby, *Will to Win*, e-Reader location 4913.

¹²⁴KMAG Command Report, December 1952, Section I, 1. Quoted in Gibby, *Will to Win*, e-Reader location 4821.

¹²⁵Ramsey, 'Advising Indigenous Forces,' 9.

a powerful tool for improving allied effectiveness. But even then, interest alignment was not so perfect as to remove any potential for agency loss and inefficiency: aggressive monitoring and credible conditionality were needed to eliminate holdover corruption and limit subsequent backsliding into clientelist behavior. The Korean case shows that where conditions are conducive, agency losses in SFA can be mitigated – but it also shows how difficult that can be to accomplish in practice.

Conclusions and implications

SFA is best understood as a PA problem wherein agency losses will often be high. Adverse selection promotes major interest asymmetries between the provider and the recipient. Monitoring is difficult and costly. Conditionality must overcome credibility dilemmas that can be managed but never wholly eliminated. These challenges normally preclude big payoffs from modest aid, and even large investments commonly yield disappointing results.¹²⁶ Though the particulars will vary, shared underlying agency dynamics confront any SFA mission, regardless of its size or context, and these pose important challenges for SFA as a solution to the twenty-first century dilemma of real but limited US interests in faraway conflict zones.

This does not make SFA useless, however. As the Korea case shows, US and allied interests will sometimes align in ways that reduce agency losses, especially if US policy is intrusive and conditional.¹²⁷ In the Philippines after 2001, US aid that focused on a small, elite subset of the Philippine military (their special forces) was able to professionalize a force whose small size limited its threat to a fragile internal balance of power; against a relatively weak, isolated Abu Sayyaf insurgency, this elite was able to make significant progress even without meaningful reform of the regular military, where corruption continued to limit its

¹²⁶For similar conclusions on the effectiveness of small footprints, see, e.g., Major Fernando M. Luján, *Light Footprints: The Future of American Military Intervention* (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security 2013); Watts, et al. *The Uses and Limits of Small-Scale Military Interventions*.

¹²⁷In fact, if interests are *perfectly* aligned, then neither conditionality nor monitoring is needed – under such conditions, PA theory predicts zero agency losses even with unmonitored, wholly unconditional capacity building: see, e.g., Eli Berman and David Lake, eds., *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Transnational Violence through Local Agents* (forthcoming), ch. 1. This is a very rare special case, however. In the real world, adverse selection normally implies some degree of interest misalignment, as the case studies above and those in the Berman-Lake anthology suggest. Even in the Korean War, where US and allied interests were unusually similar, alignment was still imperfect and the US still benefited from both intrusive monitoring and conditionality.

military utility.¹²⁸ In Colombia after 2002, a rare combination of a reformist President in command of a chastened military enabled unusually effective SFA. A series of conspicuous defeats at the hands of FARC rebels had led a compunctious Colombian military to begin modest reforms in the late 1990s. When Alvaro Uribe then took power in 2002, his unusual willingness to accept personal risk in destabilizing the regime's internal balance allowed him to exact important reductions in military cronyism and corruption. Previous US aid had achieved little. But taken together, Uribe's rare willingness to focus on an external insurgent threat rather than the intra-elite internal balance, and his enervated military's tolerance of this, brought Uribe's interests and US interests into alignment and enabled an uncommon scale of improvement in Colombian military effectiveness. It still took over a decade of fighting, but the more proficient Colombian military was eventually able to use carefully monitored, conditional US assistance to drive the FARC insurgency to the negotiating table.¹²⁹ Exceptions thus do occur – either where the external target is small enough to be addressed by a small, non-threatening elite (as in the Philippines), or where circumstances create unusual interest alignment (as in Korea or Colombia). Under adverse selection, such exceptions are rare. But when they appear, this offers an opportunity for efficient aid that makes a real military difference – interest alignment is perhaps the central political variable in any PA relationship, in wartime or in peacetime, or between established governments or following regime change; if political interests align, then SFA will be much more efficient in any of these settings.

¹²⁸On corruption and the continued lack of civilian control over the security forces see, e.g., Thomas Lum and Ben Dolven, *The Republic of the Philippines and U.S. Interests – 2014* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2014), 2–4; Watts et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies*, 98–99. On US training of the Philippine special forces versus regular military see, e.g., Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014*, RR-1236-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation 2016), xv–xvi, xxi, 40–41, 124. Reforms focused on small elites avoid the internal destabilization risk inherent in large-scale military professionalization in weakly institutionalized polities; elite forces small enough to be internally nonthreatening, however, are usually too small to defeat insurgent or terrorist groups big enough to be of central interest to US foreign policy – see, for example, the experience of South Vietnamese elites in the Second Indochina War, as analyzed in Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*, 71–138.

¹²⁹Note, for example, the major improvement in Colombia's standing in Transparency International's annual corruption rankings between Uribe's accession to power in 2002 and the conclusion of negotiations with the FARC in 2016: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, available at <http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/>. On the effectiveness of US assistance before Uribe see, e.g., U.S. General Accounting Office, *DRUG CONTROL: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results*, GAO-01-26 (Washington DC: General Accounting Office October 2000). On military reforms, Uribe, his agenda, and its effects, see, e.g., June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Issues for Congress*, RL32250 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 23 April 2010), 4–5; Ann C. Mason, 'National Security,' in *Colombia: A Country Study*, (ed.), Rex A. Hudson, 5th ed. (Washington DC: Library of Congress Federal Research Division 2010), 283–364, 289.

And even inefficient aid with serious agency losses can sometimes be worthwhile. More training and equipment is usually better than less; so, SFA will typically improve recipient capability at least somewhat. If little is needed, then SFA may suffice. In El Salvador, US SFA never produced an ESAF that could actually win the war, but it could at least avert defeat and sustain a grinding stalemate until exogenous events eventually enabled a settlement. Though many hoped for more, this was better than the alternative. In Iraq and Syria today, SFA is unlikely to end the terrorism threat from ISIL or achieve the US goal of a stable resolution to the conflict, but with steady moderate pressure, it can hasten the timetable for ISIL's eventual collapse even if this results only in ISIL's replacement with another militant group in an unstable Syria.¹³⁰ If the mission is limited, then even an inefficient SFA effort with limited payoff could still suffice in a less demanding role. The less one asks, the better the odds that SFA can provide it.

It may also be possible to improve SFA implementation in ways that make it more effective in the future. Partly this means choosing one's battles carefully: more Koreas and fewer Iraq-scale interest misalignments would certainly improve the prognosis.

SFA policies should also be more attentive to the recipients' political interests and incentives. The policy debate tends to assume an apolitical capacity-building model for SFA in which military resources translate into military power in a straightforward way: the more training and equipment the US provides, the better the ally's effectiveness should be. If the ally is underperforming, the natural implication is to provide more aid. This is especially so for the FM 3-24 model in current US doctrine: it presupposes interest alignment between the US and the host government and frames the problem for the US as building the host's capacity to realize the common goal of legitimacy.¹³¹ If the goal has not been met, this is presumably because the resources are still inadequate, and the doctrine is explicit that success will often require major resources indeed. By contrast, a PA approach highlights allies' political interests as central for SFA. Hence, policies designed to realign the ally's interests and create incentives to work and not shirk are essential. This approach is inherently political and can often be highly coercive. The whole point of conditionality in PA theory is to manipulate allies' incentive structures in ways that encourage them to work and not shirk; in a PA approach, if an ally is underperforming the best response will often be to *reduce* assistance, not increase it.¹³²

¹³⁰Stephen Biddle and Jacob Shapiro, 'The Problem With Vows to "Defeat" the Islamic State,' *Atlantic Monthly*, 21 Aug. 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/defeat-isis-con-tainment/496682/>.

¹³¹For a more extensive discussion, see Stephen Biddle in 'Review Symposium: The New US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as Political Science and Political Praxis,' *Perspectives on Politics*, 6/2 (June 2008), 347–350; Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 101–104.

¹³²See also Ladwig, 'Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency,' 144.

In Iraq, for example, perhaps the most notable exception to the pattern of limited ISF improvement was a reduction in INP sectarianism during the 2007 Surge. This was accomplished by an atypical application of PA-style incentive manipulation by US General David Petraeus and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker. The major interest divergence between Nouri al-Maliki's acceptance of Shiite sectarianism and US opposition to it had led to the INP using American aid to fuel death-squad violence against Sunnis – a major case of shirking rather than working, from the American standpoint. To thwart this, Petraeus and Crocker identified sectarian INP brigade commanders and demanded that Maliki replace them. When Maliki refused, Petraeus and Crocker withheld gasoline, ammunition, water and spare parts from the INP units in question until Maliki complied, only then restoring logistical support. This process was sometimes repeated multiple times when Maliki merely replaced one sectarian with another. But because Maliki's own interests were served by a mobile INP that could move and fight where Maliki wanted it to, Petraeus and Crocker could coerce Maliki into compliance with US preferences by selectively denying the INP essential logistical support until and unless Maliki complied.¹³³ And because the US presence was so large and Iraqi dependence so great, US threats to withhold support from individual Iraqi units were unusually credible. This was hardly a low-cost or small-footprint effort, and it required a large intelligence apparatus which could devote substantial resources to monitoring the US ally's behavior rather than simply finding insurgents.¹³⁴ But it did reduce Iraqi shirking via astute use of the political leverage enabled by a large US presence – coercive manipulation of Iraqi incentives brought results where apolitical capacity-building had not.

Not all incentive strategies need be coercive, however. As Jacob Shapiro and Oliver Vanden Eynde have shown, the Indian government was able to improve the effectiveness of its counterinsurgency aid to local authorities facing Naxalite rebels by changing tax laws and economic regulations in ways that increased the revenue potential of rebel-threatened mines. Local officials who once had little incentive to control mining districts now had reasons of their own to pursue Delhi's policy and drive the rebels out, making Delhi's military assistance effective in ways it had not been before.¹³⁵ Analogous policies to increase the economic value of mineral resources in Taliban-threatened northeast

¹³³On Petraeus and Crocker's use of conditionality, see, e.g., Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster 2013), 263–4, 341; Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs 2008), 81, 156, 261, 331.

¹³⁴On the importance of intelligence collection on one's ally in COIN, see Byman, 'Friends Like These,' at 82, 112; Flynn, Pottinger, and Batchelor, *Fixing Intel*, 19–23.

¹³⁵Jacob Shapiro and Oliver Vanden Eynde, 'Suppression of Naxalites by State Governments,' in Eli Berman et al., *Deterrence with Proxies: Kickoff Meeting* (powerpoint, 9 September 2014), slides 96–124.

Afghanistan or of potential petrochemical resources in ISIL-threatened Iraqi Anbar might have similar utility in encouraging better use of US SFA by reshaping the recipients' incentives.

But while SFA can thus help if done properly under the right conditions, there are important limits on its utility: much of the time, conditions will not be suitable.¹³⁶ In particular, many recipient regimes fear internal rivals within the governing elite more than they fear the external threats Americans typically focus on. For much of the US experience in Iraq, this hamstrung SFA effectiveness, as it has done in Afghanistan and in a range of cases from Vietnam to Mali to Nigeria to Saudi Arabia to Yemen to Pakistan and elsewhere.¹³⁷ Under adverse selection, such regimes are disproportionately likely to be candidates for US SFA, and where this is so, the US will rarely have the leverage it needs for major military improvements: when allies see existential risks in reform, even the sweetest carrots and strongest sticks available to Americans are unlikely to outweigh such incentives. More training and more equipment will not simply solve the problem in such cases and yield a capable, professional military – apolitical capacity building that ignores underlying interest asymmetries is subject to large agency losses and can even make things worse rather than better by fueling the corruption and clientelism that undermines effectiveness.¹³⁸

Nor is SFA necessarily the cheap, low-risk option it is often thought to be. Even in El Salvador, the namesake case for 'Salvador Model' small-footprint SFA, the US invested over \$5 billion (the equivalent of more than \$10 billion today). In Pakistan, the US spent more than \$7 billion over 13 years with only limited results.¹³⁹ Ongoing small-footprint SFA in post-Maliki Iraq absorbed \$1.6 billion in FY2015.¹⁴⁰ Larger footprint SFA missions like those

¹³⁶As we emphasize below, SFA will sometimes be the least-bad choice even so. And at other times, the US will be constrained to attempt it regardless of its prognosis, as was the case in Iraq or Afghanistan, for example. But there are also cases where intervention is a closer call, and where a stronger understanding of the real costs and benefits of SFA could lead decision makers to decline engagement. Either way, it is important to understand SFA's real potential with as much fidelity as possible.

¹³⁷See e.g., Seth Jones et al., *Securing Tyrants or Fostering Reform? U.S. Internal Security Assistance to Repressive and Transitioning Regimes* (Santa Monica: RAND 2006); William Rosenau, *U.S. Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam* (Santa Monica: RAND 2007); Jordan Olmstead, 'Fixing America's Aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan,' *The Diplomat*, 23 Dec. 2014; Gordon Adams and Richard Sokolsky, 'Governance and Security Sector Assistance: The Missing Link – Parts I and II,' *Lawfare*, July 12 and 19 July 2015; Michael Shank and Cassidy Regan, 'Aid Gone Awry in Africa,' *U.S. News.com*, 19 July 2013, <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/06/19/how-american-military-assistance-goes-wrong-in-africa>. Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 241–5; US Government Accountability Office, *U.S. Assistance to Yemen: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Emergency Food Aid and Assess Security Assistance*, GAO-13–310 (Washington DC: Government Accountability Office 2013), 19–24.

¹³⁸Many argue that US aid to Afghanistan, for example, has had such effects: see, e.g., Sarah Chayes, *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (New York: Norton 2015); idem, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban* (New York: Penguin 2007 ed.).

¹³⁹Kronstadt, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*.

¹⁴⁰Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy*, 31.

in pre-2014 Iraq or post-2001 Afghanistan yield correspondingly larger bills: \$25 billion in the former and more than \$61 billion for the latter.¹⁴¹ And in high-visibility cases like today's Iraq and Syria, small-footprint aid that fails to solve the military problem creates powerful incentives for American presidents to escalate lest they admit failure under domestic partisan criticism. Policy failure can encourage mission creep and mounting commitment even when the policy is initially limited to SFA.

Ukraine, for example, is an emerging case that could display many of these shortcomings. A deeply corrupt regime in a weakly institutionalized state, Ukraine has had great difficulty fielding an effective military.¹⁴² Many have proposed substantial increases in US SFA to enable Ukraine to defeat Russian-supported rebels, and recent reporting suggests some improvement with US aid after a slow start.¹⁴³ But the theory above suggests a ceiling on real effectiveness. Aid can help, especially if aggressively monitored and enforced via credible conditionality, but large agency losses are likely even so. Without sweeping political reforms, it would thus be surprising if US aid could enable Ukraine to defeat the rebels and end the war. And if not, SFA could easily yield escalatory pressures that grow with the scale of US involvement – a long-term theoretical expectation that should be factored into near-term decision making.

More broadly, these shortcomings suggest important limits on SFA's ability to substitute for large US ground forces capable of direct intervention. US Army and Marine Corps end strength has declined substantially since its peak in FY 2011, and further reductions are likely.¹⁴⁴ Many now hope that SFA can compensate for continued shrinkage by enabling partners to do the fighting in our stead, warranting both reduced end strength for the regular Army and Marines and a shift in resources from them to the SOFs that many see as the ideal tool for a more SFA-focused US posture.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹Stuart W. Bowen, *Learning from Iraq: A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, First Session, 9 July 2013; Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*.

¹⁴²Ukraine was ranked the most corrupt country in Europe, and the 38th most corrupt in the world, in Transparency International's 2015 ranking of 168 states: <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>. On its military effectiveness, see, e.g., James Hackett, "Crisis in Ukraine – Military Dimensions, International Institute for Strategic Studies: <https://www.iiss.org/en/militarybalanceblog/blogsections/2014-3bea/march-f525/ukraine-military-0218>.

¹⁴³See, e.g., Ivo Daalder, 'Now is the time to provide lethal military aid to Ukraine,' *Financial Times*, 15 Jan. 2015; Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt, 'U.S. Considers Supplying Arms to Ukraine Forces, Officials Say,' *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 2015; Reuben Gzirian, 'Ukraine's Got a Real Army Now. But Is It Preparing to Fight the Last Battle?,' Atlantic Council, 9 Feb. 2016: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/ukraine-s-got-a-real-army-now-but-is-it-preparing-to-fight-the-last-war>.

¹⁴⁴Christi Parsons and David Cloud, 'Obama announces drawdown of forces from Afghanistan, saying "tide of war is receding,"' *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 2011; Julian E. Barnes, 'General Expects Marine Corps to Shrink Due to Sequester,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 March 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324373204578374833950432610>; Thom Shanker and Helene Cooper, 'Pentagon Plans to Shrink Army to Pre-World War II Level,' *New York Times*, 23 February 2014.

¹⁴⁵In fact, this is now official US policy: U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 6.

With declining defense budgets, some real capability must surely be sacrificed, and perhaps the ability to wage large ground campaigns is the least-bad choice – but this is not a choice free of cost or risk, and SFA has only a limited ability to mitigate either the cost or the risk.¹⁴⁶

Of course, SFA is still cheaper than deploying 100,000 soldiers even so. In a world of imperfect options, ‘enabling partners’ may be the least imperfect for a given contingency.¹⁴⁷ But SFA’s real costs and risks are easy to underestimate, and its military benefits have often been oversold. Overuse is thus a real danger: SFA *can* help, but only rarely will it provide major effectiveness improvements from modest investments in training and equipment. And, overdependence has real costs: ground force reductions may be necessary, but an SFA alternative does not make them free of risk. Under many conditions and for many purposes, a small military payoff is the most one can expect from a small SFA footprint. And given this, US interests will sometimes be better served by staying out altogether when a prospective intervention involves an agent whose interests are badly misaligned with America’s: in such cases, agency losses will be large, monitoring and conditionality will be expensive and highly imperfect, and the net gain in allied military performance is likely to be much less than US policy makers will hope or expect. Sometimes even this will be better than nothing – but not always.

These problems have been especially salient for American policymakers in recent years, but the problem of agency loss in SFA is anything but uniquely American. Israeli investment in the South Lebanese Army failed to provide the kind of security zone Tel Aviv had hoped for; Qatari and Saudi SFA to Islamist enemies of the Assad regime in Syria have produced militant groups that threaten to destabilize the entire region; Serbian SFA to Croatian Serbs in the 1990s produced an allied army that crumbled under Croatian nationalist attack in 1995.¹⁴⁸ Agency loss is a ubiquitous problem in SFA.

¹⁴⁶Some also emphasize SFA’s role in building relationships, which is held to promote democratization and crisis cooperation: see, e.g., United States Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2020 Strategy* (Tampa FL: United States Special Operations Command 2013), Richard Rubright et al., *The Role of the Global SOF Network in a Resource Constrained Environment* (Tampa FL: JSOU Press 2013). A complete evaluation of this role is beyond our scope; for a more detailed assessment, see, e.g., McNerney et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*; Paul et al., *What Works Best when Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?*; Sullivan et al., ‘U.S. Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation.’

¹⁴⁷As a study of a single option’s effectiveness, an analysis of SFA cannot in itself recommend policy for any given contingency. Even a weak option may be better than available alternatives; to recommend any given option in any given context thus requires a net evaluation of all options and their respective costs and benefits, not just SFA’s. But such a net evaluation requires a sound assessment of each option’s likely effects; the analysis above is necessary, though insufficient, to prescribe policy for specific contingencies.

¹⁴⁸See e.g., William A. Orme, Jr., ‘Israel’s Buffer Strip in South Lebanon Collapsing,’ *The New York Times*, 23 May 2000; Ian Black, ‘Saudi to Spend Millions to Train New Rebel Force,’ *The Guardian*, 7 Nov., 2013; Tom Gallagher, *The Balkans After the Cold War: From Tyranny to Tragedy* (New York NY: Routledge 2003), 99.

And, this in turn raises important questions for international relations theory and comparative politics. If SFA is subject to large agency losses under many if not most conditions, why is it so commonplace? Does it really serve the interests of the many states who provide it? How does its provision correlate with the incidence of the preconditions needed to minimize agency loss? A widespread, indeed nearly ubiquitous, practice that seems as prone to underperform as SFA gives rise to an important question for theorists as well as policy makers. To explain SFA incidence in the international system is beyond our scope – but our central findings suggest that ubiquitous SFA in the presence of ubiquitous large agency losses poses an empirical puzzle that warrants serious study to resolve.

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