VOICES
FROM THE FIELD

Light Footprints
The Future of American Military Intervention

By Major Fernando M. Luján, USA

Center for a
New American
Security

Acknowledgements

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About the Author

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Looming budget cuts, ground forces worn down by years of repeated deployments, and a range of ever evolving security challenges from Mali to Libya and Yemen are quickly making "light footprint" military interventions a central part of American strategy. Instead of "nation building" with large, traditional military formations, civilian policy-makers are increasingly opting for a combination of air power, special operators, intelligence agents, indigenous armed groups and contractors, often leveraging relationships with allies and enabling partner militaries to take more active roles.

Despite the relative appeal of these less costly forms of military intervention, the light footprint is no panacea. Like any policy option, the strategy has risks, costs and benefits that make it ideally suited for certain security challenges and disastrous for others. Moreover, recent media coverage of drone strikes and SEAL raids may also distort public perceptions, creating a "bin Laden effect" – the notion of military action as sterile, instantaneous and pinprick accurate. Yet for these smaller-scale interventions to be an effective instrument of national policy, civilian and military leaders at all levels should make a concerted effort to understand not only their strategic uses and limitations, but also the ways the current defense bureaucracy can undermine their success.

- **Drones and commando raids are the "tip of the iceberg."** Surgical strikes are only the most visible (and extreme) part of a deeper, longer-term strategy that takes many years to develop, cannot be grown after a crisis and relies heavily on human intelligence networks, the training of indigenous forces and close collaboration with civilian diplomats and development workers. While direct, unilateral action can be very effective in the short term, it is best when undertaken sparingly and judiciously, balanced with civilian-led initiatives such as political reconciliation,

reintegration or influence campaigns, and phased out over time by efforts undertaken by local police or military units. These indigenous partners are the strategic lynchpin and the only means of producing lasting security outcomes.

- **Prevention is the new "victory."** Instead of attempting to "surge" overwhelming resources for an elusive victory, light-footprint missions aim to keep costs low, relying on a small number of civilian and military professionals to work patiently over many years to prevent and contain security challenges. These interventions are best suited for messy, irregular conflicts against terrorist groups, insurgencies, criminal networks and other non-state actors that operate across boundaries, resist quick solutions and confound traditional military capabilities. Strategically, they also require a new way of thinking about success: a new set of "Powell-Weinberger"-type principles based on prevention, forward engagement and a deeper understanding of the interests of potential security partners.

- **The wrong man can do more harm than the right man can do good.** Because these interventions are so small with so little room for error, the most critical resource is human capital – talented, adaptable professionals who are not only fluent in language, culture, politics and interpersonal relationships but also willing to wade into uncertain environments and influence outcomes with minimal resources. Yet the demands of rotating large units and random staff officers into Iraq and Afghanistan for a decade have only made ground forces more modular and personnel systems more blind to talent. Rather than large "plug and play" units that can go anywhere in the world, policymakers may also need a continuum of smaller-scale, regionally aligned, tiered capabilities – a range of specialized tools instead of dozens of gigantic "Swiss Army knives."

II. INTRODUCTION

In the middle of a rugged valley that had long been held by the Taliban, the mere survival of the 12-man Special Forces detachment I spent time embedded with last year seemed a paradox. The nearest coalition reinforcements were many miles away, and the small team lived on the edge of an ancient village, in a mud compound that bore no sign of the razor wire or reinforced bunkers common to most military bases. Instead, for security the team relied on a combination of handpicked Afghan special operator counterparts and police recruited from local families. Though all the team members were Americans, they wore beards, dressed in traditional garb and ate Afghan food and some spoke Pashto. I also knew from my previous deployments that in 10 years of war, this particular valley had never been secured by coalition forces for longer than a week – no matter how many thousands of troops had flooded this region of the country.

Yet here were 12 Americans and some local Afghans in a mud hut, and the valley had been safe for months. During a meeting with the village elders, an intelligence sergeant whom I had known for years pointed to four of the younger men in attendance and whispered: "Sir, you see those guys? They're local Taliban. Last year they were shooting at us. We know it, and they know we know it. But they're willing to work with us because of what we're doing here." In this particular village, a representative from the U.S. Agency for International Development had helped the team find a way to split rank-and-file insurgents from their leaders in Pakistan by negotiating the repair of a long-defunct highway that locals needed to travel to market. By enlisting the help of every able-bodied villager to build the road by hand – all under the technical supervision of a highly capable U.S. Special Forces engineer – the team had leveraged a tiny amount of resources to develop a level of local support that much larger, more expensive and externally contracted projects had consistently failed to achieve.

"In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,' as General MacArthur so delicately put it."

DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES
FAREWELL ADDRESS AT WEST POINT,
FEBRUARY 25, 2011[1]

Meanwhile, the resulting trove of intelligence from the locals helped other members of the special operations task force decimate the ranks of insurgent leaders with greater speed and precision than they could be replaced. Every few nights, we could hear the blacked-out helicopters flying in low for raids on the other side of the ridgeline.[2]

As tens of thousands of U.S. troops return home after more than a decade of war, the missions of these small teams that will stay behind have become a metaphor for the broader challenge of today's security environment: the need to do more with less. Seven thousand lives, $3 trillion and nearly 12 years after the first troops entered Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States confronts a far different strategic reality than it did before the war began. A weakened economy, looming budget cuts and a military worn down by years of repeated deployments make the idea of sending large U.S. ground forces overseas almost unthinkable, even in cases where intervention seems justified. Recent polls on Libya and Syria

conducted by Gallup and the Council on Foreign Relations show that U.S. domestic support for military action is at its lowest level since the years after the Vietnam War.[3] Meanwhile, in unstable regions around the world – North Africa, the Middle East, Central America – the perceived need for U.S.-provided security assistance, support and expertise continues to grow.

In this era of constrained resources at home and multiplying security challenges abroad, a "light footprint" approach to military intervention and engagement is quickly becoming central to U.S. strategy. The Special Forces soldiers I visited in that Afghan valley – embedded in a foreign culture and navigating complex human networks of insurgents and tribal leaders – are just one example of a smaller, lower-profile style of warfare that can also be glimpsed in Yemen, Libya, Uganda and other volatile locales. Instead of nation building with large, traditional military formations, civilian policymakers are opting for a combination of air power, special operators, intelligence agents, indigenous armed groups and contractors, often leveraging relationships with allies and enabling the military forces of partners such as Jordan or the United Arab Emirates to take more active roles. The specific tactics involved in these operations may vary, but the guiding philosophy is clear: Send tens or hundreds instead of surging thousands. Be patient and work quietly within the constraints of the existing political and social ecosystem. Help others to help themselves instead of doing the work alone. But when necessary, act unilaterally with lethal, surgical precision.

Despite the relative appeal of these less costly forms of military intervention, the light footprint is no panacea. Like any policy option, the strategy has risks, costs and benefits that make it ideally suited for certain security challenges and disastrous for others. Moreover, recent media coverage of drone strikes and SEAL raids may also distort public perceptions, creating a "bin Laden effect" – the notion of military action as sterile, instantaneous and pinprick accurate.[4] Yet nighttime raids are only the

proverbial tip of the iceberg: the most visible part of a deeper, longer-term strategy that takes many years to develop, cannot be grown after a crisis and relies heavily on human intelligence networks, the training of indigenous security forces and close collaboration with civilian diplomats and development workers.

As America winds down its longest war and implements tough personnel and budget cuts in the face of security challenges from Mali to Mexico, policymakers should consider two questions: First, how do light-footprint missions work and when are they best used? Second, once a decision to intervene is made, what institutional resources are most important for success on the ground? After all, the best plan in the world is useless without the means to accomplish it.

I have been immersed in these types of missions over the past decade as a Special Forces officer, working alongside talented men and women in the field, and then more recently, researching the subject in an academic and policy setting. While my own perspective is limited and defined by my direct experiences, I have also had the great honor of learning from a number of unsung heroes with insights from different generations and other wars. Many of these civilians, officers, noncommissioned officers and foreign counterparts are still involved in operational assignments and may never have the opportunity to put words to paper. Thus, this report is intended not as a set of comprehensive answers, but as a starting point for a frank, realistic discussion. The messy, irregular conflicts emerging in today's security environment demand a much greater degree of shared communication and understanding among all the stakeholders, especially those two communities that traditionally have remained most separate – the civilian policy establishment in Washington and the operational teams of military and interagency professionals charged with implementing decisions on the ground. This report is one small attempt to bridge the gap.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE LIGHT-FOOTPRINT APPROACH

From a strategic perspective, the light-footprint approach is based on two uncomfortable truths. First, certain conflicts and security challenges cannot be resolved quickly, even with a flood of overwhelming resources and military might. Second, as the price of an intervention rises – measured in troops, taxpayer dollars and, inevitably, casualty figures – so does the pressure at home to declare victory and withdraw quickly, whether or not the mission is complete. As such, the light footprint aims to keep costs low, relying on a small number of military and civilian professionals to work patiently, perhaps for many years, to accomplish national security objectives. It is best suited for messy, irregular conflicts against terrorist groups, insurgencies, criminal networks and other non-state actors that operate across borders and confound traditional military capabilities. Ideally, the United States aims to address these problems before they become major crises – through peacetime engagement, military-to-military partnerships and support to civilian-run embassy programs. But even when conflicts boil over and peacetime training and exercises turn into armed intervention, this strategic approach resists escalation, adjusting rules of engagement and managing higher levels of risk, but still limiting the number of personnel on the ground. To illustrate the difference, consider the case of Colombia, arguably the United States' largest and most successful light-footprint mission in recent history. Since the approval of Plan Colombia in 1999, the cost to run the entire program – including all military and civilian assistance – has roughly equalled the cost of running the Iraq or Afghanistan war for a single month during the surge.[5]

While the term "light footprint" is not defined in official Pentagon doctrine, it has recently become media and policy shorthand for the military's primary *modus operandi* in this post-Iraq and

"You have all the watches but we have all the time. Your watch battery will run down and its hands will stop. But our time in the struggle will never end. We will win."

MUJAHID RAHMAN
TALIBAN COMMANDER
BAGRAM DETENTION CENTER, 2011[6]

Afghanistan environment.[7] Specific tactics on the ground may differ depending on the local situation and objectives, but these quiet, lower-profile interventions are generally guided by a common strategic mindset and operational approach. Drawing from recent examples, interviews with dozens of practitioners and my own experiences in the field, several fundamental characteristics shape the way these missions are implemented in practice:

1. Civilian-led. One of the most striking ways that the light footprint differs from typical large-scale, conventional military operations is the nature of the relationship between U.S. civilian and military leaders. In most of these smaller missions (except for rare circumstances where no embassy exists or no permanent military attachés are assigned to the country), teams of deployed military advisers, analysts and security personnel simply build off of the existing civilian presence based at the U.S. embassy in the country.[8] The military works in support of the U.S. embassy country team, and military personnel are firmly under the oversight of the chief of mission. In general, the ambassador has the final say and must concur with any military operation. This relationship procedurally

and materially reinforces the oft-repeated but seldom-obeyed maxim that military efforts should support a broader range of intelligence, informational, diplomatic and development initiatives.[9] Under the light-footprint construct, military activities are planned and approved in the context of more sustainable, civilian-led efforts to address the underlying political drivers of the conflict through reconciliation, governance reform or other programs designed to address local grievances. The underlying rationale is that in these smaller interventions, the political aspect of the mission is even more critical because the limited U.S. military forces involved are primarily focused on advising the partner nation. Even in cases where U.S. military personnel are authorized to conduct limited raids or engage in direct combat, they lack the resources to attempt to unilaterally "kill their way to victory" or push local forces aside and take the lead.[10] Without a robust political plan, military action may only postpone state failure or prolong the conflict.

2. Small. Generally, once a major U.S. combat formation arrives in country, the operation no longer involves a light footprint, and the large influx of troops (with their own separate chain of command) means the military effort will no longer fall under the direct supervision or authority of civilian embassy officials. By this reasoning, the actual number of military personnel on the ground is likely to be smaller than any of the prepackaged conventional military units designed for a standard contingency response – the 2,200-man Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 4,000-man Army Brigade Combat Team. By being as minimalist and nonintrusive as possible, the light footprint aims to reduce the partner nation's dependency on U.S. resources and minimize the chances of a backlash from the local population. As one Special Forces officer commented, "It's hard to be arrogant when you're outnumbered."[11] Currently, Colombia and the Philippines (with

"But to meet this threat, we don't need to send tens of thousands of our sons and daughters abroad, or occupy other nations. Instead, we will need to help countries like Yemen, Libya, and Somalia provide for their own security, and help allies who take the fight to terrorists, as we have in Mali. And, where necessary, through a range of capabilities, we will continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans."

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
FEBRUARY 12, 2012

just under 1,000 combined military personnel and contractors) represent the high end of U.S. involvement under this model, while places such as Yemen, Libya or Uganda represent the midrange (with perhaps 50 to a few hundred personnel involved).[12] Meanwhile, at the low end of the scale, extreme political sensitivities might dictate that only civilian interagency personnel, contractors or a handful of specially designated military elements be permitted in country. The responsibility and level of risk for U.S. personnel is high, and the advisers, development experts and intelligence agents supporting the mission

are often required to sort through a tangled mess of self-interested local actors subject to ethnic and political tensions, long-standing rivalries and even criminal or terrorist ties. For these reasons, specially selected and trained personnel from the special operations community normally take the lead for military efforts, applying their regional experience, language capability, operational skills and cultural understanding to the mission. While the number of troops physically present may be small, assets such as close air support, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms, a quick reaction force or logistical and medical facilities are typically positioned nearby (e.g., offshore or in a neighboring country). Finally, to maintain a smaller U.S. footprint, military allies from the region may take a leading role (such as the African Union in Somalia or the French in Mali) or a significant number of civilian contractors may be needed to fill gaps in security.[13]

> *In the simplest terms possible, the light footprint is fundamentally based upon working indirectly through indigenous actors to achieve national security objectives.*

3. Indirect. Even for Pentagon insiders, the array of doctrinal terms for the various military missions that might be conducted under a small-scale, low-profile paradigm can be confusing – from foreign internal defense,[14] to security force assistance,[15] to u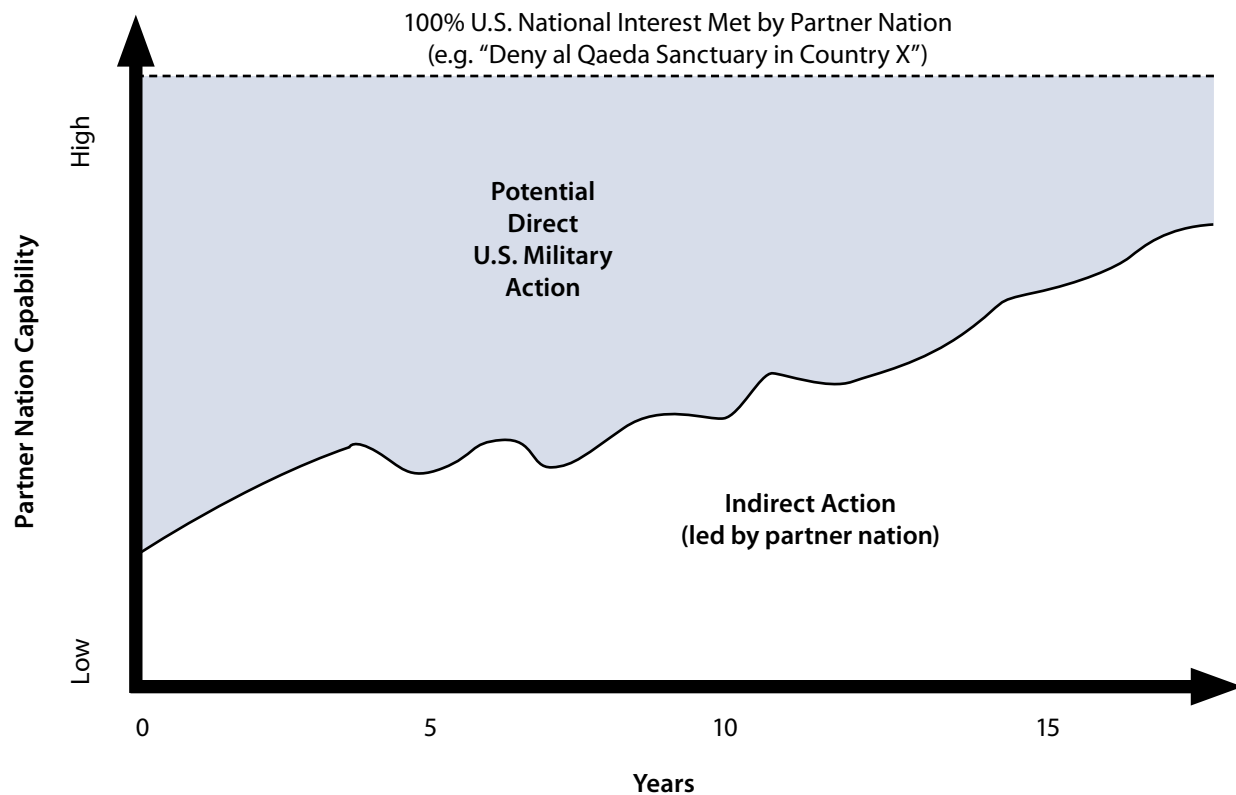nconventional warfare[16] and counterterrorism.[17] In the simplest terms possible, the light footprint is fundamentally based upon working indirectly

through indigenous actors to achieve national security objectives. The lack of "boots on the ground" forces American advisers to consult their foreign counterparts first and build their capacity to accomplish the mission by developing a range of military, local police, irregular armed groups or specialized counterterrorism forces, rather than taking direct military action alone. However, there are important exceptions: If local actors are unable or unwilling to act in time to safeguard vital U.S. national security interests, then swift, unilateral action may be necessary as a last resort or to supplement indigenous capabilities. This is typically done in very unstable areas or under extraordinary circumstances and can take the form of a surgical strike against a high-level terrorist leader, a hostage rescue, an embassy evacuation, seizure of high-end weaponry or weapons of mass destruction material, or other contingencies. However, these direct military actions are, at best, necessary but not sufficient to lasting security, and they come with the risk of further alienating the local population. Depending on the situation, the United States might also limit the scope of its involvement and provide only logistical, intelligence or close air support instead of physically committing combat advisers – for instance, if the presence of U.S. troops in the country would be politically volatile but an allied military from the region has better access or deeper situational awareness.[18] But regardless of who actually engages with and trains local forces on the ground – U.S. troops, an allied military or even contractors – the bedrock of the light-footprint strategy and the primary means to produce stable outcomes remains through indirect action, working by, with and through the indigenous forces that can preserve peace in the future.

4. Long-term. The messy struggle to stabilize foreign governments or attack shadowy terrorist networks is inherently a long-term institutional endeavor based on bolstering or eroding the legitimacy of armed political actors. A light-footprint strategy is patient; it assumes a long timeline and

FIGURE 1: BALANCING DIRECT AND INDIRECT ACTION IN THE LIGHT-FOOTPRINT APPROACH

100% U.S. National Interest Met by Partner Nation
(e.g. "Deny al Qaeda Sanctuary in Country X")

Potential Direct U.S. Military Action

Indirect Action (led by partner nation)

Partner Nation Capability — High / Low

Years — 0, 5, 10, 15

Note: This figure illustrates the concept behind the light-footprint approach. Working within the context of broader civilian-led initiatives, a small number of specially trained U.S. (and allied) military personnel prevent conflict and secure national interests by gradually developing the capability and legitimacy of indigenous security forces over a long period of time. Throughout the military engagement (peacetime conditions) or intervention (wartime conditions), indirect efforts conducted by, with and through the partner nation forces are the primary focus, but must be balanced against the potential need for direct, unilateral action if U.S. interests are threatened and local forces cannot or will not assist (e.g., securing weapons of mass destruction, rescuing hostages, securing facilities, targeting a high-level terrorist leader with imminent plans to attack the United States). The goal is to reduce the need for direct U.S. military action by helping others to help themselves. This implies developing partner nation capabilities until they are able to support U.S. national security interests with only a minimal U.S. military liaison and support relationship maintained by the embassy country team.

Source: Center for a New American Security

slow progress instead of attempting to surge resources for rapid results. In fact, attempting to rush the pace of indigenous security force development can have extremely negative effects, opening the door for enemy infiltration or creating a hollow force with minimal enablers and support structure (e.g., a force heavy in young infantrymen but lacking in medics, intelligence analysts, logisticians and mechanics because they take longer to train and cannot be mass-produced).[19]

An overly aggressive pace can inadvertently cause advisers to "mirror image" Western methods and organizational structures onto local forces rather than taking the time to understand the unique historical and cultural context of the country first. Unless indigenous forces see the new methods as organic (or close enough to the ways they have traditionally done business), they are likely to jettison them as soon as foreign advisers withdraw. But growing capability and tactical proficiency

is only half the mission. Sustainable security also requires that local forces be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the population, a goal that can be severely undermined if a sudden flood of external resources promotes corruption, nepotism and predatory behavior. To be effective, the training cannot be limited to tactics and rifle marksmanship, but must also include professionalism, ethics and respect for human rights. As the campaigns in Colombia, the Philippines, El Salvador and other locales have demonstrated, making a positive, enduring impact on indigenous security forces requires both long-term sustained engagement and a generational mindset.[20] Professional culture and institutions cannot be changed in a single tour, but as American advisers maintain relationships with their foreign counterparts over the years, lieutenants become captains, then colonels, then generals, and they begin to influence the partner nation's military from within.

5. Preventive. Finally, because of the limited resources and extended time scale involved, most of these smaller, lower-profile missions have modest goals. They are generally intended to prevent and contain security problems, not to resolve them decisively. Though some interventions inevitably start late (e.g., after an attack on U.S. citizens or major event spurs action), the light-footprint approach aims to engage with foreign partners as early as possible to avert conflict and shape the security and political environment. Thus, while daily headlines tend to focus only on the most violent, turbulent places in the world, such as Libya, Somalia and Mali, some of the most effective and strategically important work for the United States is often conducted quietly in dozens of countries that never make the news. General Stanley McChrystal, describing how international terrorist groups and insurgents can be overcome in today's security environment, once wisely wrote, "It takes a network to defeat a network."[21] But in practice, developing these diverse and

Once the security situation deteriorates to the point where state institutions fail and various irregular armed actors begin to compete for dominance, a lack of prior groundwork will mean there are few options to influence the situation indirectly and discreetly.

interconnected networks of international partners, indigenous forces, human intelligence sources and logistical or operational support nodes is better accomplished well before a crisis occurs. Once the security situation deteriorates to the point where state institutions fail and various irregular armed actors begin to compete for dominance, a lack of prior groundwork will mean there are few options to influence the situation indirectly and discreetly. Thus, light-footprint missions and the networks they produce represent a small but vital investment to hedge against future "black swan" contingencies,[22] build partnerships and develop greater situational awareness in the region.

IV. STRATEGIC LIMITATIONS AND PITFALLS

As a U.S. Army officer and the product of educational institutions that honor the proud legacy of past wars, I am aware that the notion of small-scale, long-term, shadowy campaigns that achieve limited, ambiguous outcomes signifies a huge cultural shift for most U.S. military personnel, if not most Americans. Americans see themselves as a nation of winners and would rather accept the enemy's ceremonial sword and signed surrender declaration on the deck of a carrier in the Pacific Ocean. Americans want ticker-tape victory parades to mark the ends of their wars. Andrew Bacevich distilled this sentiment about the use of military force: "The armed forces of the United States do not define their purpose as avoiding defeat. They exist to deliver victory, imposing their will on the enemy. In plain English, they make the other side say uncle."[24]

Unfortunately, those days may be over. In the absence of a state-on-state conflict with a rival power, the majority of challenges currently facing the United States – amorphous, shifting, realigning networks of terrorists, state-sponsored proxy militias, insurgents, criminal gangs and narco-traffickers – seem to require a different way of thinking about the meaning of war and peace, of winning and losing. Knowing when to use this policy tool versus when to avoid military action altogether or deploy a much heavier force requires a clear-eyed understanding of the uses and limits of this form of intervention – what success looks like, the risks involved and how it might fit into broader U.S. strategy.

Tell Me How This Ends

INDIRECT ACTION: PREVENTING THE WORST

Many veterans of America's recent light-footprint missions, myself included, can describe in great detail how they have seen their efforts to develop capable and legitimate foreign counterparts

"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

SUN TZU[23]

gradually bear fruit in the field. Partner nation security forces become more proficient and their leaders more professional, developing better relations with the civilian population or learning to apply nonmilitary, nonkinetic programs to support their efforts. Intelligence networks improve and targeting processes grow more rapid and effective. Former militias or paramilitaries are demobilized or integrated into a national security apparatus that slowly starts to show signs of meritocracy and modernization. Yet these tactical and operational observations only tell part of a larger story; they reveal little about long-term outcomes or the strategic goals a light-footprint intervention can realistically achieve.

While the rigorous study of small-scale interventions is still in its infancy, several recent attempts have been made to parse fact from fiction with field data and empirical research. A groundbreaking new study by Stephen Watts and a team of researchers from RAND analyzed 22 small-scale stability campaigns to support partner governments indirectly. Using data from 30 years of recent interventions, ranging from the Russian mission in Tajikistan to the Nigerian-led stabilization missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia to U.S. programs in Central and South America, the researchers developed a number of important findings. First, they essentially found that avoiding defeat is the most realistic result to be

expected from a light-footprint mission: The presence of a small number of foreign advisers does not statistically improve the partner nation government's chances of all-out victory by eliminating an insurgency or forcing a surrender. However, it does greatly reduce the chances of a worst case outcome, where the partner nation government collapses or is overthrown by the insurgent movement. In other words, the likely result of these smaller interventions is some sort of mixed outcome, such as a reduced (but manageable) level of violence or a negotiated peace settlement in which all parties make concessions. The study also found that although small-scale interventions improved the partner nation government's prospects across all types of environments, even the most difficult and unstable, they were generally more effective when the government was relatively strong and/or the insurgency still weak and developing.[25] Regardless of the favorability of conditions, research generally shows that the typical timeframe needed to resolve these types of conflicts exceeds 10 years, with many longer exceptions, reaffirming the need for a generational approach.[26] Finally, while the interventions generally improved the partner nation government's chances of survival, a small percentage of missions still failed despite foreign advisers' best efforts.

WHEN PARTNERSHIP IS NOT ENOUGH: THE USES AND LIMITS OF DIRECT ACTION

Another valuable line of academic inquiry has explored the hard-edged, "direct action" component of some of these smaller missions – raids, drone strikes and the aggressive targeting of terrorist networks. On balance, a growing number of studies show that targeting high-ranking terrorist leaders can be effective, at least in the short term. Looking specifically at the impact of precision drone strikes in Pakistan, Patrick Johnston and Anoop Sarbahi found the strikes to be "strongly correlated with decreases in both the frequency and lethality of militant attacks overall and in improvised explosive device and suicide attacks specifically."[27] Similarly,

Like a doctor prescribing antibiotics to treat every minor infection, the overuse of direct action may eventually render these strikes ineffective against increasingly hardened, entrenched terrorist networks.

Joshua Foust found that while the strategic impacts are ambiguous, drone strikes can tactically disrupt terrorist groups by causing three changes in their behavior: "rejecting technology, going into hiding, and violently attacking those suspected of participating in the targeting process."[28] Other studies have taken a broader approach and analyzed the impact of decapitation attacks, by the United States and by other nations, on a wide number of terrorist groups and found that the loss of a top leader makes the group much more likely to collapse.[29] These findings echo the battlefield observations of many of my colleagues in the special operations community, who assert that careful, rapid targeting can help achieve network overmatch, or the removal of terrorist or insurgent leaders faster than they can be replaced, stripping away the group's ability to organize and conduct future operations. Andrew Krepinevich has described this approach as a "cost-imposing strategy," equivalent to "dumping sand into the gears" of terrorist organizations in order to "degrade the sophistication and effectiveness of attacks against the United States and its vital interests."[30]

However, there is also recent evidence suggesting that as terrorist groups age, they become increasingly resistant to decapitation, even to the point that further strikes have little to no impact on their survival.[31] Like a doctor prescribing antibiotics to treat every

minor infection, the overuse of direct action may eventually render these strikes ineffective against increasingly hardened, entrenched terrorist networks. Moreover, questions remain about what happens in the aftermath of a successful attack. Audrey Cronin, one of the foremost experts on how terrorist groups are defeated, commented on the many second- and third-order effects that remain unexplored: "What if the group splinters, or re-forms into another group under leadership more virulent than before?"[32] Other experts have gone further, asserting that despite the short-term gains, the impact on local sentiment jeopardizes the long-term mission. Locals living in the areas being targeted suffer from a siege mentality and can be recruited more easily, while every unilateral action also brings with it the possibility of collateral damage and civilian casualties. Even if a strike is perfectly executed with no civilian loss of life, it can be exploited in the current media environment to further erode both the U.S. and partner nation government's moral standing and legitimacy.[33] Thus, while direct, unilateral action can be very effective in the short term, it should be undertaken sparingly and judiciously, balanced with nonkinetic civilian-led initiatives such as political reconciliation, reintegration or influence campaigns, and ultimately phased out over time to be replaced by efforts undertaken by local, indigenous police or military forces.

THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

Taken together, these empirical studies and recent battlefield insights suggest that the light footprint is a limited tool best suited for accomplishing modest strategic objectives. It can produce iterative, transactional changes – not transformation – in the countries where it is applied. Terrorist networks can be temporarily degraded, but not eliminated. Indigenous security forces can become marginally more professional and legitimate, but perhaps not free of nepotism or corruption. Depending on the situation, a realistic long-term end state might be a political settlement where the government

and opposing groups both make serious concessions (some of which might be contrary to U.S. interests). If no political agreement is possible, the objectives of the intervention instead might be to prevent the conflict from spreading to neighboring countries, or to disrupt an emerging threat sufficiently to keep future attacks from being planned and executed against the United States. One fact is relatively certain: Progress will be slow, some residual level of instability will remain and threats may re-emerge if left untended.

Finally, a light footprint is not a substitute for a heavy footprint. Few would dispute that in the event of a major war, large-scale conventional military force still offers the most viable deterrent against rival militaries and the only means of defeating aggression. Yet the role of larger missions does not end there. Even in irregular conflicts against insurgents and terrorist groups, experience has shown that smaller-scale missions have constraints; they work indirectly through partners and thus are most effective when security institutions exist (or at least *have* existed in the past) or a patchwork of local armed actors shares enough common ground that it can be leveraged to promote stability.[34] In the absence of any of these formal institutions or informal groups, intervening with a large coalition military force to provide temporary stability until local institutions develop remains an option, though one likely reserved only for cases where policymakers have determined that the fallout from nonintervention would pose such a direct threat to U.S. national security that it cannot be allowed. Thus, large footprints remain a policy of last resort – a "break glass in case of emergency" tool, saved only for the most dire, extreme circumstances.

When Doing Nothing is Best: Avoiding Pitfalls

Understanding when *not* to intervene – even with a tiny contingent of military professionals – is perhaps the most important, difficult question policymakers face in the absence of a foreign invasion

or other doomsday scenario. Despite the relative advantages of the light-footprint approach over larger, resource-intensive, more entangling forms of intervention, it is not always better than doing nothing, and the U.S. interests at stake must be weighed against the potential cost and risk of achieving them. While many valuable critiques have been made about the dangers of overreach and quagmire in the post-9/11 security environment, practitioners and researchers in the field have identified a number of common pitfalls. Each should be considered to be a possible off-ramp to U.S. intervention, a case where national security objectives may be clear and compelling but simply cannot be addressed effectively with a light-footprint approach.

BAD PARTNERS AND DIVERGING INTERESTS

As every graduate of Special Forces training learns, one of the most dangerous planning assumptions is to take for granted that an indigenous force – be it a formal army, a militia or a resistance group – will use military assistance and training in the way that the U.S. government intends. Experience in Pakistan, Afghanistan, El Salvador and even Egypt has shown that a partner nation will eventually use external military resources for its own internal goals. The goal for U.S. advisers or policymakers is therefore not to try to change the partner nation's fundamental interests, but to understand them, work within them and find places where American interests overlap. My colleague Richard Bennet voiced this sentiment recently after conducting extensive research on the light-footprint interventions in Georgia, the Philippines and Colombia:

> Policymakers may assume that security cooperation and assistance will yield American influence and leverage, but this isn't always the case. The U.S. must know what the partner nation needs and how badly they need it so that advice, training and support can be applied in a targeted way. Operating indirectly entails not only working by, with and through the host nation's security forces, *but also their interests.*[35]

While a huge proportion of current intelligence collection focuses on enemies and threats, smaller footprints mean the United States must better understand its potential friends and partners.

Consequently, paying more attention to a partner nation's rhetoric than to its deep underlying interests can be perilous. In the best case, the United States simply wastes resources, as the partner uses its military assistance for pet projects instead of addressing the security issue vital to American interests. In the worst case, the partner force launches a coup, oppresses its own people, makes war on its neighbors or allows equipment to fall into the hands of terrorists. Moreover, partner nation forces are never monolithic – they often consist of rival factions, competing personalities and irregular armed groups – and understanding underlying interests becomes even more difficult in situations where the security apparatus is badly fragmented, such as in the aftermath of a state collapse or regime change.

Thus, while a huge proportion of current intelligence collection focuses on enemies and threats, smaller footprints mean the United States must better understand its potential friends and partners. Providing military assistance inherently requires selecting winners and losers – empowering certain military units, commanders and constituencies, while marginalizing or weakening others. Meanwhile, the decision not to engage is never taken in a vacuum. By deciding to not support certain indigenous actors on the ground, the United

States may leave the door open to the influence of regional players – both competing state actors (e.g., Iran) and non-state actors (e.g., al Qaeda). For policymakers to have a sense for how both the winners and losers in the transaction will respond, a great deal of focused sociopolitical information must be gathered in advance and sustained over a long time – for instance, mapping out key political actors within the government and military hierarchy, or learning how informal patronage systems work. Good information enables more nuanced, effective military engagement, and trends such as the explosion of social media and the increasing speed and ease of communication open new possibilities for monitoring; partner forces will find it more difficult to hide bad behavior when any abuse can be posted instantly on Twitter or YouTube. But attempts to leverage these technologies are still in their infancy. The military barely understands how to manage the Facebook pages of its senior leaders, let alone use social media as an active, operational component in its planning and missions.

Even if high-quality information about the conflict and the partner nation is readily available, influencing behavior depends heavily on the ability to apply targeted incentives. As the late CIA operations officer Douglas Blaufarb wrote about Vietnam, "American partners in the target state do everything they can to thwart reforms … the U.S. could threaten to withdraw all support, but such threats are not credible if the U.S. has invested considerable resources and prestige in the intervention."[36] In this regard, the light footprint has advantages, as higher levels of assistance can actually reduce leverage over the partner nation. Threatening to end these smaller-scale missions is logistically and politically more realistic and hence, more believable. But as many of my colleagues and I have observed in the field, even small missions have limits. Partner nation military leaders know that their American advisers generally lack the ability to interrupt the flow of resources because

The light footprint has advantages, as higher levels of assistance can actually reduce leverage over the partner nation. Threatening to end these smaller-scale missions is logistically and politically more realistic and hence, more believable.

the military support sent to their institutions is appropriated by the U.S. Congress; it is binary, on or off, and cannot be finely adjusted in theater. If advisers want real leverage, they must know what assistance the partner nation needs most and be able to adjust this assistance based on results and observed behavior. Ultimately, light-footprint missions require both the humility to accept that the United States has limited influence over partner nation interests and the commitment and patience to learn what those interests are.[37]

SLOW ESCALATION AND PERPETUAL WAR

Another serious danger of small-scale intervention is the potential for escalation and endless conflict. Part of the issue may stem from the "can do" culture that rightfully permeates the military. Once assigned a mission, military units will stop at nothing to accomplish it, and this culture is even stronger within the special operations forces that typically carry out light-footprint missions. Having served alongside these men and women, I know them to be highly dedicated volunteers willing to serve in hostile areas at great personal danger. "Failure" is not a part of their collective lexicon. Yet as some scholars have argued, if a

clear strategy, metrics for success and a healthy, iterative, two-way dialogue are not maintained between senior policymakers and military professionals in the field, mission creep can occur, with the intervention force gradually growing bigger as it doubles down on faltering efforts.[38] Astri Suhrke describes this phenomenon in Afghanistan, where a light-footprint intervention gradually morphed into a huge, nation-building mission by a process she calls "disjointed incrementalism": "Policy [during military interventions] is shaped by a fragmented decision making process without the benefit of an overarching strategy … the perceived need to protect previous investments by investing more and more … and the result is an unseen, and often unwanted course of action … leading to a quagmire."[39] A similar argument has been made about Vietnam: Once resources were committed in the form of a small intervention, military professionals were unwilling to acknowledge failure and civilian policymakers were loathe to end or reduce the mission for fear of damaging U.S. credibility in the world.

Other research suggests that simply providing military assistance carries its own risk of prolonging the conflict by creating dependency in the partner nation, producing a conflict economy and attracting various malign actors to compete for external resources, especially if the flow of support is so large as to be unmanageable and unsupervised by advisers. This risk is only magnified if the conflict itself possesses deep structural factors that make any type of progress unlikely, thereby increasing the likelihood that, once started, U.S. engagement would be difficult to phase out or hand over to indigenous security forces. These structural factors can vary depending on the situation, but some of the most commonly cited in recent studies and confirmed by battlefield experience are the existence of key resources for the insurgent or terrorist group such as permanent sanctuary, access to profits from illicit trade (e.g., drugs, diamonds, smuggling), robust

A small percentage of light-footprint interventions will inevitably fail despite the best intentions and efforts of the professionals on the ground. Policymakers must not only recognize this uncomfortable fact, but also develop mechanisms to disengage from unsuccessful programs, lest every failure be followed by escalation.

external support (e.g., resources given by outside state sponsors, diaspora movements or individual donors) or political viability enabled by a corrupt, illegitimate government.[40] The presence of any of these factors does not necessarily mean that intervention is doomed to fail – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, better-known by the acronym FARC, arguably enjoyed nearly unfettered access to every one of these means of support for most of the 1990s. But if a light-footprint approach cannot effectively curtail or interdict any of these complicating factors, the U.S. national security interests at stake would arguably need to be much higher to justify an intervention.

There are no easy solutions to the potential for escalation and protracted conflict. Yet, recent comments by former Undersecretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy may be instructive. Concerned about the possibility of the United States falling into a "Vietnam syndrome" and becoming so risk-averse that the military stops planning for or engaging with irregular threats, Flournoy said that military

and civilian leaders "have to be willing to fail."[41] As noted above, a small percentage of light-footprint interventions will inevitably fail despite the best intentions and efforts of the professionals on the ground. Policymakers must not only recognize this uncomfortable fact, but also develop mechanisms to disengage from unsuccessful programs, lest every failure be followed by escalation. Possibilities might include identifying abort criteria in advance (e.g., events or political situations that would make the mission no longer viable) or establishing jointly agreed, third-party assessed metrics for success with the partner nation, whereby ongoing assistance and resources are directly linked to specific success metrics on a given timeline – similar to the existing Millennium Challenge Corporation model of development assistance. Developing flatter communications structures and removing bureaucratic filters between senior policymakers and field agents can also help minimize the distortion of information on its way up the chain of command. McChrystal's creation of a team of counterinsurgency advisers in Afghanistan to embed with units in the field and to report directly to him – a modern version of Napoleon's "directed telescope" – is one example of the types of organizational tools that might be increasingly needed in future interventions.[42]

THE "AUTO-IMMUNE RESPONSE" AND THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

Light-footprint interventions also have the potential to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby U.S. advisers are sent into a country to help counter a perceived threat, but the presence of foreign troops only serves to inflame local sentiments or give an unintended advantage to the opposition. Even a cursory examination of al Qaeda recruiting materials during the past 15 years reveals a constant drumbeat of messages accusing the United States of seeking to occupy Muslim lands, support apostate regimes and destroy Islam. In fact, Osama bin Laden's original "Declaration of Jihad Against

the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites" cites the U.S. troop presence in Saudi Arabia as the ostensible basis for war.[43] Against this political and cultural backdrop, the deployment of ground forces, even a small number, always carries the risk of inflaming the local situation and providing fodder for terrorist groups and insurgencies seeking to attract fresh recruits. In *The Accidental Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen calls this phenomenon the "auto-immune" response, in which foreign troops introduced into a conflict zone cause local actors to close ranks against a perceived external threat. As the old proverb states: "It's me and my brother against my cousin. But it's me, my brother and my cousin against a foreigner."[44] I witnessed a microcosm of this auto-immune response on the ground in Afghanistan, where cultural friction between young American soldiers and their Afghan military counterparts, intensified during the surge of troops, has provided the Taliban a fertile ground to recruit soldiers from among the ranks to conduct "green-on-blue" attacks and murder their Western advisers.[45]

Kilcullen and others suggest that the best way to minimize the risk of an auto-immune response is to make the intervention "slower, less violent, more locally based or lower in profile."[46] This suggests military forces should be quietly introduced into the country and integrated with the existing embassy country team without obvious, large arrivals of troops on military aircraft, and with no media exposure if possible. Small, mobile and lethal quick reaction forces should be positioned offshore, in a neighboring country or in a low-profile facility hidden from public view. Except for the training and advising of indigenous forces, U.S. military action should be largely limited to roles that are defensive (protecting or evacuating civilians) or nonkinetic (humanitarian aid, civic action, information operations support, logistics). However, in the event that direct, offensive action must be taken, it should be minimized, with the

immediacy, credibility and severity of the threat balanced against the impact on relationships with the partner nation and the political impact associated with acting alone.

If a time-sensitive, high-value target surfaces in the country and U.S. national interests demand that it be neutralized immediately (e.g., an imminent attack planned on the United States or allies, other exceptional circumstances as decided by civilian policymakers), indigenous partner forces should be included unless rampant infiltration or collusion with the enemy makes cooperation impossible in the short term. On the range of possible responses, a local police or military force making an arrest with only the lightest, most indirect U.S. assistance (e.g., intelligence collaboration, advisers present at the headquarters) represents the most desirable end of the spectrum – and least likely to cause a backlash – while the use of a precision airstrike with little mitigation by partner forces stands at the other, only to be used when no other options are available.

The possibility of creating a backlash only underscores the importance of *legitimacy* in the partner nation government. Since a light-footprint intervention can do little to quickly change the underlying political dynamics and drivers of conflict in the country, supporting a partner government that is widely seen as corrupt and illegitimate by the majority of the population inevitably plays into the existing anti-U.S. narrative and runs a higher risk of failure.

V. BEYOND POWELL-WEINBERGER: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A generation ago, the Powell-Weinberger doctrine helped guide the use of military force with a series of central tenets: Use military force as a last resort, and only after all other means have been exhausted. Commit troops with clear attainable objectives and a plausible exit strategy. Use every resource to achieve decisive force against the enemy, ending the conflict quickly by forcing the enemy to capitulate.[47] While this doctrine continues to offer invaluable insight about the conditions that justify the use of large-scale, conventional military power, it does little to guide smaller missions, when the number of troops involved is dozens or hundreds, not thousands, and the timeline is measured in years or decades, not months. Based on the aforementioned empirical research and battlefield insights, several concepts provide a starting point for a broader discussion about how light-footprint missions might support a more collaborative, forward engaged, long-term approach to security in the future.[48]

1. Prevention is the new "victory." Preventing worst-case outcomes is the goal of light-footprint engagement and intervention, not decisive victory or transformation. Objectives should be modest, iterative and consistent with the partner nation's historical and cultural context.

2. Build and preserve networks. Always build relationships, collect information and develop understanding about potential security partners, even if conditions do not support providing formal U.S. military assistance. Engage well before a crisis and never completely disengage; recognize the potential future importance of networks.

3. Partner with underlying interests and legitimacy in mind. Before committing military advisers, training or equipment, ensure that the recipients' underlying interests, not just rhetoric, overlap with U.S. objectives and that the

"In the past, the United States often assumed the primary role of defending others: we built bases, we deployed large forces across the globe to fixed positions; we often assumed that others were not willing or capable of defending themselves … our new strategy recognizes that this is not the world we live in anymore."

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LEON PANETTA ADDRESS AT THE U.S INSTITUTE OF PEACE, JUNE 28, 2012[49]

majority of the local population sees the partner as legitimate. Ongoing military support should be contingent upon demonstrated progress against mutually agreed-upon outcomes-based metrics, and the investment of U.S. resources should be targeted and small enough to make the threat of withdrawal credible.

4. Less is more. Engage with the smallest, lowest-profile military presence that can effectively foster critical indigenous security capabilities and protect U.S. interests. Build coalitions and work through allied militaries with better access and situational awareness as much as possible.

5. Minimize and phase out direct, unilateral action. Grow indigenous capabilities and partnered

relationships so that the potential need for direct U.S. military action becomes less likely over time. When offensive action must be taken, act indirectly, with local partners leading unless infiltration or other security concerns make this inadvisable. If a unilateral strike must be made, be as surgically precise as possible and balance the likely effects on the local political situation, the importance of the target, the imminent threat to the United States and the credibility of the information.

6. Military engagement is a constructive tool, not a last resort. Military engagement, partnership and training should be used proactively instead of as a last resort, and firmly integrated with a broader political, economic and diplomatic effort. Without a robust, civilian-led political plan, military efforts may only prolong the conflict.

7. Do not surge for faster results. Attempting to rush the pace of security force development and surge more resources than partner nation institutions can handle encourages corruption and decreases leverage because U.S. support will appear automatic and irreversible.

8. Be prepared to fail. Accept mission failure as a rare but normal outcome with abort criteria to support disengagement and prevent escalation in the event that the mission is no longer tenable or is not producing desired outcomes. Promote flat communications or direct feedback mechanisms between military and civilian leaders to continually manage risk, assess progress and refine the mission via an iterative, two-way planning process.

Attempting to rush the pace of security force development and surge more resources than partner nation institutions can handle encourages corruption and decreases leverage because U.S. support will appear automatic and irreversible.

VI. THE LIGHT FOOTPRINT AND THE DEFENSE BUREAUCRACY

Strategic principles and doctrine are very important, but even the most carefully tailored plan is worthless without the resources to implement it. As Vietnam policy adviser Robert Komer once wrote after a different decade of war: "Looking back, one is struck by how often we Americans in particular did the one thing that we had the most readily available capability to do, whether or not it was the most relevant. Whatever overall policy called for, the means available tended to dictate what we actually did."[50] This logic implies that while recent Pentagon speeches and strategy documents have been almost unanimous in their call for "innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve security objectives,"[51] the bureaucracy also gets a vote. Overcoming the institutional tendency to maintain the status quo will require leaders at all levels, both civilian and military, to take full stock of not only the strategic implications of light-footprint missions, but also the ways that the defense bureaucracy will naturally inhibit their successful completion.

For good reason, the machinery of the Pentagon has spent the past 12 years working to maintain a major "steady state" troop presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, rotating large military units through yearlong deployment cycles. But while this process has helped ground forces become more modular and interchangeable, fielding elements a tiny fraction of the size of standard 4,000-man brigades, quietly introducing troops into theater to support embassy-led initiatives or adjusting for specialized, long-term missions seems to demand a different bureaucratic machinery altogether. Meanwhile, special operations forces – institutional experts at smaller, lower-profile missions – have spent the post-9/11 years supporting the wars and pursuing a global campaign against terrorist networks. Some senior leaders believe that the demands of this mission have created an organization ruthlessly

"We've met the enemy, and he is us."

POGO

optimized for surgical strikes and direct action at the expense of the original capabilities that made these forces "special": the ability to work indirectly through local allies and embedded in foreign cultures.[52] The aggregate result of the past decade of war may be a defense apparatus that is lopsided in its application of military power – too heavy and too focused on "man hunting" to fully implement the preventive, long-term, indirect and civilian-led model for engagement that the light footprint requires.

Fully exploring all the various bureaucratic impediments to reform is beyond the scope of this report and is a task better undertaken by scores of analysts, military professionals, academics and organizational experts. But while much attention has been paid to the role of new technologies and advanced weaponry on today's battlefield, policymakers would be wise to remember that the most critical resource requirement in smaller interventions is human capital: talented, adaptable professionals who are not only fluent in language, culture, politics and interpersonal relationships but also willing to deploy for long periods and operate with little guidance. Smaller-scale missions mean less redundancy, less room for error and more responsibility for every person in the field. In the words of LTG Charlie Cleveland, the commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command: "To succeed in these missions, we need people who can wade into uncertainty, learn the key players and figure out the best way to influence outcomes."[53] This means that in the face of looming budget cuts, the Pentagon's biggest national security challenge

may not be dealing with a rival power or preserving force structure, but instead solving an intractable human resources problem – how to retool outdated institutions to select, train, assign and retain the most talented people to address today's security problems overseas.

A Tale of Two Units: The 7th Special Forces Group and AFPAK Hands

Two of my own operational assignments may help illustrate how light-footprint programs can succeed or fail depending on the people who are assigned to them. I have served in the 7th Special Forces Group and the Department of Defense Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands program – organizations with very different missions but built for the same fundamental task of influencing foreign partners and building security capacity with a handful of U.S. personnel. The experiences I outline here are not intended to draw unnecessary comparisons between special operations and conventional forces, or to claim one force superior to the other. Indeed, the range of emerging security challenges guarantees that effective American responses will require the participation of personnel from all parts of the military and civilian interagency. Instead, these contrasting vignettes should serve as a vivid example of two different organizational philosophies and the institutional challenges that must be overcome if the United States is to master a smaller, more indirect, lower-profile approach to warfare.

LO QUE SEA, DONDE SEA, CUANDO SEA: THE 7TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP

The ethic that defines Special Forces training is probably best described as "select hard, manage easy." Operators enjoy tremendous autonomy in the field, but they must earn it first. Before reporting to an operational unit, every Special Forces officer and soldier is required to undergo a rigorous screening and selection process, followed by a two-year qualification course that includes instruction on infantry tactics, specialized technical skills such as weapons or communications, guerrilla warfare, survival

"The OSS, when selecting officers to parachute into occupied France, described the ideal candidate as a Ph.D. that can win a bar fight. We don't just want an officer that can carry a hundred-pound rucksack on his back. We need someone who can think and improvise."

THEN-MAJOR ROGER CARSTENS
THE OFFICER IN CHARGE OF THE
SPECIAL FORCES DETACHMENT
COMMANDERS' COURSE IN 2002

and foreign language training. Undertaking these intense experiences just after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, I was surprised by two things. First, there was a strong connection between our training and real-world Special Forces missions – operators who had just fought on horseback with the Northern Alliance would return to speak to the class, and their feedback would be immediately incorporated into realistic, immersive exercises. Second, a large portion of the course was focused on the intellectual and social attributes of the students – creativity, oral and written communication, judgment, cultural respect and interpersonal skills –rather than sheer athletic prowess. Peers who aced every physical challenge would suddenly be dropped when the instructors observed them unable to plan a mission alone without further guidance or incapable of building rapport with role players during

a cross-cultural scenario. Sensing our confusion after a particularly tough cut sent a dozen students home, one instructor quoted a line from our World War II predecessors, the Office of Strategic Services: "The OSS, when selecting officers to parachute into occupied France, described the ideal candidate as a Ph.D. that can win a bar fight. We don't just want an officer that can carry a hundred-pound rucksack on his back. We need someone who can think and improvise."[54]

Upon graduation, I was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group, a unit that has long specialized in Latin America. Every Army Special Forces unit is permanently aligned with a region of the world, and as the Spanish-speaking son of Mexican immigrants, I saw 7th Group as the natural choice. From the first day I arrived, I was struck by the sense of continuity and shared culture I encountered; it showed in the soccer posters hanging in the team rooms and the salsa music playing in the hallway. Like me, many of the operators were native or advanced Spanish speakers with families from Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic or Panama, and those who were not, had gradually improved upon their few months of formal language instruction by working with foreign militaries across the region. This was a unit full of very talented people, focused on conducting tough training and advisory missions. At any given time, 12-man detachments were scattered across a half-dozen countries, from Peru to Bolivia to Chile, or attending privately run tactical schools for off-road driving, mountaineering or whatever the mission required. Moreover, the teams prized their independence when deployed, and they were accustomed to frequently operating as the only military presence in a country. A longtime unit veteran pulled me aside and explained: "In 7th Group, you can maybe get away with calling back to the United States and asking your boss for guidance once. But do it twice, and you'll be out of a job. Fix problems at your level. You're in charge."

On my first deployment, to conduct a State Department-funded infrastructure security mission in the Colombian jungle, I had the good fortune of being mentored by a senior warrant officer and sergeant major with nearly 35 years of experience and seven or eight trips to Colombia between them. While I was impressed by their ease working with civilian embassy officials and their tactical knowledge in the field, the most valuable lesson they taught me was the power of relationships. I watched these experienced American soldiers walk into high-level meetings to give the Colombian generals a bear hug and immediately start joking about past exploits. They'd known most of the top officers for more than a decade. More importantly, this level of rapport and trust allowed them to have a deeper influence than any first-time adviser with a standard training plan; they could discuss topics that mattered, such as corruption, professionalism or ethics – not just tactics and marksmanship. I saw the power of relationships repeated again and again in many countries, even in Iraq, where I served as an adviser to a battalion from El Salvador. In the middle of an Arabic-speaking country, we conducted missions together in Spanish and learned that even though specific personalities had changed, the Salvadorans knew the history of our unit and the names of the U.S. advisers who had been killed, and they felt honored to repay the sacrifices that our 7th Group predecessors made for their homeland more than 30 years ago.

STRATEGIC GAME CHANGERS: THE PENTAGON'S AFPAK HANDS PROGRAM

In late 2009, as the military was ramping up for a surge in Afghanistan, the Pentagon announced the creation of the AFPAK Hands program. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen wrote a memo calling it his "number one" manpower priority and asked the services to search for the "best and brightest" candidates.[55] The concept was innovative:

A small contingent of several hundred military personnel from all branches of service would be carefully selected; given intensive instruction in Dari, Pashto or Urdu; and then would spend years rotating between critical assignments in theater and Afghanistan-Pakistan staff positions in Washington or at Central Command. The in-theater jobs would be totally immersive, requiring advisers to embed within Afghan ministries, military units, district centers and other key places where they could help serve as a cultural bridge and build long-term relationships that could endure after most U.S. troops had withdrawn. According to the concept briefing, the goal was to create a deep bench of knowledgeable, talented regional experts who would add much-needed continuity to the campaign. It was billed as a strategic game changer and basically sought to apply special operations methodologies, as I had seen in 7th Group, to the broader military effort in Afghanistan. I jumped at the chance to participate.[56]

But a few days after reporting to Washington for the initial AFPAK Hands training, it quickly became apparent that something was amiss. First, there was no mechanism to turn unsuitable candidates away, and half of the cohort had not even volunteered for the assignment. As such, the class included far too many students who that lacked either the aptitude or desire to participate in the challenging, unstructured advisory missions the program was designed for. The overarching problem was incentives. I distinctly remember one of the best students – an exceptionally talented F-16 pilot named Lt Col "Bruiser" Bryant, who was later tragically killed in Afghanistan – explaining the situation during a coffee break: "Some of the most talented people in the Air Force are the fighter pilots. Now, you try asking one of them if he wants to stop flying, learn to speak Pashto, and spend the next three to five years away from his family in a high-risk mission, after which he won't be promoted because he's off his career

"Some of the most talented people in the Air Force are the fighter pilots. Now, you try asking one of them if he wants to stop flying, learn to speak Pashto, and spend the next three to five years away from his family in a high-risk mission, after which he won't be promoted because he's off his career track? Not many volunteer for that. So sometimes you end up with people that just didn't have any better options."

LT COL "BRUISER" BRYANT, JUNE 2010

track? Not many volunteer for that. So sometimes you end up with people that just didn't have any better options."

Beyond the selection and screening problems, the program did little to prepare even the most qualified volunteers for their future roles. The AFPAK Hands training basically consisted of four months of abbreviated language courses, a few days of PowerPoint presentations, and a week of basic combat skills. There was no practical instruction in the tasks most important to embedded advisers, such as rapport

building, negotiation, force protection or anti-terrorism measures, meaning that those volunteers who came from non-combat occupations or had no previous adviser experience were left with few resources to help prepare.

Rather than "select hard, manage easy," the program had essentially "selected easy." It had skipped vital training and was now left to "manage hard." When the first mixed bag of AFPAK Hands graduates arrived in theater, conditions were set for disappointment all around. Receiving commanders in Afghanistan had been promised a strategic game changer but all too often encountered a mediocre staff officer with a smattering of language skills and no desire or training to embed with Afghan counterparts. Conversely, the best AFPAK Hands, eager to immerse with their counterparts and full of good ideas, were frequently placed into jobs that involved little interaction with Afghans or placed under rules that severely restricted access. This became a vicious cycle, with the program developing a stigma, commanders tightening rules to prevent untrained personnel from getting into situations beyond their training or abilities, and AFPAK Hands often resigning themselves to jobs that did nothing to influence U.S.-Afghan relationships. Even today, as I prepare for my second AFPAK Hands deployment, half of the original cohort of students is now gone – departed because career progression demanded it or because the frustrating experience of their first tour gave them little desire to return.[57]

Right People, Right Training, Right Assignments

Every new initiative suffers setbacks and implementation problems, and the experiences I have described with AFPAK Hands should not overshadow the sincere efforts by various managers and staff to improve the program since its inception. Fundamentally, the concept has great promise, but a clear-eyed discussion of the bureaucratic and structural factors that drove these early difficulties

is vitally important to the future of preventive, light-footprint missions. U.S. involvement in Afghanistan may be winding down, yet AFPAK Hands (APH) is not so different from Embedded Training Teams (ETTs), Human Terrain Teams (HTTs), Security Force Assistance Teams (SFATs), Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) or any other of the veritable graveyard of acronyms for the various ad hoc organizations designed to better work by, with and through foreign partners in the past.[58] As the military draws down from wartime conditions and attempts to match force structure to future security challenges, the Pentagon needs to closely examine how it manages its precious human capital. If light-footprint missions are to become central to U.S. strategy, where dozens, not thousands, of troops work under the lead of civilian embassy authorities, then the fundamental assumptions that have determined personnel policies for much of the past decade may need to be re-examined or rewritten to get the right people, with the right training, into the right assignments.

RIGHT PEOPLE: NOT EVERYONE CAN DO LIGHT-FOOTPRINT MISSIONS

The selection course attended by candidates en route to the 7th Special Forces Group is just one version of a process used by nearly every organization in the broader special operations and intelligence community. Working to influence foreign partners, collect intelligence and, on occasion, surgically apply violence requires a unique mix of maturity, cross-cultural competence and creativity, and it is a mission better conducted by seasoned veterans than by 19-year-olds spoiling for their first firefight. The philosophy behind the rigorous screening is simple: "The wrong man can do more harm than the right man can do good."[59] In light-footprint missions, amid today's hyper-globalized media environment, a single person in the wrong job can uproot entire campaigns and undo years of progress, and it is often better to leave a position empty than to send an untrained

or unqualified person in to fail. Unfortunately, this concept is the polar opposite of the assignment methodology that has been used to fill many critical adviser and staff positions in the broader military for the past decade.

AFPAK Hands may have suffered from a lack of willing recruits and inadequate screening mechanisms, but as anyone who has observed the unpredictable nature of the "Worldwide Individual Augmentation System" or the composition of typical brigade, division or national-level mentoring teams can attest, talent can be exceedingly hard to come by. Adviser positions are generally stigmatized and relegated to subpar performers, and the centralized mechanisms to fill billets are talent-blind and based only on rank and specialty. The bureaucracy sees "major, combat arms," and not "bottom 20 percent performer" or "has never deployed" or "lacks relevant experience for the job." Moreover, even if a candidate has performed well in conventional assignments, qualities like the ability to learn a foreign language, work across cultures, operate with minimal guidance or build rapport are all impossible to gauge without specifically screening for them. All too often, the mission is left to the mercy of a personnel assignment lottery, and progress only happens when chance places the right person in the right place. If not reformed, these bureaucratic processes mean that when future planners tailor light-footprint missions to the needs of a particular mission or foreign partner – requesting police liaisons, senior staff mentors or ministerial advisers – they will be forced to draw from the same random pool of unscreened, untrained personnel and simply hope for the best.

Ironically, the timing has never been better to change selection mechanisms and identify the right people to support smaller missions. Not everyone can do it, but now, after 12 years of continuous war in and among foreign populations, the U.S. military has never before possessed so many people in its ranks with the experience and aptitude working as

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foreign advisers, human intelligence professionals, linguists, development workers and other critical skills. Yet the window of opportunity is closing: As the Army and Marines begin to cut 100,000 personnel during the next few years, policymakers and senior military leaders have announced plans to retain an expansible, experienced force that can be reconstituted rapidly in the event of a major war.[60] The rationale is that under emergency conditions, entry-level soldiers can be trained in a matter of weeks, but midlevel leaders take years to develop. Battalion commanders, first sergeants and other key positions cannot be filled with volunteers off the street. This leaves the military with a pressing need to retain a top-heavy rank structure and keep more majors, colonels and senior noncommissioned officers than there are operational units to command. If these extra personnel are sent to administrative or institutional positions while they wait for a major contingency to break out, many will simply depart the service. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in his farewell speech: "Men and women in the prime of their professional lives, who may have been responsible for the lives of scores or

hundreds of troops, or millions of dollars in assistance, or engaging or reconciling warring tribes, may find themselves in a cube all day re-formatting PowerPoint slides, preparing quarterly training briefs, or assigned an ever-expanding array of clerical duties … the consequences of this terrify me."[61] Instead, the most effective way to keep the most experienced leaders from leaving the military may not be by awarding bonus pay or special incentives, but by selecting the best and keeping those with the right aptitude and skills engaged in light-foot-print missions overseas. For all the talk of doctrine and preserving lessons learned, it is the *people* who will carry the hard-earned knowledge from the past decade of war and apply it to future security challenges.

RIGHT TRAINING: THE LIMITS OF MODULARITY

Some may argue that making any comparison between 7th Special Forces Group and AFPAK Hands is unfair and that each Special Forces unit has the benefit of decades of regional focus and specialized training. Yet, this is precisely the point: Just as no one would expect a championship football team to suddenly compete in water polo or Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, no one should expect units whose primary mission is combined arms maneuver against another military (or large-scale, nation-building stability operations) to be able to operate effectively under a paradigm that calls for much smaller, civilian-led, long-term missions in and among foreign populations. The core reason is best summarized by Nick Armstrong of Syracuse University, who conducted scores of interviews with advisers returning from Afghanistan and found that to effectively influence foreign counterparts to become more professional, advisers had to learn to use persuasion, not incentives or coercion. But he also found, as many of my colleagues and I have observed in the field, that persuasion was typically the hardest to accomplish, because it requires U.S. advisers to see problems from the same perspective as their foreign counterparts, to

The challenge of persuasion is further complicated by traditional military notions of force protection that measure security in inches of glass, body armor and layers of sandbags. If units are not accustomed to managing risk while embedded within foreign cultures, the tendency to focus on physical barriers and overly prescriptive rules can make influencing partners nearly impossible.

avoid "mirror imaging" solutions and to convince people from a completely different culture that a particular behavior lies in their own interests.[62]

The challenge of persuasion is further complicated by traditional military notions of force protection that measure security in inches of glass, body armor and layers of sandbags. If units are not accustomed to managing risk while embedded within foreign cultures, the tendency to focus on physical barriers and overly prescriptive rules can make influencing partners nearly impossible.[63] In the end, achieving the level of training required to thrive in this complex environment demands a willingness to specialize not only in the mission, but also in the specific geographic region where it will be conducted; it requires a major cultural shift in the unit's mindset. The process takes years, not weeks, and goes far beyond what can be taught in

a classroom at a pre-deployment training center. Advisers need to learn firsthand how to navigate the delicate politics of a U.S. embassy country team, not just be given a briefing on the State Department. They must be able to leverage the military professional culture of the partner nation, not just memorize lists of cultural do's and don'ts. They should know how to communicate in the same language as their foreign counterparts, not just recite the words for "hello" and "goodbye."

[Advisers] should know how to communicate in the same language as their foreign counterparts, not just recite the words for "hello" and "goodbye."

Unfortunately, this need to train specifically for light-footprint missions lies at odds with the military's overarching drive for modularity. Since the 1990s, ground forces have been designed to be interchangeable, rapidly deployable organizations that can "plug and play" anywhere in the world, and even the Army's recently unveiled "regionally aligned forces" concept reflects a deep hesitation to specialize. The concept essentially aims to mimic what 7th Special Forces Group does in Latin America with the fundamental building block of modular thinking: a 4,000-man brigade combat team. As a test, an initial brigade has already been aligned with Africa and will conduct various decentralized, small-scale advisory missions there in the coming months.[64] But important differences exist: The regional alignment is temporary and still constrained by the limits of an institutional force generation system that reconstitutes and realigns units every three years.[65] In other words, soldiers in

the unit might be aligned with Africa and conduct a mission there, but after three years, they will rotate and never return, losing the opportunity to expand upon their knowledge. Also, there are no significant changes to the fundamental organization of each brigade, and like all conventional forces the brigades consist of a large number of very junior soldiers led by a small number of midlevel officers and sergeants.[66] This arrangement might be effective for more centralized, large-scale combat operations, but when piecemeal teams of 5, 10 or 20 soldiers are sent to various countries across the African continent, seasoned leaders run out quickly and the resulting lack of maturity or experience becomes a liability on the ground. Nothing will shut down a military engagement program faster than an international incident, and placing young, junior soldiers into isolated, embedded advisory roles with minimal supervision and training can be potentially counterproductive.

Instead, the demands of light-footprint missions suggest the need for some proportion of the military, beyond just the special operations community, to break away from modularity and truly specialize. Rather than "plug and play" building blocks that can go anywhere in the world, policymakers may also need a continuum of smaller-scale, regionally aligned capabilities – a range of specialized tools instead of dozens of gigantic "Swiss Army knives." The possibilities for building this continuum of capabilities are endless, but a few guiding parameters are clear. First, small-scale missions come in different degrees of difficulty according to the level of physical risk, political sensitivity and the nature of the indigenous counterparts involved. For instance, working with irregular armed groups and militias in an area where the U.S. presence is highly unpopular and the risk of enemy infiltration is high would be considered very difficult, while a standard training mission with a foreign infantry unit in a stable country would not. Second, the more sensitive a mission, the greater the degree of specialization

and the more rigorous the selection required for the personnel assigned. Third, within any given country, multiple missions of varying levels of difficulty and with varying partners are likely to be occurring simultaneously, requiring different units to collaborate across bureaucratic boundaries (e.g., civilian contractor, conventional military, State Department, special operations).

One possible institutional solution might be developing a stratified or tiered system of units that specialize in light-footprint missions. This concept already exists within the special operations community to conduct surgical strikes or raids, whereby different levels of capability and specialization (akin to an A team, a B team and a C team) can be assigned to different problem sets. But this capability is largely absent for units that work indirectly to advise and assist foreign partners. Moreover, the dedicated capabilities that do exist are confined to the special operations community. The conventional military lacks any standing adviser units, and very few small-scale "quick reaction force"-type teams (such as the Marine Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team) can easily support light-footprint missions. Yet even a cursory glance at today's security environment suggests that the special operations community cannot handle the full range of small-scale missions alone. (See the appendix for a more detailed discussion of possible tiered capabilities and missions.)

RIGHT ASSIGNMENTS: YOU CAN'T SURGE TRUST

For all its faults, the AFPAK Hands program made an earnest attempt to address the paralyzing criticism that Afghanistan was "not a ten year war, but a one year war fought ten times."[67] By deploying language-capable advisers repeatedly into the country and encouraging them to build long-term relationships, the program aimed to make a disproportionately large impact on the campaign with a very small number of people. As Admiral William McRaven warned at the recent Aspen Security Forum, "You can't surge trust."[68] Real influence

with foreign counterparts, in Afghanistan or elsewhere, can only be developed over many years and repeat assignments. Unfortunately, while service as a foreign adviser is certainly not career-enhancing for most military volunteers, returning to do a second tour with the same counterparts is regarded as even worse, and the institutional pull to maintain competitiveness for promotion proved too strong for many AFPAK Hands.

The program also wisely aimed to take a holistic approach to partnership, embedding advisers not only at the small unit level, but also in other places where they could engage with the Afghan bureaucracy. Ultimately, the challenge of developing security capabilities is a long-term institutional endeavor, and for all the advice and assistance the United States provides to a foreign military unit, the day an exercise or training event ends, the unit's skills begin to atrophy.[69] Unless there is a corresponding effort to address key weaknesses at different levels within the partner nation institutions – among high-level staffs, across various services and within training facilities, leader development or doctrine – the growth of the partner's capacity and legitimacy will inevitably be limited, ebbing and flowing with each passing training event.

Thus, while many special operations and intelligence units may have developed personnel mechanisms that allow the same individuals to deploy repeatedly to build relationships and understanding, without a broader approach this institutional trend may lead to a mirror imaging of its own: The United States will be limited to building boutique commando forces and intelligence units in countries across the world, each dependent on continued American training and resources, lacking sufficient institutions to sustain themselves. To address the issue, the military may need to re-evaluate the incentives for advisory work, foreign languages and overseas duty in support of small-scale missions. For

instance, assignment opportunities may in some cases need to be mission- or country-based instead of installation- or unit-based. Rather than changing duty stations to Fort Bragg or Fort Hood, an officer might be assigned to a specific task force or embassy overseas, learning the language, then spending three or four years overseas or supporting policymakers in Washington. To facilitate these assignments, the rules regarding families and accompanied tours may need to be relaxed to fall more in step with other U.S. government agencies or even the civilian sector, or rotation cycles may need to be changed (e.g., three months deployed, three months home).

These steps may seem drastic, but with the proper incentives and selection mechanisms, the number of volunteers may be surprisingly high. As the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan winds down and the opportunities to deploy decrease dramatically, even those officers who are selected to fill positions within standard combat units may find themselves essentially serving rear detachment duty – preparing for simulated wars at national training centers while dozens of small-scale, real-world missions are being conducted in countries overseas.

VII. CONCLUSION: SYSTEM REBOOT?

To be effective, the light-footprint approach to military intervention and engagement requires a full understanding of capabilities and limitations, a different strategic mindset and the right people on the ground. While small-scale missions are not new, the technology involved, the sheer number and complexity of evolving security challenges, and the collective impact of a long decade of war demand a fresh look at the subject. Despite the best intentions of senior officials, some worry that the frustrations of waging counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan may drive the military bureaucracy to repeat the post-Vietnam years, returning to the status quo of preparing for large conventional wars rather than retooling for smaller ones. Shawn Brimley and Vikram Singh call this a *system reboot*, or a tendency to "purge those military innovations most associated with a campaign that is considered a failure."[70]

Cultural and institutional factors cannot be underestimated. While it is too early to tell which direction the Defense Department is headed, if the revised curriculum of the Army's Command and General Staff College offers any hint, future war will look conspicuously like it did before September 11, 2001. Officers from a recent class discovered that the school's final culmination exercise was focused not on irregular threats, but on planning a deliberate defense against a fictitious tank division attacking with old Soviet tactics.[71] The looming defense budget cuts further complicate matters, as they are likely to greatly intensify the Pentagon's natural institutional tendency to protect large, high-tech, expensive programs, while "squishy," esoteric programs such as language lessons, culture immersion, broadening experiences, advanced education, advisory units and other human capital investments – all invaluable to smaller missions – have little hope of being prioritized alongside traditional core platforms such as fighters, carriers and submarines, particularly when the factories

that build these platforms employ thousands of Americans during difficult economic times.[72] Meanwhile, the bureaucratic processes that drive the way units and people are selected, trained and assigned remain largely unchanged.

While this report likely raises more questions than answers, one thing is clear: Reforming the defense establishment to be more effective at smaller missions will require a concerted, sustained effort by leaders at all levels, both civilians and military. Left unchecked, the state of affairs within the defense establishment may come to resemble the parable of the blind men and the elephant, with doctrine writers, strategists, operators and budget analysts all drawing different lessons from the past decade of war and telling a different story about how the institution should change to remain relevant. Unless speeches and policy documents are backed up by culture, processes, doctrine and strategic clarity, the light footprint will likely remain a niche capability confined to a few fringe military units, not an effective instrument of national policy.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Gates, "Farewell Address" (United States Military Academy, West Point, February 25, 2011).

2. These observations were drawn from a visit with a Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha that was conducting village stability operations in southern Afghanistan during winter 2011. I served as a team leader on the Commander, International Security Assistance Force Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team and frequently embedded with units in Afghanistan, including U.S. special operations and conventional forces, coalition military advisory teams and Afghan National Security Forces at varying stages of readiness.

3. Stewart M. Patrick, "Public Wants Tougher Action in Syria – but Not U.S. Troops," The Internationalist blog on cfr.org, August 27, 2012, http://blogs.cfr.org/patrick/2012/08/27/public-wants-tougher-action-in-syria-but-not-u-s-troops/; and Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Approve of Military Action Against Libya, 47% to 37%," Gallup.com, March 22, 2011, http://www.gallup.com/poll/146738/Americans-Approve-Military-Action-Against-Libya.aspx.

4. The term "bin Laden effect" stems from a conversation with a defense official regarding the "CSI effect," a phenomenon in criminal science in which the exaggerated portrayal of forensic science on popular television shows such as CSI causes juries to expect a higher standard of evidence for convictions.

5. Since 1999, Plan Colombia has cost just over $7 billion, according to the Inter-American Dialogue. See Michael Shifter, "Plan Colombia: A Retrospective," Americas Quarterly (July 26, 2012), http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/3787. Monthly spending peaked at $11.1 billion in Iraq during Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, and exceeded $5.7 billion in Afghanistan during FY 2010, according to the Congressional Research Service. See Congressional Research Service, The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11, RL33110 (March 29, 2011), 25, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf.

6. Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "You Have the Watches, We Have the Time," Newsweek, October 2, 2011.

7. The term "light footprint" has been used in a number of recent books and articles, including David E. Sanger's Confront and Conceal (New York: Random House, 2012) and "Obama Nominees in Step on Light Footprint," The New York Times, January 8, 2013; Leon Wieseltier, "Welcome to the Era of the Light Footprint: Obama finally finds his doctrine," Washington Diarist blog on NewRepublic.com, January 29, 2013, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112205/obama-doctrine-light-footprint-lightweight-thinking#; and Jackson Diehl, "The red flags in Obama's foreign policy," The Washington Post, November 11, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-11-11/opinions/35505521_1_benghazi-foreign-policy-ambassador-chris-stevens.

8. Most U.S. embassies overseas have a small contingent of military officers assigned as defense attachés or security cooperation officers, under the direction of a senior defense official. These offices are typically staffed by specially designated foreign area officers or, in some cases, special operations officers.

9. This paraphrases one of the core ideas in the counterinsurgency manual as described in Chapter 2, "Unity of Effort: Integrating Civilian and Military Activities." See Department of the Army, Counterinsurgency, Field Manual 3-24 (December 2006).

10. The warning that military forces cannot "kill their way to victory" has been used repeatedly by senior defense officials but was first attributed to Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan," Statement to the Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, September 10, 2008, http://osd.dtic.mil/dodgc/olc/docs/testMullen080910.pdf.

11. Interview with a Special Forces officer regarding the village stability program, April 2011.

12. The involvement of U.S. advisers in Colombia, the Philippines, Yemen, Libya and Uganda has been widely reported in the media. See Abigail Hauslohner, "U.S.-backed force in Libya face challenges," The Guardian, November 13, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/13/libya-middleeast; Barbara Starr, "U.S. military official: Special Ops helping gather intel on Libyan militia," Security Clearance blog on CNN.com, October 4, 2012, http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/04/u-s-military-official-special-ops-helping-gather-intel-on-libyan-militia/; Thom Shanker and Rick Gladstone, "Armed U.S. Advisers to Help Fight African Renegade Group," The New York Times, October 15, 2011; Jim Garamone, "U.S. Trainers, Military Cooperation Return to Yemen," Armed Forces Press Service, May 8, 2012, http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=116252; Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Teaming With New Yemen Government on Strategy to Combat Al Qaeda," The New York Times, February 27, 2012; Simon Romero, "Increased U.S. Military Presence in Colombia Could Pose Problems With Neighbors," The New York Times, July 23, 2009; and Wyatt Olson, "US troops see terrorism threat diminish on Philippine island of Mindanao," Stars and Stripes, September 28, 2012, http://www.stripes.com/news/us-troops-see-terrorism-threat-diminish-on-philippine-island-of-mindanao-1.191126.

13. See Anne Gearan and Craig Whitlock, "U.S. looks to effort in Somalia as model for Mali solution," The Washington Post, October 11, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-10-11/world/35502275_1_tuareg-rebels-march-coup-somalia.

14. The Department of Defense (DOD) defines foreign internal defense as "Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism and other threats to security." Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Manual 1-02 (November 2010 as amended through January 2011).

15. DOD defines security force assistance as "The Department of Defense activities that contribute to unified action by the U.S. Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions." Ibid.

16. DOD defines unconventional warfare as "Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow a

government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in a denied area." Ibid.

17. DOD defines counterterrorism as "Actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks." Ibid.

18. For an example where allied special operations forces have taken the lead because of superior access to local security actors, consider the involvement of special operations forces from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in Libya. See the Institute for the Study of War, "The Libyan Revolution," November 2011, http://www.understandingwar.org/press-media/webcast/libyan-revolution.

19. The negative effects of rushing the growth of security forces have in Afghanistan been well documented. See Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Afghan security force's rapid expansion comes at a cost as readiness lags," *The Washington Post,* October 20, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-10-20/world/35498594_1_afghan-security-afghan-soldiers-afghan-forces.

20. Intervention in El Salvador lasted nearly 13 years, from 1979 to 1991, while the United States has been offering significant military advice and assistance to Colombia and the Philippines since the 1980s, with a more robust commitment starting in 1999 and 2001, respectively.

21. Stanley A. McChrystal, "It Takes a Network," *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2011), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/22/it_takes_a_network?page=0,2.

22. Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).

23. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994).

24. Andrew Bacevich, "Where Petraeus let us down," *New York Daily News,* November 25, 2012, http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/petraeus-article-1.1206013.

25. Stephen Watts, Caroline Baxter, Molly Dunigan and Christopher Rizzi, "The Uses and Limits of Small-Scale Military Interventions" (RAND Corporation, 2012), 27-45. This study took an alternate approach to defining what minimalist, small-scale intervention means and set the maximum size of the foreign military presence at two advisers for every 1,000 local civilians. This is one-tenth of the so-called "Quinlivan ratio," the oft-quoted minimum ratio of security forces to civilian population used in counterinsurgency literature. The researchers' rationale was that with less than one-tenth of the required security forces on hand, the foreign personnel would be forced to work through locals instead of attempting to take the lead or provide security themselves.

26. See, for example, Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, "How Insurgencies End" (RAND Corporation, 2010).

27. Patrick B. Johnston and Anoop K. Sarbahi, "The Impact of US Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan," January 3, 2013, http://patrickjohnston.info/materials/drones.pdf.

28. Joshua Foust, "Understanding the Strategic and Tactical Considerations of Drone Strikes" (American Security Project, January 2013), 10, http://americansecurityproject.org/featured-items/2013/understanding-the-strategic-and-tactical-considerations-of-drone-strikes/.

29. See Patrick B. Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security,* 36 no. 4 (Spring 2012), 47-79; and Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security,* 36 no. 4 (Spring 2012), 9-46.

30. Interview with Andrew Krepinevich, December 2012.

31. Bryan Price discusses the decline in effectiveness over time of decapitation campaigns in "Removing the Devil You Know: Unraveling the Puzzle Behind Decapitation Effectiveness and Terrorist Duration" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, 2009). See also Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies,* 18 no. 4 (December 2009), 718-755.

32. Interview with Audrey Cronin, October 2012.

33. See David Kilcullen and Andrew McDonald Exum, "Death From Above, Outrage Down Below," *The New York Times,* May 17, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/opinion/17exum.html?pagewanted=all.

34. For an excellent study of the challenges of promoting stability in the absence of state institutions, see Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security,* 31 no. 3 (Winter 2006/07), 74-106.

35. Richard Bennet, "Indirect Military Power: Military Effectiveness and U.S. Security Force Assistance" (Ph.D. dissertation, King's College London, forthcoming). Emphasis in the original.

36. Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

37. Interview with Richard Bennet, November 2012.

38. For a detailed discussion of the difficulties of civilian-military relations in irregular conflicts, see Patrick M. Cronin, "Irregular Warfare: New Challenges for Civil-Military Relations," Strategic Forum No. 234 (Institute for National Strategic Studies, October 2008), http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA488455.

39. Astri Suhrke, "Anthony Hyman Memorial Lecture" (University of London, London, 2010).

40. Watts et al., "The Uses and Limits of Small-Scale Military Interventions," 32.

41. Otto Kreisher, "DoD Too Cautious: 'We Have To Be Willing To Fail,' Says Flournoy," AOL Defense blog on AOL.com, December 12, 2012, http://defense.aol.com/2012/12/12/dod-too-cautious-we-have-to-be-willing-to-fail-says-flournoy/.

42. For information on the Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team, see https://ronna-afghan.harmonieweb.org/CAAT/Pages/Public-Portal.aspx.

43. See Bernard Lewis, "License to Kill: Usama bin Ladin's Declaration of Jihad," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1998), or for complete original text,

see "Osama Bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad Against Americans," *Milestone Documents in World History*, Salem Press, http://salempress.com/store/pdfs/bin_Laden.pdf.

44. Philip Carl Salzman, "The Middle East's Tribal DNA," *The Middle East Quarterly,* 15 no. 1 (Winter 2008), 23-33.

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46. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37.

47. See Heiko Meiertons, *The Doctrines of U.S. Security Policy: An Evaluation Under International Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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49. Leon Panetta, "Dean Acheson Lecture" (United States Institute of Peace, Washington, June 28, 2012).

50. Robert W. Komer, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam" (RAND Corporation, 1972), 14.

51. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (January 2012), 3.

52. See Sean D. Naylor, "New SOCOM boss touts 'indirect' action forces," *Army Times,* October 3, 2011, http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/10/army-socom-boss-touts-indirect-action-forces-100211w/; Christopher Lamb, "The Future of Special Operations Forces," Statement to the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, July 11, 2012; Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress*, RS21048 (Congressional Research Service, February 6, 2013), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS21048.pdf; and Linda Robinson, "The Future of Special Operations: Beyond Kill and Capture," *Foreign Affairs,* 91 no. 6 (November/December 2012).

53. Interview with LTG Charlie Cleveland, September 2012.

54. This comment was originally made by then-Major Roger Carstens, the officer in charge of the Special Forces Detachment Commanders' Course in 2002, and is printed with his permission.

55. See memorandum from chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Service Chiefs, December 14, 2009.

56. See also Afghan Hands Concept Briefing by United States Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Afghan Hands Management Element, August 14, 2010.

57. See "Lament of an AfPak Hand: I've been Abandoned and Misused in Kandahar," The Best Defense blog on ForeignPolicy.com, July 7, 2011, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/07/lament_of_an_afpak_hand_ive_been_abandoned_and_misused_in_kandahar; Mark Thompson, "Converting the Taliban," Battleland blog on Time.com, October 19, 2012, http://nation.time.com/2012/10/19/converting-the-taliban/; and Gary Owen, "A Hand Speaks: A Response to Major Brown from the Kabul Cable," People's Republic of Snarkistan blog, October 26, 2012, http://www.republicofsnarkistan.net/2012/10/26/a-hand-speaks-a-response-to-major-brown-from-the-kabul-cable/?replytocom=1443.

58. See Terrence K. Kelly, Nora Bensahel and Olga Oliker, "Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan: Identifying Lessons for Future Efforts" (RAND Corporation, 2011).

59. The OSS Assessment Staff, *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (New York: Rinehart and Co, 1948).

60. Sebastian Sprenger, "Army Crafting Plans for Quick Reversals of End-Strength, Equipment Cuts," The Insider blog on InsideDefense.com, December 9, 2011, http://defensenewsstand.com/NewsStand-General/The-INSIDER-Free-Article/army-crafting-plans-for-quick-reversals-of-end-strength-equipment-cuts/menu-id-716.html.

61. Gates, "Farewell Address."

62. Interview with Nick Armstrong, October 2012.

63. The challenge of navigating personal security concerns and influencing foreign military counterparts is probably best summarized by T.E. Lawrence: "Remain in touch with your [counterpart] as constantly and unobtrusively as you can. Live with him, that at meal times and at audiences you may be naturally with him in his tent. Formal visits to give advice are not so good as the constant dropping of ideas in casual talk." See T.E. Lawrence, "The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence," *The Arab Bulletin,* August 20, 1917, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_27_Articles_of_T.E._Lawrence.

64. For a brief summary of the regionally aligned forces concept, see "Realigning regional forces aimed at preventing future wars," Association of the United States Army News, January 2013, http://www.ausa.org/publications/ausanews/archives/2013/01/Pages/Realigningregionalforcesaimedatpreventingfuturewars.aspx.

65. The Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) system is changing to two years from three years, and initial plans for regional forces are to preserve ARFORGEN and rotate soldiers every two cycles (four years).

66. Interviews with several staff officers from Army G-3/5/7, November 2012.

67. See Joshua Foust, "How Short-Term Thinking Makes the U.S. Worse at Fighting Wars," TheAtlantic.com, March 31, 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/how-short-term-thinking-makes-the-us-worse-at-fighting-wars/255292/.

68. See David Trulio, "You Can't Surge Trust – Insights from the Opening of the Aspen Security Forum," Security Debrief blog of the Homeland Security Policy Institute, July 27, 2012, http://securitydebrief.com/2012/07/27/you-cant-surge-trust-insights-from-the-opening-of-the-aspen-security-forum/.

69. The need for institutional programs to prevent the atrophy of tactical training was highlighted by COL Mark Mitchell, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, during an interview in November 2012.

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72. See Fred Kaplan, "What Happened to a Leaner, Meaner Military? The Pentagon budget again calls for more pricey, big-war weapons than we need," Slate.com, February 13, 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2012/02/_2013_pentagon_budget_why_so_much_spending_on_big_war_weapons_.html.

APPENDIX: FEWER SWISS ARMY KNIVES, MORE TOOLBOXES

Figure 1 illustrates one possible concept for aligning some military forces to the range of possible light-footprint missions. For the sake of discussion, the types of missions have been divided into high, medium and low based on the political sensitivity, level of risk and the status of indigenous partners (e.g., more irregular groups are more difficult to engage). For higher categories of risk, the need for specialized selection and training increases, but the demand signal also decreases. In other words, there are likely to be far fewer high-risk, sensitive missions than there are low-risk, standard missions, and the number of forces assigned to each level would mirror this. The biggest gaps occur at the high end, where special operations forces have not fully adopted a stratified, tiered system for indirect, "special warfare" missions with indigenous partners, and at the low end, where conventional forces rely on ad hoc adviser teams, individual augmentees or the new regional aligned forces concept to meet demand. Several options are possible on the low end, including:

- Creating a standing adviser corps, as proposed by John Nagl.*

- Creating adviser battalions or companies (manned similarly to the Ranger Battalion, as a follow-on assignment for high-performing conventional personnel) aligned with each Special Forces group. These units would be heavily staffed by both combat arms personnel (to assist in training select foreign conventional militaries) and individuals with occupational specialties and experiences outside those of the standard Special Forces A Team (e.g., logistics, administration, field artillery, aviation, senior staff officers, regional specialists).

- Permanently aligning select conventional units with a geographically proximate special operations unit (to facilitate combined training and operations), with adjustments made to the conventional unit's manning, organization and equipment to facilitate smaller-scale, distributed adviser operations (e.g., more senior officer and noncommissioned officer billets, more enablers, enhanced communications).

Levels of Risk

HIGH

These interventions are so politically sensitive that no U.S. military personnel can be seen participating on the ground, and typically no embassy is present in the country. Air support, humanitarian aid and other assistance may be involved, but the core mission – working with local, indigenous forces – must be undertaken by a combination of third-party allied nation(s), covert intelligence operatives and/or civilian contractors. If U.S. military personnel do participate in these types of missions, they would fall under the control of the intelligence community via special authorities and their presence would not be publicly disclosed. This type of intervention might involve supporting an insurgent movement against an oppressive regime (called "unconventional warfare" in military doctrine) or training for security forces in a country where an overt U.S. presence would cause too much political fallout. The task of training indigenous forces in this environment is very complex and may involve vetting forces heavily infiltrated by terrorist groups or organized criminal networks. These missions necessitate a rigorous selection and training process and would be suited for specially designated and organized elements within the special operations community.

*See John A. Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps" (Center for a New American Security, June 2007), http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/Nagl_AdvisoryCorp_June07.pdf.

FIGURE 1: FROM MODULAR UNITS TO REGIONAL ALIGNMENT, TIERED UNITS AND SPECIALIZED CAPABILITIES
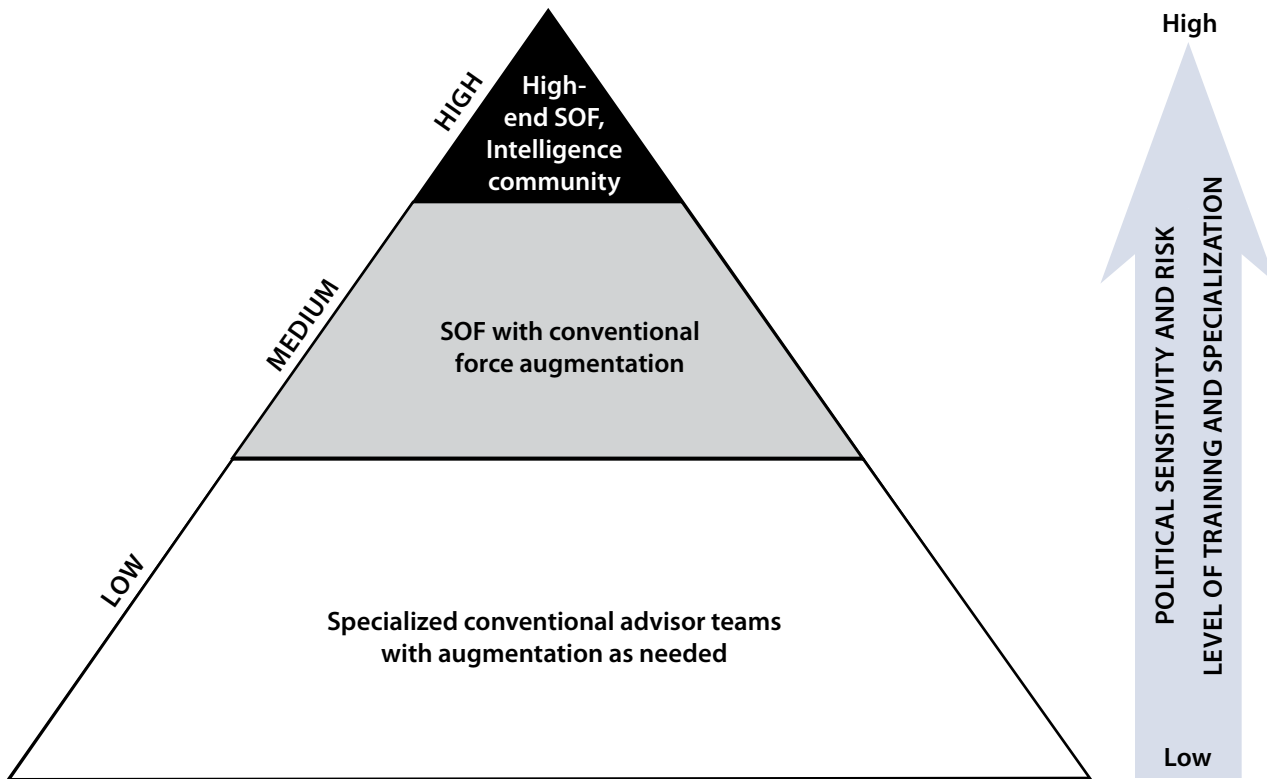
Source: Center for a New American Security

MEDIUM

These interventions are politically sensitive, but the existence of U.S. troops on the ground is acknowledged (though minimized as much as possible). The security environment is still very unstable, with an active insurgency or terrorist group in the immediate area where the mission is to be conducted. The task of training and advising indigenous forces remains relatively complex, perhaps because some type of highly specialized instruction is required, there is a possibility of enemy infiltration or compromised leadership among the ranks and/or the forces to be trained are highly irregular, such as militias and local village defense groups. Selecting and vetting indigenous personnel is still a critical task. Special operations forces are particularly well-suited for these types of missions, often with assistance from contractors, allied special forces and conventional enablers (e.g., logistics, medical). Depending on guidance established by the embassy or consulate, U.S. military personnel may be confined largely to fixed bases or permitted to conduct operations freely with their indigenous partners. Examples include Colombia, the Philippines, Libya after Moammar Gadhafi, Mali and Yemen.

LOW

These operations are the least politically sensitive, but in the event of a high-profile incident (such as a criminal act or major cultural offense) can still become extremely charged. U.S. troops are openly acknowledged to be present on the ground, usually in training, advisory or support roles. The security

environment is either totally stable (no active conflict) or relatively stable, with isolated pockets of violence or lawlessness. The indigenous forces to be trained are relatively well-established, with minimal threat of enemy infiltration. These missions might also be conducted with senior-level staff or in more secure areas (e.g., training institutions, headquarters) within a country where front-line units are still engaged in heavy combat. Moreover, the training usually involves basic, conventional military tasks such as marksmanship, first aid, planning or administration. Conventional forces, if organized into dedicated, standing adviser units and manned with sufficiently senior, experienced personnel, can excel in these roles. Examples include Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.

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