

Changing Partners' Military Norms to Build Capacity

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ABSTRACT

This paper posits that norm entrepreneurship is a critical component of building partner capacity in fragile states because, without the adoption of U.S. military norms, recipient security sectors remain unable or unwilling to break with corrupt practices that hinder battlefield effectiveness. This paper proceeds to analyze seven U.S. capacity-building efforts to determine whether recipient security sectors adopted U.S. military norms and whether they were successful in countering the threat the security partnership was meant to address. Three cases were identified as successful (norms adopted, threat countered), and commonalities included the presence of “early adopters” of U.S. norms and complementary civil reforms. These findings support anti-corruption literature suggesting that local agents are crucial for aligning anti-corruption norms with existing cultural precepts to facilitate wider norm diffusion, and that individuals’ perceptions of corruption’s frequency affect their likelihood of tolerating and engaging in corruption.

KEYWORDS

Corruption;
Security
Cooperation; Build
Partner Capacity;
Civil-Military
Relations; Security
Sector Reform

Introduction

Capacity-building missions in fragile states are risky investments because these states’ capacity to provide security and rule of law within their territories is undermined by corruption, a less visible yet more corrosive issue than training or equipment shortfalls.¹ However, U.S. capacity-building efforts have tended to focus on improving tactical proficiency without considering how corruption undermines recipients’ ability and incentives to provide security.² This results in U.S. personnel attempting to build effective security sectors on compromised foundations.

To address corruption, U.S. advisors and trainers must not only develop recipients’ capacity (ability to conduct operations), but also their professionalism (how they conduct operations).³ This requires U.S. personnel to act as norm entrepreneurs within recipient security sectors, purposefully imparting U.S. norms of political professionalism and deference to civilian authority that strengthen institutions and foster stability in the long run.⁴ Only once these norms

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are internalized by the members of recipient security sectors will their organizational cultures begin to complement, rather than hinder, U.S. training and material support.⁵

This is not an easy process because norms are rooted in deeply held worldviews and are shaped by various factors, only some of which can be leveraged by U.S. personnel involved in capacity-building missions.⁶ By analyzing the dynamics and outcomes of Cold War and Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) capacity-building missions, this article attempts to derive insights on norm entrepreneurship applicable to current and future partnerships. If policymakers and practitioners fail to learn from these past successes and failures, their efforts will remain vulnerable to the pitfalls of corruption, increasing the likelihood that U.S. investments of blood and treasure will be squandered.

Corruption's Corrosiveness

Norm entrepreneurship is only one variable in a complex geopolitical environment. The outcome of any capacity-building mission, and by extension the fate of a recipient state, is influenced by the foreign policies and domestic politics of the U.S., partners and allies, adversaries, and even third parties, in ways that are not easily discernible to policymakers, practitioners, or outside observers. Complexity notwithstanding, corruption's deleterious effects cross the boundaries that separate foreign policy from domestic politics, and civilian affairs from military operations.

Corruption encourages the inefficient allocation of resources by diverting money meant for public goods to private pockets.⁷ It hinders political development, since respect for laws and institutions is undermined when people know they can be circumvented for the right price.⁸ Corruption discourages external investment, depriving developing states of the economic growth that could fund and strengthen their governments.⁹

For states facing existential threats, corruption is especially self-defeating. Strong and efficient administration is needed to manage their conflicts, but corruption prevents that administration from emerging.¹⁰ More often than not, rampant corruption has metastasized domestic discontent into the conflicts that the U.S. is assisting recipient states with in the first place.¹¹ Conflict locks these states into a vicious cycle, as their ability to regulate corruption is further decreased, making corruption more widespread and entrenched.¹² The spread of corruption further undermines societal trust in the state and prompts citizens to align with competing sources of power that contribute to the further fragmentation of society.¹³

At the tactical level, corruption degrades recipient forces' operational readiness due to mismanagement of funds and assets and undermines public trust in them.¹⁴ U.S.-recipient rapport is also compromised because corruption conditions organizations to operate in secrecy and obfuscate their true intentions.¹⁵ If practices that reinforce perceptions of corruption are not reformed, it is unlikely that recipient security sectors will earn the trust of their populations. Instead, they will continue exacerbating the grievances that fuel the conflicts the U.S. is attempting to quell through capacity-building efforts.

Security sector corruption is rarely an isolated issue and tends to be self-sustaining. In some cases, civilian governments politicize security sectors by dispensing economic rents.¹⁶ In other cases, civilian authority is so weak that security officials can extort benefices from their erstwhile overseers.¹⁷ Institutional reform is stymied by buying off or intimidating reformers, rewarding loyalists, and punishing waverers.¹⁸ Each individual act of corruption cultivates a critical mass of loyalists with a vested interest in the status quo.¹⁹

Path to Reform

Reforms can take place at several levels, including operational, addressing how recipient security sectors carry out day-to-day duties; structural, addressing weak internal governance through new disciplinary regimes, oversight mechanisms, and promotion practices; and external oversight, where civilian officials or entities are given explicit authority to manage certain aspects of a security sector.²⁰ Within the Department of Defense's (DoD) terminology regarding security partnerships, these reform activities are classified as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Defense Institution Building (DIB).²¹ SSR involves "transforming the security sector...which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities, and actions so that they...operate... in a manner that is more consistent with...sound principles of good governance."²² Policing activities are also included in the purview of SSR, which is relevant to conflicts within fragile states since the duties of external security actors (military) and internal security actors (police) become blurred.²³ SSR primarily occurs at the operational and structural levels. DIB occurs at the structural and external oversight levels, focusing on making national-level institutions "effective, transparent, and responsive," as well as "improving civilian control of the military, building respect for the rule of law, and improving military professionalism."²⁴

By integrating SSR and DIB into capacity-building efforts, the U.S. would "enhance the ability of security forces to uphold state authority and provide justice and security to citizens," which is a necessary condition for good governance and long-term development.²⁵ These activities require U.S. personnel to play the part of norm entrepreneurs, in addition to their roles as advisors and trainers. Norm entrepreneurship would facilitate organizational culture changes from old norms that permitted corrupt and predatory practices to norms that are conducive to "civilian control, accountability, transparency, and rule of law."²⁶ Norm entrepreneurship is most often discussed in research concerning political corruption, but the field's insights and considerations can be applied to U.S. capacity-building efforts. This compatibility is due to recurrent findings that political corruption adversely impacts recipient security sectors' capacity to secure their territory and populations. Additionally, recommendations to counter corruption's influence on recipient security sectors mirror the logic of norm entrepreneurship practices.

Norm Entrepreneurship

Fragile states are undergoing what could be described as a process of "modernization," at least in the political sense, since more often than not they are also located in developing regions of the world like Africa and Latin America.²⁷ For these states' security sectors, capacity-building missions serve as a form of modernization; therefore, U.S. personnel involved in the effort need to be cognizant of how modernization enables corruption. To start, "modernization involves a change in the basic values of the society," which includes redefining what counts as acceptable behavior and redefining the difference between public welfare and private interest.²⁸ During this period of flux, both old and new norms lack legitimacy, giving individuals moral license to violate both sets of norms when it suits their self-interest.²⁹

The transition between old and new norms can be further complicated if a state's population is ethnically heterogeneous, since new norms will have to contend with a fragmented landscape of traditional norms where "grease money" may already be commonly employed to address ethnic frictions.³⁰ A related consideration is whether the U.S. is the recipient state's sole partner. If multiple external actors are aiding a state, then the security sector will be influenced by other sets of military norms besides the U.S.'s, which makes the transition from old norms and

operational doctrines more difficult. The last consideration regarding the transition between old and new norms is that although a society may accept a new set of norms, its tolerance for corruption may remain higher than U.S. standards.³¹

Modernization increases corruption by introducing new laws, regulations, and oversight mechanisms, which certain actors will attempt to avoid, circumvent, or distort for private or personal gain.³² In addition to ‘creating’ new corruption by redrawing the boundaries of acceptable and legal behavior, increased transparency exposes previously hidden corruption, creating an impression that corruption is on the rise.³³ The perception of increased corruption, whether reflective of reality or not, is important to keep in mind since societies’ equilibrium between norms and corruption shifts depending on individuals’ perceptions of corruption’s frequency.³⁴ In fact, studies exploring the relationship between individuals’ perceptions and tolerances of corruption have repeatedly found that people are more likely to tolerate corruption if they believe it is widespread, irrespective of their personal ethics and experiences.³⁵

While modernization inevitably creates new sources of corruption, which may never be eradicated, once the new set of norms has been internalized, the “modernized” society should settle into a corruption equilibrium that is hopefully lower than the previous one and exerts a less damaging effect on the development of the state and its security sector. However, this is not a quick process, since individuals within a society adopt new norms at an uneven pace and with varying levels of enthusiasm.³⁶ The norm diffusion process is best understood as an “S-curve” that begins slowly with a small number of early adopters, gains momentum after a “tipping point” is reached and the majority adopts the new norm, and then decelerates as holdouts adopt the new norm.³⁷ Although norms are rooted in deeply held worldviews, they are still influenced by “cultural structure” and agentic factors.³⁸ In theory, by working within the boundaries of a recipient’s cultural structure and wisely employing their leverage over military aid, the U.S. can improve the likelihood of recipient security sectors adopting U.S. military norms. The resulting organizational culture change will make them more effective at employing the tactical capabilities provided by the U.S., ideally in support of U.S. objectives.

Making Norms Stick

Assuming that norm diffusion in a security-partnership context follows the “slow-quick-slow” tempo described in corruption literature, there will not be an immediate “mass conversion” to U.S. military norms.³⁹ Because the new norms prescribe behavior that is opposed to their self-interests, most leaders within a recipient security sector will attempt to obstruct, if not reverse, this process. These attempts will have the greatest probability of success during the initial slow growth phase, when only a small cadre of early adopters champion the new norms. By mobilizing larger networks and superior resources, obstructionists can sideline or buy off early adopters, conveying to waverers the perils and benefits of pushing for reform or toeing the line, respectively.

The challenge for U.S. personnel is to use whatever leverage they have at their disposal to shield early adopters from obstructionist backlash long enough for adopters to achieve successes that can be clearly attributed to U.S. training, equipment, and norms, piquing waverers’ interest and calling old practices into question. Success must then be leveraged to get early adopters rewarded and promoted, while obstructionists are sidelined, signaling to waverers that the cost-benefit calculus has shifted in favor of reform. While the U.S. will never have complete leverage over recipient states, or their security sectors, the conduct and outcomes of seven capacity building efforts (Republic of Korea [“South Korea”], Philippines, Republic

of Vietnam [“South Vietnam”], El Salvador, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mali) provide useful insights into what factors could promote the diffusion of U.S. military norms to a recipient security sector. These factors are the presence of early adopters, comprehensiveness of U.S. oversight, conditionality, time/continuity, and concurrent civilian government reform.

Early Adopters

Although not a sufficient condition, the presence of early adopters is a necessary condition for U.S. military norms to be diffused to a recipient security sector. While U.S. personnel may act as examples and conduits of U.S. military norms at the start of a capacity-building effort, local reformers are better suited to anchoring the norms within the recipient state’s cultural precepts, making the norms more acceptable to the rest of the security sector.⁴⁰ After the new norms are accepted, these early adopters will also be essential to fostering a sense of local ownership so that reforms are properly implemented and sustained.⁴¹

Among the seven analyzed efforts, only three had a high-profile local leader who adopted U.S. military norms and acted as a rallying point for other reformers: South Korea, the Philippines, and El Salvador. Prior to the Korean War, President Syngman Rhee created a politicized officer corps whose loyalty he maintained through dispensing economic rents.⁴² After the Republic of Korea’s Army (ROKA)’s disastrous performance in the first year of the war, U.S. advisors took over personnel policy, identifying and promoting promising officers who adopted U.S. military norms.⁴³ The most high-profile early adopter was Paek Sun Yup, who started the Korean War as a colonel and eventually became the first four-star general in the Korean Army.⁴⁴ His meteoric rise was due in no small part to the support of U.S. advisors, since Paek was regarded with suspicion by President Rhee and his loyalists.⁴⁵

In the Philippines, the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) supported the installation of reformer Ramon Magsaysay as Secretary of National Defense, and he improved the performance of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) by dismissing corrupt officers, streamlining chains of command, and increasing soldiers’ pay to disincentivize looting.⁴⁶ JUSMAG and the U.S. embassy prevented obstructionists from undermining Magsaysay’s authority or removing him from office, which bought time for the reformed AFP to gain the initiative and contain the Huk insurgency.⁴⁷

Similarly, in El Salvador, the U.S. took advantage of a stand-off between reformist and right-wing factions in the Salvadoran Army to install the reformist Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova as Defense Minister.⁴⁸ Vides Casanova ousted his predecessor’s loyalists, chose replacements based on merit instead of personal connections, streamlined chains of command, and condemned right-wing extremism within the officer corps.⁴⁹ Although his retirement resulted in a temporary right-wing resurgence, his tenure set conditions for reformist sentiment to spread within the officer corps and signaled the end of the “code of silence” around human rights violations.⁵⁰

On the other hand, U.S. advisors in South Vietnam never found officers who would support reform, since they all shared the same religion, partisan affiliation, and regional ties as President Diem, and this loyalty system continued under President Thieu.⁵¹ In Iraq, accession into the officer corps was based on sectarian loyalties, and as the U.S. footprint shrank, the Iraqi government sidelined apolitical officers, preventing early adopters from rising to prominence.⁵² In Mali, early adopters never rose to prominence because the armed forces were polarized between supporters and opponents of the 2012 coup, with the opposing factions murdering and torturing each other’s partisans.⁵³ Meanwhile, the international community’s long-time

cultivation of corrupt Afghan powerbrokers through direct monetary payments ensured that a desire for reform never manifested among the country's senior leadership.⁵⁴

U.S. Oversight

By monitoring a recipient security sector, the U.S. can coerce recipients to conform to U.S. norms, in theory. However, oversight incurs differing costs and benefits depending on its comprehensiveness. Findings from previous SSR efforts suggest that at the beginning of a partnership, "highly interventionist" tactics are necessary, as more aspects of a recipient security sector are identified as deficient, which increases the breadth of oversight needed to ensure recipients adhere to reforms.⁵⁵ Increased depth of oversight may also be required in decentralized bureaucracies where every level extracts bribes or diverts funds.⁵⁶ However, comprehensive oversight requires a larger U.S. presence, which contradicts the capacity-building mantra of "small footprints," and may offend recipient states' sense of sovereignty.⁵⁷

Both South Korea and South Vietnam are classified as partnerships with a "high" level of oversight. After 1950, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) assumed command of all ROKA forces and managed their budgets, expenditures, and personnel policy.⁵⁸ In South Vietnam, the ratio of advisors to Vietnamese soldiers decreased from 1:202 in 1957 to 1:12 in 1963, with each battalion receiving two advisors, in addition to intelligence and development specialists being deployed to rural areas.⁵⁹

U.S. partnerships with El Salvador and Iraq are classified as having a "medium" level of oversight. In El Salvador, the advisor ratio was maintained around 1:300, with advisors deployed at the brigade level even after the Salvadoran Army doubled in size.⁶⁰ A limiting factor was the prohibition on U.S. advisors accompanying Salvadoran units on patrol, but news media and NGOs filled the blind spot by reporting on human rights violations.⁶¹ Military Transition Teams (MTTs) in Iraq were composed of 11 soldiers and embedded at the battalion level, achieving a 1:50 ratio on paper.⁶² However, MTTs only visited their assigned units once or twice a week, and the Iraqi government prohibited them from partnering with politically sensitive units.⁶³

The Philippines, Mali, and Afghanistan are considered cases of "low" oversight. Due to the doubling of the AFP's size, the advisor ratio in the Philippines also doubled from 1:431 to 1:875 from 1947 to 1952.⁶⁴ In Mali, advisors focused on training select counterterrorism units before the 2012 coup, and this occurred only on an episodic basis.⁶⁵ After the return of democratic rule, the U.S. opted to delegate the training of Malian troops to France, the European Union, and the United Nations.⁶⁶ Findings from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found that the U.S. military command in Afghanistan's oversight capacity was so limited that it could not even validate Afghan units' personnel rosters.⁶⁷

Conditionality

Related to the concept of oversight is conditionality. This describes a "carrot and stick" approach where aid is provided after reforms are implemented and sustained, or withheld if recipients continue engaging in corruption and resist reforms.⁶⁸ Conditionality is crucial during the norm diffusion process because failure to punish corruption cements the perception that corruption can be committed with impunity, making it less likely that reforms will be implemented or respected.⁶⁹ One drawback to conditionality is that it can undermine recipients' confidence in U.S. commitments, making them less willing to implement reforms that could threaten their hold on power.⁷⁰ However, ironclad commitments on the U.S.'s part can invite

moral hazard and undermine the credibility of threats to withhold aid if recipients do not conform to expected behaviors.⁷¹

South Korea, the Philippines, and Mali can be considered cases where conditionality was applied. Once it became clear that South Korea was utterly reliant on U.S. aid to prevent a North Korean takeover, the South Korean government assented to the professionalization of ROKA units under threat of U.S. advisors withholding equipment and training.⁷² JUSMAG repeatedly delayed aid to force the Filipino government to authorize joint U.S.-AFP planning, reorganize the AFP, enact economic reforms, and prevent the ouster of reformers in the security sector.⁷³ After a military coup overthrew President Touré in 2012, the U.S. suspended all military aid to Mali.⁷⁴ When aid resumed two years later, it was severely restricted, with the U.S. preferring to work with neighboring countries instead.⁷⁵

El Salvador is the only “mixed” case, with the U.S. alternating between unconditional support and enforcing conditionality. When the Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations pursued conditional strategies, they were successful in changing the Salvadoran government and armed forces’ (ESAF) behavior in regard to human rights and democratic reform.⁷⁶ Conversely, unconditional aid resulted in the Salvadoran government reneging on reform agreements or declining to punish ESAF human rights violations.⁷⁷

South Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan are examples of the U.S. providing unconditional support. Despite 44 percent of South Vietnam’s GDP consisting of U.S. aid, conditions were rarely imposed, and even then, never on military aid.⁷⁸ This unwillingness to impose conditions was due to conflicting recommendations from U.S. embassy personnel and military advisors to cut or continue aid, respectively, when the Diem regime refused to enact reforms, as well as U.S. presidents’ public commitments to South Vietnam.⁷⁹ Besides selectively withholding logistical support to Iraqi National Police (INP) units to force the replacement of uncooperative INP commanders, the Iraq effort was characterized by a lack of conditionality.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, prior to 2014, the U.S. military headquarters, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), provided funds to the Afghan defense and interior ministries with no conditions on how they should be used.⁸¹

Time/Continuity

Anti-corruption researchers have suggested that it takes around 25 years for societal norms to conform to anti-corruption legislation. SSR researchers also found that longer-duration reform initiatives were more likely to have domestic elites take ownership of the process.⁸² The lengths of the analyzed case studies are as follows: South Korea, 4 years (1949–1953); Philippines, 6 years (1947–1953); Vietnam, 17 years (1957–1973); El Salvador, 14 years (1979–1992); Iraq, 12 years (2003–2014); Mali, 18 years (2001–2012; 2014–2020); Afghanistan, 20 years (2001–2021). One caveat to this list is that the Philippines was a U.S. colonial possession dating back to the Spanish-American War and was granted independence in 1946, making its U.S. tutelage almost five decades long before the Huk rebellion started.⁸³ Another consideration is the continuity of U.S. mentorship. Turnover may weaken oversight while newly arrived U.S. personnel become familiar with processes, procedures, and personalities. A metric that can provide some insight into continuity is tour length, since the more time an individual advisor or trainer spends with recipients, the more opportunities they have to influence recipients to adopt and adhere to U.S. norms, and for advisors to become knowledgeable about local corruption dynamics.

There is limited information on JUSMAG's personnel turnover during the Huk Rebellion, but one of the key U.S. advisors who championed reformers like Ramon Magsaysay was Colonel Edward Lansdale, who was assigned to a three-year tour on the eve of the Huk rebellion.⁸⁴ Korean advisor tour lengths were 18 months unaccompanied or 24 months with family, although this changed to a points system during the Korean War, with frontline service garnering more points.⁸⁵ In Vietnam, tours were 12 months, but most advisors only served 11 months and typically only spent six months with a combat unit, while the remainder was spent on staff.⁸⁶ At first El Salvador tours were 89 or 179 days in length, but were eventually lengthened to 1 year.⁸⁷ At the start of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), tours to Iraq and Afghanistan could last up to 15 months, but toward the end, deployments were around 6–9 months, depending on the branch of service.⁸⁸ Whatever the length of the tours, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found that turnover among advisors “impaired the training mission’s institutional memory and hindered the relationship building required in Security Sector Reform missions,” an insight that may also be applicable to Iraq.⁸⁹ U.S. special operations forces (SOF) filled the advisor role to Malian forces, but their contact was episodic, and then nonexistent after training was delegated to France, the EU, and the UN.⁹⁰

Civilian Reform

Usually, a state is beset with internal conflict because its government is flawed in some regard, such as rampant corruption.⁹¹ This means that in addition to improving the capacity of recipient security sectors, the U.S. must also encourage civilian governments to enact reforms that address the grievances of the population. However, some governments will resist reform because it threatens elites’ political and economic prerogatives.⁹² Civilian governments’ continued corruption can delay the norm diffusion “tipping point” by contributing to perceptions that corruption remains widespread and incentivizing security sectors to also resist reform.⁹³

Only the South Korea, Philippines, and El Salvador cases included civilian reform. While the South Korean government under Syngman Rhee remained highly corrupt during and after the Korean War, it continued the U.S. military government’s land reform program to address peasant grievances and gradually increased the proportion of civil servants who were selected through the civil service examination.⁹⁴ The Quirino administration and its Liberal Party supermajority in the Filipino Congress opposed and delayed U.S. reform proposals but were eventually pressured into passing legislation that raised corporate income taxes and the minimum wage.⁹⁵ When the Quirino administration attempted to interfere with the 1953 presidential election, the U.S. again threatened to suspend aid, ensuring a relatively free and fair election that swept reformer Ramon Magsaysay into office.⁹⁶ In El Salvador, the far-right ARENA party was taken over by more moderate leadership and won the presidency on a platform of economic reform and a negotiated peace with the FMLN.⁹⁷ The Cristiani administration followed through on its promised economic reforms, negotiated a peace deal with the FMLN that integrated them into the political system, and then overhauled the ESAF by disbanding services associated with human rights violations and bringing other services under civilian control.⁹⁸

In South Vietnam, the Diem regime never enacted meaningful political or economic reforms to shore up its popular support.⁹⁹ This failure to reform could be attributed to the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations’ failure to condition military aid, which was the only support Diem considered necessary for his regime’s survival.¹⁰⁰ Contrary to U.S. expectations,

elections in Iraq were distorted by sectarian tensions, with Iraq’s first two prime ministers sponsoring sectarian militias and politicizing the Iraqi officer corps to ensure their grip on power.¹⁰¹ The U.S.-Mali security partnership was narrowly focused on improving Malian forces’ tactical proficiency, with no attention paid to Malian institutions’ weaknesses despite widespread knowledge of the civilian government’s corruption.¹⁰² Ironically, to advance their own political interests, Malian elites had purposefully sown division and discord among the armed forces, undermining their cohesion and capacity.¹⁰³ U.S. officials purposefully turned a blind eye to Afghan government corruption, believing that security had to take precedence before corrupt actors could be held to account.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Afghan civil servants obstructed and derailed U.S.-proposed economic reforms to preserve their rents.¹⁰⁵

Analysis/Discussion

Table 1 below summarizes the outcomes of the seven analyzed cases and the factors that contributed to or detracted from recipients adopting U.S. military norms. For the purposes of this analysis, South Korea, the Philippines, and El Salvador are considered “successful” cases because their security sectors adopted U.S. military norms and effectively countered the threats that U.S. advisors had been deployed to assist with. The ROKA was professionalized, and its combat performance continually improved until the 1953 armistice.¹⁰⁶ The AFP improved its tactical proficiency and reformed its abusive behavior toward civilians, undercutting support for the Huk insurgency until its leaders surrendered in 1953.¹⁰⁷ The ESAF repeatedly relapsed to its old norms whenever the U.S. did not condition aid, but advances were made in breaking the “code of silence” surrounding human rights violations, and the ESAF managed to stave off FMLN advances until a negotiated settlement was reached.¹⁰⁸

Table 1: U.S. Norm Entrepreneurship – Factors & Outcomes						
Recipient	Early Adopters?	Oversight	Conditionality	Time (Years)	Civilian Reform?	Outcome
South Korea (1949-1953)	Yes	High	Conditional	4	Yes	Success
Philippines (1946-1953)	Yes	Low	Conditional	6*	Yes	Success
South Vietnam (1957-1973)	No	High	Unconditional	17	No	Failure
El Salvador (1979-1992)	Yes	Medium	Mixed	14	Yes	Success
Iraq (2003-2014)	No	Medium	Unconditional	11	No	Failure
Mali (2001-2020)	No	Low	Conditional	18**	No	Failure
Afghanistan (2001-2021)	No	Low	Unconditional	20	No	Failure

*Under U.S. control from 1898-1946; **2001-2011; 2014-2020.

Conversely, unsuccessful outcomes entail a continuation of corrupt practices and a failure to defeat the threat U.S. military aid was meant to address. The South Vietnamese Army remained mired in corruption, and two years after U.S. forces withdrew, North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam in 1975.¹⁰⁹ In 2014, the politicized Iraqi officer corps could not stop their units from dissolving when confronted by numerically inferior ISIS forces, necessitating the reentry of U.S. forces into Iraq.¹¹⁰ Mali's forces have continued their human rights violations, only to see Islamist groups gain territory and bring the state to the verge of collapse.¹¹¹ Rampant corruption left Afghan security forces under-equipped and undermanned, and without U.S. assistance, the state fell to the Taliban in a matter of weeks.¹¹²

While each case has a unique combination of factors, all successful cases contained early adopters and civilian reform; unsuccessful cases contained neither. This suggests that there may be merit to the supposition that early adopters are needed to anchor U.S. military norms in their states' cultural precepts before others accept the norms.¹¹³ The correlation of civilian reform with case success gives weight to the theory that if the civilian government is reforming, the security sector is more likely to follow suit, since corruption will be perceived to be in decline.¹¹⁴ Conditionality was also present in successful cases, although El Salvador was labeled "mixed" due to the U.S.'s inconsistent enforcement. However, Mali also featured conditionality, the only unsuccessful case to do so. This conditionality was imposed in 2012 to comply with Section 7008 of U.S. foreign aid appropriations legislation, which restricts aid to states whose democratically elected governments are overthrown by a military coup.¹¹⁵ Although Section 7008 can be waived for national security issues, the conditionality exercised in Mali's case did not contain the same level of flexibility as the conditionality U.S. personnel leveraged in the three successful cases.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The historic record suggests that security partnerships are not a surefire way to achieve U.S. objectives with minimal effort. Often, the U.S. finds itself partnered with corrupt governments whose security sectors are also corrupt and ineffective.¹¹⁷ Although reforms are required, the will to reform is often lacking.¹¹⁸ The desire to reform must be cultivated by diffusing U.S. military norms to recipients. Yet U.S. personnel are not best suited to effect this change. Instead, they should identify and empower early adopters to take local ownership of the process.

Additionally, the correlation of successful capacity building with civilian reform suggests that military norm entrepreneurship is more likely to succeed as part of a larger, whole-of-government norm entrepreneurship effort. It is reasonable to posit that a state is more likely to survive if its civilian officials are more focused on wielding their non-military elements of national power to advance the public welfare, rather than enriching themselves. The question of which U.S. agencies are best suited to act as norm entrepreneurs for recipient states' civilian governments merits further exploration. What is clear from this analysis is that SSR and capacity building, more generally, cannot, and do not, occur in a vacuum.

Conditionality may also be required to change recipients' incentive structures, since adoption of new norms is unlikely without an extrinsic motivator (aid, operational success, etc.) to entice the wavering majority. However, two issues affect the U.S.'s ability to employ conditionality in support of norm entrepreneurship. First, U.S. military doctrine emphasizes "rapport building and persuasion," which encourages advisors to self-limit their range of options when dealing with intransigent recipients.¹¹⁹ Second, legislation such as Section 7008 and Leahy vetting affects the conditionality that on-the-ground U.S. personnel can exercise in

response to recipient violations.¹²⁰ Further study is needed to assess how current legislation affects the U.S.'s ability to elicit recipients' compliance before recommendations can be made to pass a corruption-centric version of Section 7008 or the Leahy Amendment.

Endnotes

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