OCTOBER 2025

FOREIGN AREA OFFICER

A PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN FOR ARMY FAOS

HORIZONS

THE ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF THE ARMY FOREIGN AREA OFFICER ASSOCIATION

Army Foreign Area Officer Association

The Army Foreign Area Officer Association (AFAOA) is proud to announce the publication of *Horizons*, the academic journal of AFAOA. Horizons fits into the third part of the association's mission where we hope to strengthen the community of Army FAOs worldwide through academic rigger and discourse. Horizons is one leg of AFAOA's educational stool for its members. The other two legs are the bi-annual newsletter, which is designed to be more informative about the ongoing, past, present, and future of the Functional Area 48 (FA48) Foreign Area Officer. The third leg is the Army FAO Handbook. This handbook is designed for all Army FAOs, with a specific focus on new Army FAOs. The handbook will cover all areas of Army FAO: entrance to FA48, the training pipeline, assignment guidance, and career and spouse advice. If you are interested in helping the association in any of these three areas, we always welcome writers and editors. Please get in touch with the association president at armyfaoassociation@gmail.com.

The Army Foreign Area Officer Association is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to fostering and furthering the Army's Foreign Area Officer functional area 48 in achieving Army strategic objectives.

The goals of the association are:

Support the U.S. Army proponent office for Functional Area 48 (Foreign Area Officer) by advocating programs and activities in support of the functional area.

Preserve and foster a spirit of mentorship and fellowship among military and civilian persons whose past or current duties affiliate them with the Foreign Area Officer functional area.

Strengthen the community of Foreign Area Officers, enhance the study and practice of FAOs, and provide a forum to recognize excellence and the contributions of those in the community.

WELCOME FROM OUR EDITOR

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer Association's (AFAOA) professional journal, *Horizons*. I am deeply grateful to the authors, editorial team, and AFAOA Officers for doing the lion's share of the work in putting this together.

The articles in this edition of *Horizons* are wide-ranging in both topic and geographical region, as befits professional military officers serving in complex environments across the globe. At first glance there may not appear to be a unifying theme, but the skills unique to FAOs - intercultural competence, language proficiency, and regional expertise - are embedded in each article. As my haphazard uniform in the photo attests, sometimes one has to make do with what it is at hand, and adaptation is another hallmark of Army FAOs. As U.S. foreign policy tools undergo a major transition, the ability of FAOs to use these skills to develop and maintain relationships with host nation and third country interlocutors is more vital than ever.

I look forward to future submissions for our next edition. If you are interested in publishing an article or wish to join the editorial team, please send an email to armyfaoassociation@gmail.com.

I wish you all the best on your FAO journey.

Scott Womack
48J (retired)
Editor

HORIZONS GUIDANCE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Horizons: The Journal of the Army Foreign Area Officer Association's goal is to highlight the FAO community's analytical and writing skills while fostering a healthy exchange of ideas, thorough editing is a must.

We are looking for original articles by FAOs past and present on topics of interest to political-military practitioners at the operational and strategic levels. These can address a variety of issues including but not limited to the future of the FAO Functional Area; regional affairs past and present; the effects of security cooperation on war plans, strategy, and national security ends; an analysis of the future or past roles of an attaché or security cooperation officer; or historical pieces concerning the functional area. The intent is for the articles to offer the in-depth analysis and evaluation that are the hallmark of FAO's. The intent is not to rehash FAO training pipeline or In-Region Training personal experiences. Thus, authors should go beyond what happened but also provide the context of why it matters and what the U.S. Government might do about it. There is no set length but articles of at least ten pages are ideal. Submissions should be single-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font and follow the Chicago Manual of Style format. If the paper has copious citations use endnotes for these and reserve footnotes for explanatory information. Include a separate one paragraph biography. Relevant photos and other images are welcome. A team of AFAOA editors will review the articles and may offer suggestions on them prior to publication.

Submit questions and articles subject to the Horizon's Editor at: armyfaoassociation@gmail.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Please send any letters to the editor in the format mentioned above to:

Subject: Horizons - Letter to Editor

To; armyfaoassociation@gmail.com

JOIN AFAOA:

www.armyfaoassociation.com or

CONTENTS

Foreign Area Officer Discussions

In-Region Training Discussions

Strategic Discussions

Writing from the Horizon: The Strategic Imperative of FAO Scholarship in Shaping Army Decisions

Colonel Matthew Kopp, US Army, 48J

In November 1922, Truman Smith, a young US Army military attaché in Berlin, conducted an interview that would echo through history. Meeting a then-obscure Adolf Hitler in a shabby Munich apartment, Smith described him as a "marvelous demagogue" with "immense power over the mob." His report, the first American assessment of Hitler, warned of the rising Nazi movement's anti-Semitism, nationalist fervor, and dictatorial ambitions.[1] Smith's dispatches from Germany, including later reports on German rearmament and Luftwaffe capabilities, were not mere observations—they were strategic arguments that shaped U.S. military planning and alerted Washington to the growing threat of Nazi Germany.[2] Smith's clarity and foresight underscore the timeless truth that the written word from foreign locales can steer the course of history. Smith's candid reports, though prescient, drew criticism for allegedly overstating German capabilities to spur U.S. preparedness, a professional risk that underscores the courage required to write truth from over the horizon of your Army's headquarters. For today's Army Foreign Area Officers (FAOs), Smith's legacy helps frame the importance of wielding the pen to inform and influence national security decisions.

FAOs, operating at the nexus of military professionalism, regional expertise, and policy acumen, are uniquely positioned to inform Army decisions through their writing. Their reports, analyses, and debates bridge operational theaters and strategic headquarters, shaping policy and fostering international partnerships. This article argues that writing and written debate are indispensable for FAOs and the military profession,

writing and written debate are indispensable for FAOs and the military profession

shaping strategic outcomes, fostering critical thinking, and building credibility in multinational contexts. Drawing on historical examples, the modern demands of multinational environments, and the Army's renewed focus on professional writing through the Harding Project, this inaugural issue of Horizons calls FAOs to view writing as a strategic weapon and a professional duty.

Writing from over the Horizon to Shape the Core

Military writing born of experience distant from the castle, imperial capital, or nation's borders has long informed

critical decisions, often with profound strategic impact. From ancient strategists to modern attachés, those on the frontiers have used the written word to clarify, persuade, and influence. Thucydides, in his History of the Peloponnesian War, chronicled the interplay of power and diplomacy from the edges of the Greek world, offering lessons that shaped Athenian policy and continue to guide strategic thought.[3] Similarly, Sun Tzu's The Art of War, penned from the periphery of Chinese states in the rising state of Wu, distilled principles of strategy and communication that remain timeless.[4]

In the 19th century, British officers in colonial outposts like India and Africa wrote detailed dispatches to London, published in journals like the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*. These reports debated tactics, cultural dynamics, and imperial policy, grounding Britain's global strategy in local realities.[5] Notwithstanding the outmoded colonial context, their collective insights formed an important corpus of influential analyses. In the American context, General William T. Sherman's letters to President Lincoln during the Civil War were not just operational updates but strategic arguments for total war, influencing the Union's approach to the conflict.[6]

LTC Truman Smith's work in Germany during the interwar years exemplifies this tradition. As a military attaché in Berlin from 1935 to 1938, Smith reported on German rearmament, leveraging connections with figures like Werner von Blomberg, the German Minister of War, and arranging Charles Lindbergh's inspections of the Luftwaffe. His lucid reports provided critical intelligence on German military capabilities, influencing U.S. preparedness for World War II.[7] Similarly, General Joseph Stilwell's dispatches from China during World War II, often critical of Allied efforts, forced Washington to confront logistical and diplomatic challenges in the China-Burma-India theater, shaping resource allocation.[8] These examples highlight a recurring theme: military professionals serving over the horizon—whether in ancient Greece, colonial India, or interwar Germany—have used writing to bridge local realities and central authority. Army Foreign Area Officers inherit this mantle, adapting it to the demands of modern diplomacy and defense.

Bridging Diplomacy and Defense

Army Foreign Area Officers, particularly those serving as military attachés, inherit this tradition of writing from over the horizon. FAOs blend regional expertise, military professionalism, and policy experience, serving as the Army's eyes and ears in foreign capitals. Their written products inform and influence U.S. policy and military strategy while enhancing international partnerships. This role demands more than technical reporting. FAOs must navigate complex cultural and political landscapes, translating local nuances into actionable insights. As Samuel Huntington noted in *The*

Soldier and the State, military professionalism requires balancing technical expertise with broader societal responsibilities, including clear communication.[9] For FAOs, writing is a professional duty that joins diplomatic and military spheres, building trust with allies and informing U.S. decisions.

LTC Truman Smith's career as an attaché illustrates this bridge. His reports on German military developments, including his innovative use of Lindbergh to gather Luftwaffe intelligence, provided Washington with a clearer picture of Nazi capabilities.[10] These efforts required diplomatic finesse, cultural understanding, and strategic clarity—hallmarks of FAO work. During the Cold War, FAOs serving as attachés in Moscow or Beijing continued this tradition, providing insights into Soviet and Chinese military capabilities that shaped U.S. defense postures and arms control negotiations. Today, FAOs analyze Russian intentions in Eastern Europe, Chinese activities in the Indo-Pacific, and Iranian proxies in the Middle East, furthering this legacy.

The modern operational environment demands that FAOs wield their pens to pierce the "fog of war,"

Writing in an Information-Rich, Polarizing World

The modern operational environment demands that FAOs wield their pens to pierce the "fog of war," which Clausewitz described as the uncertainty that clouds decision-making in conflict.[11] This fog is now thickened by information overload and multinational complexities. It requires FAOs to provide clarity and credibility through their writing. In the US Revolutionary War, General Nathanael Greene exemplified this skill, using detailed letters to coordinate with French allies and persuade civilian leaders, ensuring strategic alignment despite chaotic conditions and the lack of clear information.[12] FAOs today play a similar role, distilling complex regional dynamics into clear, actionable recommendations for Army leaders, interagency partners, and multinational coalitions.

The information age exacerbates these challenges. FAOs face a deluge of open-source intelligence, social media, and competing narratives. As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella observes in Hit Refresh, effective leaders navigate information overload by blending data-driven insights with human empathy, a skill FAOs mirror in their authoritative, regionally grounded analyses.[13] Even advanced AI tools, while adept at processing data, cannot replicate the human judgment FAOs apply to deciphering cultural subtext in negotiations or building trust with foreign partners; skills honed through immersive regional experience.[14] As Eliot Cohen argues, military professionals must shape strategic debates through public and

professional discourse, a role FAOs are uniquely suited to fulfill.[15] By publishing in Horizons, FAOs ensure Army decisions reflect ground truths, countering both information overload and the limits of technology with human insight.

The Harding Project and Horizons: A Renewed Call for Professional Writing

The Army's renewed emphasis on professional writing, driven by General Randy George's Harding Project, provides a powerful platform for FAOs to amplify their voices. Named after General Edwin F. Harding, who revitalized Army publications in the mid-20th century, the Harding Project encourages soldiers to write, debate, and publish on critical issues, from tactics to strategy.[16] Horizons, the AFAOA's journal, is a direct outgrowth of this initiative, offering a dedicated forum for FAOs to address operational and strategic challenges.

Horizons, the AFAOA's journal, is a direct outgrowth of this initiative, offering a dedicated forum for FAOs to address operational and strategic challenges.

Unlike external publications, *Horizons* is an internal crucible where FAOs can debate tough issues that might include countering Chinese influence in Africa, stabilizing the Middle East, or navigating great power competition.

By publishing in Horizons, FAOs contribute to the Harding Project's goal of fostering intellectual rigor and critical thinking. As General George has emphasized, professional writing hones the ability to think clearly and communicate effectively—skills essential for leadership in complex environments.[17] For FAOs, this is especially critical, as their written work builds credibility with allies, informs policymakers, and shapes the Army's global approach.

Writing as a Strategic Weapon

FAOs must view writing as a strategic weapon and a professional duty. FAO writing can influence resource allocation, strengthen partnerships, and deter adversaries. Churchill's wartime memoranda rallied allies and clarified strategy, and LTC Truman Smith's reports warned of Hitler's rise and German rearmament, both demonstrating the power of the pen to steer history.[18, 19]

This call to action is threefold:

- Engage in Written Debate: Use Horizons to debate critical issues, from hybrid warfare to partner capacity building. These discussions sharpen strategic thinking and ensure Army decisions are grounded in reality.
- Publish with Purpose: Writing for external audiences—think tanks, academic journals, or policy forums—builds FAO credibility and amplifies Army perspectives. Internal publications like Horizons

- foster candid discussions that drive institutional change.
- Mentor the Next Generation: Senior FAOs must encourage junior officers to write, sharing lessons from their experiences. By fostering a culture of scholarship, FAOs ensure the Army remains a learning organization.

Writing is not a distraction but an extension of operational duties. Just as Truman Smith's dispatches shaped U.S. strategy, FAO writing today can steer the Army through great power competition, hybrid threats, and multinational operations.

Conclusion

The inaugural issue of Horizons marks a new chapter in the AFAOA's commitment to professional excellence. It is a call to pens for FAOs to shape the Army's future through written scholarship. From Thucydides to Truman Smith, history teaches that those serving over the horizon have a unique vantage point to inform and influence. FAOs, with their regional expertise, policy experience, and military professionalism, are the modern inheritors of this tradition. In an era of information overload and geopolitical complexity, FAO writing is a strategic imperative. By engaging in debate, publishing with purpose, and mentoring the next generation, FAOs can ensure the Army remains agile, informed, and credible in multinational contexts. Horizons, supported by the Harding Project, is the crucible where these ideas will be forged. Sharpen your quills and send your dispatch to lengthen our horizon.

Endnotes:

1. Smith, Truman. *Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith*. Edited by Robert Hessen. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984, 67–69.
2. Smith, Truman. "Lindbergh and the Luftwaffe." *American Mercury* 82 (April 1956): 93–97.
3. Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner. London: Penguin Classics, 1972.
4. Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
5. Strachan, Hew. *The Politics of the British Army*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
6. Sherman, William T. *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman*. New York: Library of America, 1990.
7. Wedemeyer, Albert C. *Wedemeyer Reports!* New York: Henry Holt, 1958, 112–115.
8. Stilwell, Joseph W. *The Stilwell Papers*. Edited by Theodore H. White. New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948.
9. Huntington, Samuel P. The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.
10. Smith, Truman. Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith. Edited by Robert Hessen. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984, 123–130.
11. Clausewitz, Carl von. On War. Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, 119–121.
12. Greene, Nathanael. The Papers of General Nathanael Greene. Edited by Richard K. Showman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, Vol. 2, 123–130.
13. Nadella, Satya. Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone. New York: Harper Business, 2017, 105–110.
14. Russell, Stuart. Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control. New York: Viking, 2019, 156–160.

Matt Kopp, Colonel USA, Sub-Saharan FAO

End notes continued:

15. Cohen, Eliot A. Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime. New York: Free Press, 2002, 208–210.
16. George, Randy A. “The Harding Project: Renewing Professional Writing in the Army.” Army News Service, October 2023.
17. George, Randy A. “The Harding Project: Renewing Professional Writing in the Army.” Army News Service, October 2023.
18. Churchill, Winston S. Their Finest Hour. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.
19. Smith, Truman. Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith. Edited by Robert Hessen. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984, 45–50.

COL Matthew Kopp is an Army Foreign Area Officer with regional specializations in Africa and Latin America. He has served on five continents in a variety of country team and staff assignments. He earned a BA from the University of Florida, an MA from the Naval Postgraduate School, and a PhD from the University of Georgia. He is a graduate of the Guatemalan Army High Strategic Studies War College and the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies Advanced Strategic Planning and Policy Program. His research centers on strategic decision making, regional institutions, and human rights. He is Vice President of the US Army Foreign Area Officer Association.

Overcoming FAO Traps

Lieutenant Colonel Andrus W. Chaney, US Army

As the Army Foreign Area Officer Association (AFAOA) embarked upon its inaugural academic journal, the founders debated the scope of the journal. One of the biggest fears was the writers would rehash arguments about improving the FAO training pipeline, discuss how to improve or change FAO language training, or even worse, limit their discussions to their first-person experiences that FAOs write in the vacuums of their personalities, time, and location(s). Then, the group had a longer discussion about which level of security cooperation/assistance articles should be addressed in the journal. Lastly, the board wholeheartedly agreed that the sole focus of the journal should be on how Army FAOs support the Army's mission.

I have often said if a FAO does not have an opinion, then they likely are not a very good FAO.

I have often said if a FAO does not have an opinion, then they likely are not a very good FAO. I have also often said if a FAO has too many opinions then they are likely not a very good FAO. One of the many purposes of the association's academic journal is to direct the future of the functional area. It is to inform, opine without repercussions, and highlight future potential.

During the discussion about the purpose of the AFAOA academic journal, we were lucky to have several FAOs from my first observations. These FAOs discussed this topic and, therefore, there were dissenting opinions to the points made above. One FAO argued that a "…bit of rehashing the FAO training pipeline might be worthwhile to release necessarily cyclic steam with the younger writers. I think it is also key here to capture historically what is happening with the branch through these articles. I think we should orient higher and then let the academic board chop on submissions. We are not looking for someone's IRT report here: put that in the bi-annual newsletter which should be more about the functional area's past, current, and future."

As I participated, listened, disagreed, agreed, and pontificated on the purpose of the Army FAO Association's academic journal I thought my first contribution should be an enclosure I wrote to a white paper to the FAO General Officer Steering Committee (GOSC) in 2023 that never was fully distributed for many reasons. I wrote the following article just after I departed the Human Resources Command (HRC) serving almost three years as the FAO Branch Chief, the longest a FAO has ever served in that position. During my three years at HRC, I continuously observed and

heard some of the same arguments, most of which were focused on an individual perspective and lacked a holistic FAO perspective. Few FAOs understand anything outside of their Area of Concentration (AOC). As my time at HRC came to closure I grabbed my penciled list of post it notes stuck on my cubicle wall, of which I had labeled FAO traps.

I offer these traps to the community so that we can move on from most of them, further investigate some, and focus our functional area's efforts on key and specific areas to improve our profession. I cannot count the number of meetings I have been in where one of the following 29 FAO traps has derailed progress. I hope my discussion of them helps our newest generation, and perhaps our older generation, overcome a personal experience or obstacle with one of the FAO traps. I also hope highlighting these traps allows our members to move forward from the traps and focus more on specific areas for improvement. Eliminating rabbit holes is a personal passion of mine. I hope my FAO traps article assists in doing so.

Eliminating rabbit holes is a personal passion of mine.

What is a FAO Trap?

I define a FAO trap as an area where a FAO's experience creates a bias towards a FAO area and, therefore, the FAO then proceeds to try to correct the area to overcome their experience. Other FAO traps are inherent to being a FAO and any systematic changes the functional area has made. Overall, FAO Traps are FAO obstacles, most of which all FAOs will experience while being a FAO. Most of these are not new, some go back to 1907, and almost all of them, if you asked a group of FAOs, would have a difference of opinion. Almost all of those differences of opinion are because each Army officer comes to the FAO functional area with differences (family, age, career goals), and because of those differences, every Army FAO goes through the training pipeline similarly but differently. Therefore, if you asked a hundred Army FAOs their opinion of the FAO training pipeline, you'd get 100 different opinions. Those 100 opinions are captured in my FAO Traps.

Language

For all FAOs, language is pre-determined based on their prior skills, the officer's Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB), and their preferences during the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP). However, because of these determiners, how a FAO conducts language training, or if they do not, creates multiple biases and issues within their AOC. One of these biases is true, but most are perpetuated myths.

1. The State Department's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) trains language(s) better than the Defense Language Institute (DLI). This trap is often used to justify consolidating the FAO

pipeline in the National Capitol Region (NCR). This is likely true, at least in the speaking portion. However, FSI costs significantly more than DLI Monterey or Washington (3x), it has limited capacity to absorb Army FAO language requirements, and FAOs who go to FSI struggle to pass the DLPT upon completion, as they are not taught it during class. The Army will likely never move its language training in mass to FSI for multiple reasons, mainly because of the financial costs.

2. The Army can reduce PCSs by doing all language training in the NCR. This trap is often used by FAOs who did language training in the NCR, attended FSI, or were assigned niche languages such as Turkish, Vietnamese, or Serbian-Croatian. These FAOs must learn that language training through DLI Washington is done differently and costs significantly more. Having most of the prominent languages moved (again) from DLI- Monterey to Washington would double the Army's budget for FAO language training and likely result in fewer training opportunities. In a resource-constrained environment, doing so would negate the overall attempt at reducing FAO training costs for the Army.

3. FAOs do not graduate DLI with a 3/3/2. This trap is used by FAOs who are polyglots or prolific language speakers or senior Army officials who encounter a native speaker and then later work with a DLI graduate. Only some people can translate for the Secretary of Defense, and we should understand that DLI does an excellent job of taking a non-speaker to a speaker within a short time. In 2022, as the HRC Branch Chief I collected the stats of this trap, and around 45%+ of FAOs were graduating DLI with a 3/3/2 or 1+. The other 54% were graduating at the 2/2/1+ level or higher, and very few FAOs a year (single digits on one hand) were failing language training. Compared to the rest of the Army, FAOs have the language skills we require.

4. If a FAO fails DLI, they can still self-study and achieve the 2/2/1+ standard. As someone who almost failed out of DLI-Monterey, I find this trap utterly false and only applies to a few distinct FAOs. DLI is the most intensive language training a FAO will ever get; if they cannot do it there, they likely will only achieve a 2/2/1+ if they are a polyglot type. However, in that case, most polyglots would not fail DLI anyway. Army FAOs, as a functional area, are soft in this area. U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) allows an officer to fail the Q-course and returns them to their basic branch. FAOs should not be afraid to do this either for our officers that fail language training. Those officers who fail DLI may not have the heart to be a FAO. Those at DLI Monterey have the opportunity for some retraining, which does not cost additional funds; those in Washington do not. Either way, a FAO should only move on to the next training phase if they have achieved the minimum training standard.

5. My language does not matter, and I will never serve in the country where it spoken.

48Ps and 48Es usually mention this trap, and it has some validity. Only some 48E or 48P Turkish, Vietnamese, Thai, and Serbian-Croatian speakers serve in those countries (outside of IRT). I surmise less than 50%, but HRC could research and get an actual percentage. This issue creates a huge morale challenge within those two AOCs between the "haves" and "have nots." The haves are the Russian, Chinese, and Korean speakers, and the have-nots are the rest.

6. We should not be in classes with enlisted members and learn numbers we will not use. FAOs usually say this myth have a low DLPT score or struggled to finish DLI Monterey. Most FAOs who attended language training at DLI-Monterey before 2010 will complain of being in classes with enlisted members suffering through the numbers drill and not speaking enough. Most do not know that this changed to almost all FAOs being in an all-officer class with more FAO focus. This change raised the cost of language training for DLI, and thus the Army, and it should be investigated if we are trying to reduce FAO training costs. The FAO community imposed this cost on DLI, but we have yet to analyze whether it produced better FAO linguists. I surmise it did, but the cost was not worth it. The overarching effect of this was a reduced arrival date for courses, which affected FAOs' PCS timelines and has created much friction with onboarding FAOs, e.g., where there used to be four Russian courses a year, for example, there are now two. That means we have to consolidate our incoming trainees into the same classes and might be extending their training timelines. Most of the timeline issues with in-region training (IRT) were caused by reducing the number of language courses FAOs can attend.

7. We should eliminate specific niche languages. FAOs trained in one of these niche languages constantly perpetuate this bias, and they feel invalidated in their struggle to learn a language that they will never use. I concur that we should stop training FAOs in Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, Vietnamese, Thai, and others. Our system allows us to train language on demand for certain countries. We should challenge our system to do that more and not send new FAOs through language training where they will never use the language.

We should challenge our system to do that more and not send new FAOs through language training where they will never use the language.

In-Region Training (IRT)

Why is IRT so important to becoming a FAO, and why twelve months? In 1907, in Peking, China, IRT was twenty-four months. A Mandarin-speaking Army officer would spend twenty-four months at UC Berkley learning

Mandarin and getting a master's degree, then spend two years in China. Later, it changed to Hong Kong, but it was still two years long. Stillwell spent over three months building a road for a U.S. Government project during his IRT; during that time, he solidified his language skills daily. From 1917 the Army allowed cross-attaching FAOs to other agencies and respected their requirements. All of the FAO greats did this, so what has changed? The answer is that we formalized the Army requirements over time in the FA48 functional area. A great question is why Army senior leaders continuously question the value and cost of a (FAO) Soldier's cultural immersion into a foreign society. Is it that expensive? How expensive is SF training? We will only win the narrative if a FAO can answer these questions to a senior Army leader.

8. All regions should adopt the Garmisch or Beijing IRT method. The Beijing method started in 1907 in Peking, China, and later the 48E method in Germany in the early 1940s. Both methods conducted language training at the center and then IRT out of the same location. This method is at the heart of how FAOs are trained, and the FAO GOSC should relook this with a 2040 modernization. These two methods of training FAOs worked and still work because they are done based on how they were historically done in those two regions, and historical funding streams support them. For 48Es, Garmisch is nice, but the schooling situation creates many issues for families. The Army drew down the mission support aspects for families, and the current family support differs from the program officers experienced from 1950-2000. For 48Ps (China FAOs), the previous training models are obsolete. We are still waiting to get IRT back to Beijing, a strategic issue we must address. Why are/were these two models the premier IRT model? I would suggest because they have the following aspects: 1) multiple cultural touchpoints create in-depth comprehension; 2) standardized program expectations for all trainees; 3) a standardized rating scheme for all trainees; and 4) a focus on a Geographical Combatant Command (GCC) and an Army Service Component Command (ASCC). I would argue that standardizing IRT is the key to the future of Army FAOs. This argument will be presented with an immense amount of pushback from all FAOs because their IRT experience was so unique that they cannot look beyond what a standardized IRT experience would have given them.

9. IRT should be a language immersion experience. This trap comes from FAOs in the 48B, 48J, and 48G worlds, mainly because those AOCs have multiple countries that speak the same language. Around only 50% of 48Ps or 48Es conduct IRT in a country where they speak their DLI-trained language. If only around 50% of FAOs conduct IRT in a country where their DLI training is undertaken, then why do we, as a FAO community, consistently say IRT should be a language immersion experience? 48Es, 48Ps, and half of the 48Js cannot conduct IRT in a country

that speaks their DLI-trained language, and it has never been 100% chieved. This is a FAO myth and trap, and is based on what AOC the FAO is in.

10. IRT must be twelve months. This trap comes from FAOs that conducted the traditional twelve-month IRT and it has some validity. During my research for the IRT Officer Efficiency Report (OER) White Paper, I found that FAO Proponent waived only about nine percent of FAOs' IRT. Of that, a majority are SF Officers with extensive experience in the theatre. Not all FAOs have the timeline to conduct a twelve-month IRT, which we have made worse with our FAO-only DLI courses. This requirement has reduced the class start dates throughout the year, which has restricted putting together the FAO training pipeline puzzle.

11. IRT brings families into the embassy environment, which is the most important thing. This works for IRT FAOs who have spouses and families, and less than 50% of these are married and with children. It is different for each AOC, but mostly, those FAOs who move to a country just for IRT spend most of their time traveling while their families deal with living in a foreign country where they do not speak the language. How many of those spouses would prefer to stay in Monterey or the U.S. while their spouse traveled during IRT? The single IRT FAOs occupy a house only to likely never live in it. I'm not sure this FAO trap is a real argument.

12. We should establish regional centers of excellence for FAOs (like 48E and 48P). This trap is usually made by Garmisch grads or those who had a bad IRT experience and think they should have been "spoon-fed" like the Garmisch IRT FAOs. The regional center concept has much value, and the GOSC should focus the Army FAO 2040 on this concept. I think we have dispersed our FAOs to too many embassies worldwide with little guidance and training, and FAO training has become an individual experience, which is diluting our brand.

13. We should improve our IRT handbook. This trap is accurate and almost always comes from new IRT FAOs. The last version I saw still has the National Guard FAO Strategic Scout symbol on it. I think it was last updated in 1997.

I think it was last updated in 1997.

14. IRT FAOs should attend Joint Military Attaché School (JMAS) and the Security Cooperation Officer (SCO) course during IRT. This FAO trap is an excellent idea, and the training these two courses give would go with a FAO into all the assignments they will have. However, both courses require you to reattend them once you pass a five-year mark. Therefore, having IRT FAOs attend these courses would not only significantly increase the number of students these courses would be required to accommodate, which neither course can, but it would also put a dual burden on the officer and

family to have to attend the course twice. This trap would also cost the Army twice for the same training. I would surmise this requirement is at the heart of many FAO's issues with multiple PCSs. To overcome this, FAOs should go to Advanced Civil Schooling (ACS) in the NCR, which would synchronize them with JMAS or SCO training.

Advanced Civil Schooling

15. FAOs attending Ivy League schools have automatic street credibility with their Foreign Service counterparts. This trap is, of course, perpetuated by FAOs who attended Ivy League schools and is a fallacy that solely justifies high-end ACS slots. There are minimal measurable effects of creating a better FAO through their attendance at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) versus an Ivy League school. The officers who are "better FAOs" because they went to an Ivy League school were likely better already, however, having Harvard on a resume surely impresses someone. We shouldn't orient our entire ACS policy around having a higher status at the table with Department of State foreign service officers.

We shouldn't orient our entire ACS policy around having a higher status at the table with Department of State foreign service officers.

16. ACS should be 24 months. This trap is usually perpetuated by FAOs who joined FAO to go to a specific program and later learned that FAOs only do twelve-month ACS programs. It is a myth that ACS used to be 24 months long. Historically, ACS was created in 1916 and has almost always been 12 months for Army officers, specifically FAOs. The 24 months come from some programs, such as the original 48Ps and 48Es, who took language training at civilian universities in conjunction with ACS for 24 months. ACS has moved from Berkely in 1907 to only NPS in the 1970s and 80s to its current form. ACS should be regionally focused and challenge a FAO to broaden their education.

17. Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and National Intelligence University (NIU) can provide the same education as civilian universities. This new FAO trap is emerging due to the decline of the ACS budget and is perpetuated by HRC and FAO Proponent staff members. Before moving further in this direction, we need an in-depth analysis of the long-term effects of this decision. CGSC and NIU will only provide FAOs with strategy-focused classes, not regionally focused classes, which is required by DA PAM 600-3. I believe beginning this trend will negate the entire purpose of sending FAOs to ACS and lead to a complete elimination of ACS for FAOs.

Promotions

18. FAOs are only promoted if they have command or key designated jobs such as

Battalion (BN) S3. This myth is usually perpetuated by FAOs who became FAOs but still have very grounded feelings for their basic branches. They have not walked away from being in an Army unit anymore. Significantly few FAOs were a BN S3 or a BN Executive Officer, and now almost none were a BN Commander. FAO has the highest promotion rate to Major in the Army, one of the top five highest promotion rates to Lieutenant Colonel (LTC), and one of the highest to Colonel. The Army is an up-or-out system; unfortunately, not all FAOs will promote in it. If you don't get promoted as a FAO it is not because you weren't a commander or a BN S3.

19. The FAO IRT OER does not matter. This trap is perpetuated by IRT FAOs who likely OER shopped and received a Most Qualified (MQ) during IRT. Overall, the FAO IRT OER does matter, and it likely contributes directly to our Selective Continuation (SELCON) numbers and low Senior Service College (SSC) numbers. I wrote a ten-page analysis of this issue and distributed it to the FAO GOSC and Council of Colonels. They have seemed to ignore my recommendations because of legacy biases.

20. FAOs should be commanders, e.g., dual-tracked. FAOs perpetuate this myth who are closely attached to their basic branch or are the FAOs who still need to fully transfer over to being a FAO. These FAOs fear their lack of FAO skills is causing them not to be promoted. Some regret becoming FAOs. The truth of this trap is that all the problems that FAOs used to have ended in 1997 when the Army ended the dual-track process. Since 1997, FAO promotions have gone through the roof, and FAOs began to execute multiple FAO billets, refining our trade more and more.

Foreign Staff Colleges

21. A FAO attending a foreign staff college gets the same experience as a regular IRT FAO. This trap is usually perpetuated by FAOs who went to foreign staff colleges and likely is rebutted by FAOs who did a traditional twelve-month IRT with extensive travel. FAOs who do foreign staff college are some of the best linguists I have encountered in FAO, but most lack experience in their region until their second or third tours. Not all foreign staff colleges give intermediate level education (ILE) credit, so why do we send our FAOs there? I would eliminate all staff colleges that are over six months.

22. FAOs go to these schools because the Army wants FAOs to go. Almost all FAOs are going to a foreign staff college because the FAO Proponent decided FAOs should go to that country's staff college, not because the country formally requested it to the Army G 3/5/7 staff. The Army does not direct FAOs to go to any foreign ILEs. The Army does send FAOs to foreign war colleges solely based on our abilities to speak the language of the war college. Most foreign staff college

assignments start with a good idea from a FAO on the country team, likely those who went to another foreign staff college. The Army staff has little to no input in the FAO Proponent committing the Army to sending FAOs to these staff colleges. Most are FAO Proponent-driven decisions without an accurate analysis of whether or not the pipeline can and should sustain this commitment.

Other Random Traps

23. Army senior leaders do not value FAOs. FAOs who perpetuate this myth tend to be currently serving under one of the rare Army General Officers who has it out for FAOs. Army senior leaders do not value the bad FAOs they experience when they travel overseas to an embassy and then have dinner with a young Major or Lieutenant Colonel (LTC), who perpetuates one of the many myths mentioned above. That FAO likely looks fat in their uniform, or could not speak their language well, etc. Army senior leaders have high expectations of FAOs. Unfortunately, the functional area has some FAOs in our ranks who should never be assigned to a position that puts them before a senior Army leader. Army senior leaders value Army FAOs, quit perpetuating this myth!

24. FAO training is expensive, and we must make it cheaper. Is it? How expensive is FAO training? Eliminating salary and PCS costs and any training costs that any other Army officer would go through, what costs does the Army pay for FAOs? I saw the budget from G 3/5/7 and it was less than $10M for Army FAO training. This did not include PCS, Language, ACS, JMAS, SCO, etc. First, language training, which also pays for other branches, but it does pay a large percentage of language training at DLI for Army FAOs (about 20%, but check my math). Next, ACS, yes, a large percentage of the ACS budget is Army FAOs, which should continue. However, we now have the Advanced Strategic Planning Policy (ASP3) PhD program (which I would de-fund completely) and other branches that have used ACS as a retention requirement since the officer bonuses in 2008. Then IRT, other than the $40,000 TDY costs, the expensive embassy costs, say around $10 to $15 million a year from the G 3/5/7's budget. If you compare Army FAO training costs to Army SF Officer training costs, it would be minuscule. The actual cost to Soldier ratio is minimal for what the Army gets out of Army FAOs. We are at fault for perpetuating this myth as an Army FAO community. The exact cost is at G 3/5/7, and we must better justify the budget. That is where we are failing because we have a LTC from FAO Proponent fighting this fight to a three-star. Army FAO training is tiny compared to other functional areas and branch expenses. Quit promoting this myth, it is wrong. I will admit, I've promoted this myth, and I was wrong to do so. Imagine the cost of one tank company's Table 8 or 9 and compare that against the entire Army FAO training program. The cost is not

comparable. Army FAOs are the cheapest versus the most expensive Army Officers the United States Army can train.

25. FA48 FAO should cone its officers solely as attaché or security cooperation officers. This trap is usually perpetuated for the security cooperation aspect by 48Bs as they almost all spend time doing SCO work during IRT, and most of their country team assignments early on are in the SCO world. The attaché focus tends to come from the 48Es, who are over represented by attachés You could also add staff coned, which tends to go from 48Ps because they are almost all staff officers until they make LTC, and some spend their entire careers on staff.

FAO already has a 39% acceptance rate, making it any harder, and we would not make our mission.

26. We should be more selective in our selection process. This bias is usually from a West Point graduate who speaks two to three languages fluently or attended an Ivy League graduate school. These officers think all FAOs should be as well-groomed as they are. FAO already has a 39% acceptance rate, making it any harder, and we would not make our mission. I think we should return to requiring the Graduate Record Examination again, providing a writing sample, etc. The interviews that began a few years ago assisted in making the VTIP process more effective. Although FAO Proponent insisted upon having the interviews, after two people PCS'd it then became an HRC responsibility.

27. The assignment process needs to allow us proper transparency. This trap is always from the officer who did not get the job they wanted, likely because the officer interviewed horribly or asked only for a European assignment when they were an African FAO.

28. JMAS should not be a PCS. This FAO is not a trap or a myth, but FAOs often misunderstand why this is a current policy. The Army's minimum requirement for a PCS is twenty weeks or more of training. Therefore, if a FAO is only going to the JMAS course (4 months) and has no other follow-on training, such as language training, it is not technically required to PCS to JMAS according to Army Regulations. This requirement is new (~5 years), and the Defense Attaché Service (DAS) directs it. There are financial implications to this change, and undoing the change also has financial implications. Allowing officers to PCS to JMAS, if they have other training or enable other officers to be on temporary duty (TDY) en route, is a simple math equation that should be done by HRC and permitted by the DAS. The Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATTARS) system allocates this status, which then allocates Army funding for training. HRC should request that the DAS withdraw this requirement and allow HRC to determine PCS versus

TDY based on the officer's timeline and requirements. It will likely take yearsor this decision to come to fruition as the Army will need to do a Program Objective Memorandum (POM) for more TDY funds. However, the effects of this requirement have been a standard year-long PCS into the NCR region and excessive moves or separations of FAO families.

29. Post-VTIP FAO transfers: I did not need this training because I can already fully execute FAO duties. We should be methodical and judicious when accepting transfers after the VTIP. From Civil Affairs to other branches, FAO FA48 should deliberately debate and defend against officers requesting to transfer to FA48 post the VTIP. There will be GO influences, and those cases should be adjudicated at the FAO GOSC level because, previously, G-35 GOs have tried to influence transitions. If the officer's situation creates too much friction, then the FA48 community should move on and accept them. One officer of 1,200 is negligible. These are the areas where FA48 will receive small and minor requests, almost always with GO involvement, and we should entertain the request and move on. None of those officers will be true FAOs, and those officers will likely never be FAO GOs. Overall, too often, one Army GO conflicts with FA48 and demands things, and we overestimate their request when we should entertain their biases and move on. Most may be able to execute the duties we expect of a FAO. However, a Civil Affairs LTC who requests to transfer over the same year as their O6 board should be denied because he intended to move to FAO to get promoted, not actually to be an FAO.

Conclusion

I hope this article has hit every single Army FAO bias or opinion. I challenge anyone to prove me wrong in any future articles that don't express their personal experience. That is where the heart of my FAO traps exist. FAOs write articles projecting a thesis that is often based on their personal experience. Although those experiences are key, they are not necessarily academic or holistic to the entire functional area. I hope this journal moves beyond these FAO traps, and I challenge you to write beyond these traps.

Wes Chaney, Lieutenant Colonel USA, sub-Saharan FAO

Lieutenant Colonel Andrus (Wes) Chaney is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army in 2001. He has served in leadership positions in the 1st Infantry Division as an Infantry Rifle Platoon Leader, Company Executive Officer, Battalion Logistics Officer, and as a Company Commander three times. During this time, he deployed to Kosovo in support of Task Force Falcon, to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Upon successful completion of company command LTC Chaney was selected to become a ForeignArea Officer specializing in sub-Saharan Africa. LTC Chaney most recently served as the U.S. Army HumanResources Command as the U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer Branch Chief. His current assignment is at the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command, Director CENTCOM Regional Operations. Other notable assignments include service in Afghanistan as a Military Transition Team leader advising, trainingand mentoring the Afghan National Military; the Office of Security Cooperation Chief for the United States Embassy Djibouti; International Military Affairs Officer for Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, and South-East Africa Branch Chief in the Security Cooperation Directorate, G 3/5/7, U.S. Army Africa/Southern European Task Force, Vicenza, Italy, and Senior Defense Official / Defense Attaché to Cote d'Ivoire.

LTC Chaney's military education includes the Infantry Officer´s Basic and Captain's Career courses, BradleyMechanized Leaders Course, U.S. Army Airborne and Pathfinder courses, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the Defense Language Institute French course, and the U.S. Army War College Defense Strategy and Defense Planners Courses. LTC Chaney holds a Bachelor's of Arts degree in political science from UNC-Charlotte, a Master's in International Public Policy with a concentration in African Studies from The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C., and a Master's in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

Vietnam Combat and the Importance of Trust: How I Became a FAO

Colonel John B. Haseman, U.S. Army-Retired

Introduction

Foreign Area Officers (FAO) take a variety of paths to come to this career specialty. My path was unique! I have always considered that my FAO career began during my second combat tour of duty in Vietnam, 1971-1973, when I was a district-level advisor to the Vietnamese armed forces. Those experiences occurred a year or two before the Army FAO program began, but I firmly believe that I became a FAO in the mud of the Mekong Delta in 1971. The U.S. Army officially confirmed it when I applied to enter the FAO program in 1974. I was accepted, and designated as a fully-qualified Southeast Asia FAO with no further training. I believe that the experiences and lessons learned described below are still valid for today's Army FAOs.

The War Story

Even before I returned to the Republic of Vietnam for the second time in July 1971, I thought about what it would be like to be an advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) instead of being assigned to an American army unit, as had been the case my first time (9th Military Intelligence Detachment, 9th Infantry Division, 1967-1968). By 1971, the withdrawal of U.S. combat units from Vietnam was almost complete and "Vietnamization" was the watchword. I volunteered for assignment to a district- or province-level advisory team.

I found it difficult to anticipate what it might be like. I just knew it would be very different from any work environment I had ever been in. Yes, I'd been in Vietnam for a year during that first tour, and worked with Vietnamese interpreters every day, and a bit with ARVN personnel. But I had not worked full time with Vietnamese military or civilian personnel.

My first experience with the newly-assigned district chief (he a major, me a captain) while the DSA was in the hospital did not get off to a good start. Only a few days after my arrival, one afternoon came word that the enemy had ambushed a small convoy of visiting Vietnamese province officers at a dangerous place on the main road through the district. The district chief gathered a small force of soldiers and sped to the scene to render first aid and provide security. He did not tell me he was going -- I found out from one of the radio operators in the TOC.

This was not a good start to a counterpart relationship! I quickly rounded up our interpreter and drove our jeep to the scene of the ambush.

We found the district chief giving comfort to a wounded province officer. His first words surprised me:

"I did not tell you I was going out here because I just assumed you would not go out to a dangerous area."

Uh oh! He had clearly had a less-than-satisfactory relationship with an American advisor(s) at his previous assignment.

"Sir," I told him, "I am your advisor and I will always go with you no matter where. You have far more experience in fighting this enemy than I do, but I can help you in many ways. From now on, please don't leave me behind."

He nodded, and we got along very well in the ensuing weeks.

The most important event that cemented our relationship occurred only a few days later, on a tactical operation in the dangerous western part of the district. It was the first time I went on a combat operation with Major Manh.

We were well into the operation when a soldier hit a Viet Cong booby trap that blew off his foot and inflicted severe head wounds. His buddies carried him to the road and attended to his wounds while the district chief radioed to the Vietnamese side of the province TOC for a medical evacuation helicopter (medevac). But the Vietnamese TOC told him that there were no Vietnamese helicopters available.

Clearly distraught, he turned to me: "Can you help?"

By that time in the war a firm policy required that U.S. medevac helicopters would respond only for U.S. casualties. Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) helicopters would evacuate Vietnamese casualties. This policy was designed to force the VNAF to be more responsive to ARVN ground casualties. Knowing that, I still went ahead and used my radio to call the U.S. side of the province TOC and requested a U.S. medevac. The duty officer in the TOC knew I was calling about a Vietnamese casualty, and he denied my request.

Second counterpart, Major Manh, District Chief, Mo Cay District. "From now on, please don't leave me behind." He never did.

I got angry. I knew there was a MACV inspector-general team from Saigon visiting the province and district teams, and had full use of our province daily "swing ship" helicopter. At the time they were in the adjacent district. I told the duty officer that a life was in the balance and we needed that medevac. This time the senior American watch officer, a major who out-ranked me, denied my request. I got really angry and *demanded* that they call the pilots for the inspection party, who were only a short flight from our location, to ask if they would come in to pick up the wounded soldier.

Fortunately, the adjacent district advisory team was monitoring the radio net and the DSA broke into our contentious radio exchange and said he would ask the pilots if they would fly the mission. The pilots agreed to do so, and within a few minutes a U.S. Army helicopter pilot called on my radio (I always carried the advisory team PRC-25 radio). I described the landing zone on the muddy road where we had stopped and put out security. A soldier tossed a smoke grenade to show the wind direction and the place where we wanted the helicopter to land. I stood on the road with my rifle held horizontally over my head to guide him in. The helicopter landed, took the wounded soldier and two soldier escorts on board, and flew them to the Ben Tre hospital. Then, they continued their administrative mission with the inspector-general team. We continued on the operation without further incident. I later found out that the wounded soldier had survived his serious wounds.

But, now I knew I was in trouble! Senior officers do not take kindly to junior officers demanding anything. Besides, I had challenged a firm policy by calling for an American helicopter to evacuate a Vietnamese casualty.

Several days later, I accompanied Major Manh to Ben Tre for the monthly District Chief/DSA meeting. I was sure I was going to get an ass-chewing from somebody. But as I quickly found out, my counterpart, knowing that I was probably in trouble, had already told the province chief privately what I had done. At the start of the meeting Province Chief Colonel Kim asked me to stand. He thanked me, in front of the assembled American and Vietnamese officers, for what I had done, and praised the high level of the American-Vietnamese counterpart relationship in Mo Cay District.

Saved! The PSA, a very reasonable man, thanked me in public – and told me in private not to do it again.

There is more to this war story. In 1972, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Easter Offensive throughout Vietnam was late coming to the Mekong Delta, but come it did. In July, as I mentioned above, an estimated six NVA battalions invaded Mo Cay District while I was away on my 30-day extension leave. The district chief and DSA, leading a force of two RF companies, confronted an NVA

SECONDS AFTER I TOOK THIS PICTURE OF MAJOR MANH (IN FRONT OF ME), A SOLDIER HIT A BOOBY TRAP OFF TO THE RIGHT. I GUIDED THE MEDEVAC HELICOPTER TO LAND ALMOST EXACTLY WHERE I AM STANDING.

YOUR PAR[illegible]PH TEXT

regiment of enemy forces and in the ensuing battle the district chief was killed and the DSA badly wounded. A week later a separate NVA regiment crossed the Mekong River and nearly overwhelmed Ham Long District, where I had worked for ten months, from which the advisory team had been withdrawn. The PSA assigned a captain from the province advisory team to help the district chief, but sadly he was killed in action in a major ambush only one day after he got there.

At that point, the PSA called me to Ben Tre and sent me back to Ham Long to be the DSA to a Vietnamese lieutenant colonel. We had worked well together for ten months (I described that relationship earlier) but at that time I had been the deputy advisor. I worried that while I had been effective as a deputy, how would I be received as DSA with a more senior Vietnamese officer? Would the two cultures and the difference in our ranks be a problem? I need not have worried.

"I am so glad they sent you back to help me," he said. "We know you and trust you, and we will work well together."

We did! My orders from the PSA were clear: support and buck-up the district chief's confidence in himself and his soldiers; aggressively deploy tactical air strikes and attack helicopters against the NVA forces; and "go everywhere" with the district chief. I was at Lieutenant Colonel Son's side throughout the ensuing three months. My improved Vietnamese, the District Chief's English, my very brave interpreter, and our soldier-to-soldier commo all worked. We managed soldier-to-district chief-to advisor-to U.S. forward air controller communications, and it worked! His troops stiffened and fought well against the better-armed NVA troops. The combination of courageous soldiers, confident leadership, and the daily U.S. tactical air strikes that I managed, decimated the invading enemy regiment and the remaining local Viet Cong units. The remnants of that NVA regiment retreated back across the Mekong River. Although friendly casualties were heavier than before, the soldiers fought well. After three months of heavy combat together, we maintained government control of the district. Lieutenant Colonel Son attempted to credit me with his and his troops' victory.

"No sir," I told him. "Your leadership and your soldiers' courage won the fight." True statement.

The Lessons Learned

My counterparts in two different situations, both of whom outranked me, trusted me to be with them in the field, trusted me to fight the enemy, and trusted me to support them with tactical air support and anything else when it was needed. I trusted my counterparts and soldiers. I was confident they would not leave me behind during an operation or during combat. I was confident they would not betray me to the enemy. I trusted them

to protect me when protection was needed. No matter what the different cultures might be, the counterpart relationship cannot succeed without trust. Trust between two officers and two cultures put together in a combat situation cemented the vital personal and professional relationships needed to succeed.

My first counterpart trusted me based on my performance during the time I had previously worked with him and his staff. Despite my junior rank, he knew my abilities and trusted me. We worked very hard to regain control of the district and recover from three months of hard combat against a main force NVA regiment.

My second counterpart, once he saw that I would go with him wherever he went despite the danger posed by a strong enemy threat, trusted me to be there when he needed assistance. He re-paid that trust by ensuring that I was not disciplined for my humanitarian act that was, nevertheless, contrary to firmly-established policy. Our relationship throughout the ensuing weeks was rock-solid. Our parting when my assignment ended was quiet but emotional. We shook hands very firmly, looked each other in the eye, and nodded. No words were needed.

The biggest challenge I faced was how to work effectively with a counterpart of a different culture, a counterpart more senior in rank in a society in which rank structure was very important, a counterpart whose priorities and modes of operation were different from mine. How does one react when your advice is either ignored or seemingly never implemented? The U.S. Army trained us to be pro-active, adaptable, action-oriented. Do something, anything! The Vietnamese did not operate that way. So, it was very important to be careful in choosing issues to present to my counterpart, important to present them in an acceptable manner, important not to protest or argue when nothing happened. If something I had once-upon-a-time suggested did in fact come to pass, it was important that it was always my counterpart's idea, not mine. I had no difficulty with any of these; that's why I was a good advisor.

Needless to say, my eighteen months of experience as a district-level advisor in combat in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam stayed with me through another twenty years in consecutive FAO assignments with counterparts in three different countries, and through more than thirty years as a retired FAO. All of the aspects of those eighteen months as an advisor returned constantly in my life as significant parts of the professional and personal qualities I expected of myself and of my fellow FAOs.

In different assignments, in different countries, with different personalities, always the same factors were at the top of my personal and professional performance and leadership:

- The importance of foreign language

ability. Before all of my later FAO assignments I first went to language school for Thai, Indonesian, and Burmese. Language ability was absolutely essential in my eight FAO assignments. I did not have an interpreter in any of those jobs.

- Understanding as much as possible about a different culture. I was challenged to move from Thailand, to Indonesia (three assignments), to Burma. Each culture was different.

- Knowing the daily, monthly, strategic, and tactical political and security aspects of the environment in which one serves. I was on a U.S. compound in northeastern Thailand, in comfortable embassy assignments in Indonesia, and always in difficulty dealing with the brutal Burmese military junta.

- Understanding the background, aspirations, and personal and political objectives of counterparts. I was lucky to work with professional counterparts in Indonesia, but there was nothing more difficult than maintaining a correct relationship with the Burmese junta.

- And, of course: No FAO can succeed without trust. Shortly after I arrived in Jakarta as the Senior Defense Official/Defense Attaché, the chief of Indonesia's military intelligence command urged me to visit the troubled province of East Timor. "We trust you will tell us accurately what you see and hear." That led to twelve visits to East Timor, where human rights issues became a major issue in U.S. relations with Indonesia.

My active duty FAO career ended more than thirty years ago. When I started out there was no FAO course of instruction, and I've never participated in subsequent structured FAO training. My experiences were enriched by good mentors, good colleagues both military and civilian, and good common sense. The principles I've listed at the end of this essay are, I firmly believe, as applicable today as they were as I learned them in the field of combat, in school, in language training and cultural briefings, and again good common sense across twenty years of consecutive FAO assignments. The world is different today than when I learned "FAO man-ship" in the mud of the Mekong Delta, and refined those lessons during my FAO career and as a retired but still "active" Southeast Asian FAO.

The most important quality to assure a harmonious inter-cultural relationship was the presence, always, of trust -- to gain the trust of counterparts with a different culture, made even more important by being in combat or having contentious political issues with the host nation. The corollary, of course, was that the American had to trust the counterparts. In my humble opinion, on-the-job training and experience, fertilized along the way by mentors and formal classroom instruction, will serve you well in your chosen FAO career.

My first award as a FAO: Colonel Kim, the Kien Hoa Province Chief, awarded me the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Star, for valor. November 1972, Ham Long.

John B. Haseman, Colonel USA (Retired), Southeast Asia FAO

Colonel Haseman is was commissioned in the Military Intelligence (MI) Branch from ROTC, University of Missouri-Columbia, in 1963. He served 2 ½ years in combat in Vietnam, with the 9th Military Intelligence Detachment, 9th Infantry Division (1967-1968); and as a district-level advisor on Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) Advisory Team 88 in the Mekong Delta, during which he was one of the few MI Branch officers to be awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge (1971-1973).

Strongly influenced by his Vietnam advisory duty, he entered the Army Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program in 1974, and was accessed with no further training -- no FAO course, already had a masters degree and language training, and was in a "regional assignment." From 1974 through his retirement in January 1995 he “single tracked” as a FAO. His assignments included Commander Udorn Field Office, 500th MI Group, Udornthani, Thailand (1974-75); Red Team War-Gamer, Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, KS (1975-1976); IMET Program Manager and Army Division Chief, U.S. Defense Liaison Group Jakarta, Indonesia (1978-1981); Assistant Army Attaché to Indonesia (1982-1985); Senior Analyst for Southeast Asia, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ACSI), The Pentagon (1985-1986); Defense and Army Attaché, Rangoon, Burma (1987-1990); and Defense and Army Attaché, Jakarta, Indonesia (1990-1994).

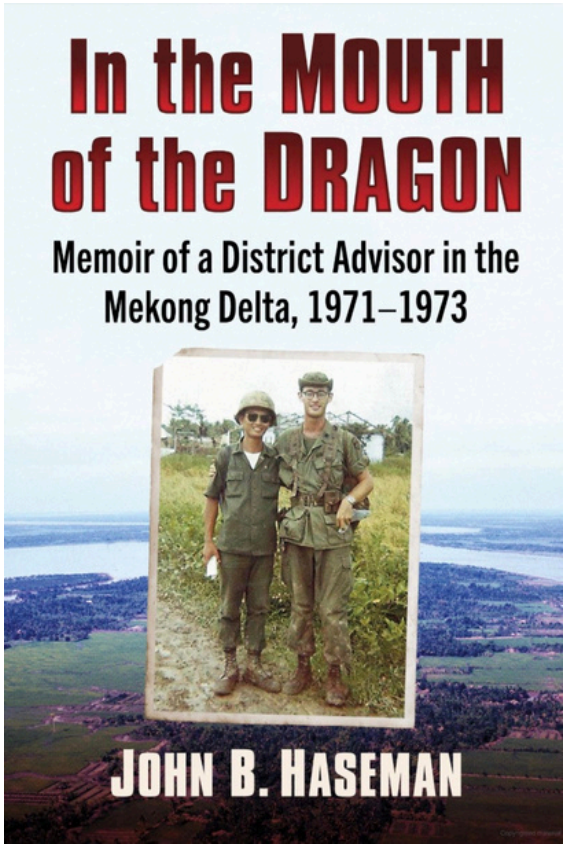
He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science, University of Missouri (1963); a Master of Public Administration Degree, University of Kansas (1971); and Master of Military Art and Science, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (1977). He is

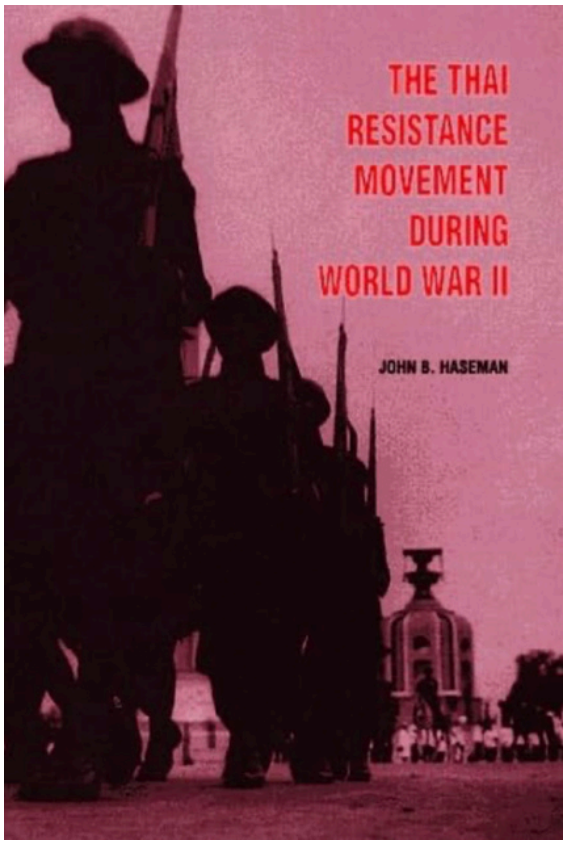
a 1985 graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

He completed formal training in three Southeast Asia languages: Thai (1975); Indonesian (1978), and Burmese (1987).

Colonel Haseman is author or co-author of five books and numerous book chapters dealing with Southeast Asia political-military affairs; more than 250 of his news and analytical articles have been published in journals in the U.S., Europe, Asia, and Australia. His most recent book is *In the Mouth of the Dragon: Memoir of a District Advisor in the Mekong Delta, 1971-1973*, September 2022, McFarland Publishing.

Colonel Haseman was a member of the FAO Association Board of Governors from 2009 to 2024, and is Chairman of the Editorial Board for the FAO Association Journal of International Affairs. He serves as Membership Officer for Counterparts, an organization of former advisors in Southeast Asia. He resides in Grand Junction, Colorado.





The RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool: Background, Assessment, and Applications

Matthew A. Hughes, Major, US Army

Measuring success has been a long-standing challenge in security cooperation – looking backward in terms of returns on investment and forward to predict outcomes. The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act highlighted this where Congress called upon the Secretary of Defense to "develop and maintain an assessment, monitoring, and evaluation [(AM&E)] framework for security cooperation with foreign countries to ensure accountability and foster implementation of best practices."[1] This framework, it stated, "should be used to inform security cooperation planning, policies, and resource decisions as well as ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of security cooperation efforts."[2] Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs), and others involved with security cooperation have since developed or improved databases and AM&E tools to measure security cooperation operations, activities, and investments (OAIs). Recent assessments, however, explain that further refinement is necessary to ensure that security cooperation OAIs align with U.S. foreign policy objectives and optimize returns on investment.

To address these challenges and improve planning, the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation in the Office of the Secretary of Defense sponsored research conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute that yielded a security cooperation diagnostic algorithm: the RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool.[3] The tool incorporates inputs from several publicly available databases to determine propensity for successful U.S. security cooperation, rooted in nuanced analysis and validated with case studies. However, the tool's challenges in data currency and other factors such as limited inputs accounting for international dynamics demonstrate why results should inform nuanced studies rather than provide definitive conclusions. In other words, this tool "is not a substitute for strategic thought."[4] Past applications and potential research topics outline some appropriate approaches to harness this tool in security cooperation studies. The RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool offers a structured, data-driven way to assess partner nation potential for U.S. security cooperation success, serving as a valuable planning aid when used

alongside strategic judgment and context-specific analysis.

This article seeks to inform security cooperation planners about a diagnostic tool developed by RAND that can aid in quantitative analysis for a variety of security cooperation studies. Planners at GCCs, ASCCs, the National Guard Bureau, and other locations, as well as Foreign Area Officers conducting advanced civil schooling or in-region training, can apply this tool toward security cooperation research, policy papers, plans, and other products for a unique dataset that may challenge or bolster findings. The article first describes this tool's characteristics and provides context for its creation. Next, the article lists the tool's key strengths, weaknesses, and considerations based on developers' intent and personal experience. Explanations of previous applications provide a sampling of research questions or problems the tool helped to explore. Outlining potential applications for future studies offers additional research avenues that may benefit from the tool. The article concludes by summarizing this tool's characteristics and applications and proposes areas for further research.

Diagnostic Tool Background

The RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool is designed to assess the likelihood of successful U.S. security cooperation with any country. It is a Microsoft Excel workbook with 17 nested worksheet tabs that organize data inputs, scores, and visualizations across multiple dimensions of security cooperation.[5] The tool analyzes 195 countries using 66 publicly available measures grouped into 27 constructs and 10 categories. These figures generate an overall security cooperation propensity score for each country which ranges from 0 (highly unlikely) to 1 (highly likely). Key values, such as overall propensity scores, are listed on the top sheet, while other tabs include data tables for raw data inputs and weights for measures and constructs. The top sheet (truncated version shown

Sort by		Overall	Priority	$$$	$$$	CAT 1	CAT2	CAT 3	CAT 4	CAT 5	CAT 6	CAT 7	CAT 8	CAT 9	CAT 10	Strategic/Policy Considerations					
Country / COCOM / Overall Score / Priority / SC/SFA/BPC Expenditures / SC/SFA/BPC Expenditures by PN Troop	Category #1 … Category #10	OVERALL SUMMARY PROPENSITY SCORE (Weighted average of CAT 1–CAT 10)	PRIORITY/PRIORITY RANK	TOTAL SC/SFA/BPC EXPENDITURES (FY10 US Expenditures ($M for security cooperation with PN)	TOTAL SC/SFA/BPC EXPENDITURES PER PN TROOP	HISTORICAL QUALITY OF US SC/SFA/BPC PROVISION	HISTORICAL TRACK RECORD OF SUCCESS WITH PN	US-PN RELATIONSHIP	SUPPORT FOR MILITARY IN/BY THE PN	ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF PN MILITARY	STRENGTH OF PN GOVERNMENT	PN GOVERNANCE	PN ECONOMIC STRENGTH	PN SECURITY SITUATION	PRACTICAL EASE OF ENGAGING WITH PN	Largest allied contributor of foreign aid	Percentage of total arms shipments that is from China or Russia	Efficacy of security forces (1=low, 2=medium, 3=high)	PN on the State Department list of state sponsors of terrorism	NBC weapons proliferator	PN size index (population)
#	Country or Territory	ISO	FIPS	COCOM																	
1	Afghanistan	AFG	AF	CENTCOM	0.36	X	10,265.4	22,603	0.76	0.08	0.32	0.70	0.22	0.11	0.23	0.20	0.23	0.16	USA	14	1	0	0	0.77
13	Bahrain	BHR	BA	CENTCOM	0.52	X	15.9	1,033	0.37	0.50	0.36	0.69	0.51	0.74	0.45	0.73	0.61	0.57		0	2	0	0	0.23
52	Egypt	EGY	EG	CENTCOM	0.42	X	1,298.7	1,589	0.55	0.41	0.31	0.64	0.41	0.39	0.22	0.44	0.59	0.34	FRA	55	2	0	1	0.83
78	Iran	IRN	IR	CENTCOM	0.36	X	0.0	0		0.62	0.09	0.57	0.33	0.28	0.23	0.53	0.31	0.34	DEU	100	2	1	1	0.82
79	Iraq	IRQ	IZ	CENTCOM	0.40	X	963.7	1,346	0.23	0.57	0.39	0.63	0.43	0.18	0.25	0.47	0.34	0.16	USA	13	2	0	1	0.77
85	Jordan	JOR	JO	CENTCOM	0.57	X	319.2	2,804	0.55	0.36	0.48	0.83	0.57	0.61	0.43	0.56	0.65	0.41	USA	43	3	0	0	0.46
86	Kazakhstan	KAZ	KZ	CENTCOM	0.43	X	5.1	219	0.27	0.63	0.37	0.37	0.40	0.44	0.28	0.66	0.55	0.50	USA	91	2	0	0	0.67
92	Kuwait	KWT	KU	CENTCOM	0.58	X	0.0				0.39	0.77	0.56	0.60	0.47	0.73	0.73	0.55		25	2	0	0	0.33
93	Kyrgyzstan	KGZ	KG	CENTCOM	0.38	X	16.2	755	0.25	0.45	0.37	0.64	0.35	0.33	0.35	0.38	0.35	0.31	TUR	0	1	0	0	0.45
96	Lebanon	LBN	LE	CENTCOM	0.43	X	79.6	32	0.27	0.42	0.26	0.74	0.57	0.45	0.40	0.49	0.29	0.40	USA	0	2	0	0	0.40
130	Oman	OMN	MU	CENTCOM	0.56	X	14.6	226	0.52	0.42	0.31	0.88	0.56	0.70	0.53	0.65	0.74	0.50	KWT	0	2	0	0	0.33
131	Pakistan	PAK	PK	CENTCOM	0.39	X	673.2	1,000	0.74	0.34	0.25	0.76	0.32	0.26	0.25	0.28	0.22	0.39	USA	47	1	0	1	0.87
133	Palestinian Authority (Palestinian Territories)	WBG	0	CENTCOM	0.23	X	0.0			0.20	0.03		0.21	0.44	0.26	0.57	0.04	0.28	USA	50	1	0	0	0.39
141	Qatar	QAT	QA	CENTCOM	0.60	X	0.0				0.31	0.66	0.57	0.76	0.59	0.84	0.83	0.58		0	2	0	0	0.25
151	Saudi Arabia	SAU	SA	CENTCOM	0.56	X	0.0	0		0.84	0.36	1.00	0.59	0.50	0.25	0.77	0.67	0.50		0	2	0	0	0.76
170	Syria (Syrian Arab Republic)	SYR	SY	CENTCOM	0.35	X	0.0			0.39	0.10	0.76	0.27	0.34	0.22	0.49	0.35	0.26	DEU	91	2	1	1	0.72
172	Tajikistan	TJK	TI	CENTCOM	0.27	X	8.3	1,037	0.27	0.31	0.23		0.27	0.21	0.24	0.33	0.37	0.29	USA	0	1	0	0	0.49
181	Turkmenistan	TKM	TX	CENTCOM	0.25	X	3.3	482	0.17	0.51	0.14		0.39	0.10	0.21	0.48	0.41	0.31	TUR	91	3	0	0	0.43
185	United Arab Emirates	ARE	AE	CENTCOM	0.66	X	0.0	0			0.39	0.85	0.57	0.74	0.58	0.80	0.82	0.60		33	2	0	0	0.50
189	Uzbekistan	UZB	UZ	CENTCOM	0.36	X	5.2	78	1.00	0.58	0.17		0.36	0.20	0.13	0.44	0.40	0.37	KOR	0	2	0	0	0.76
193	Yemen	YEM	YM	CENTCOM	0.30	X	21.1	101	0.24	0.31	0.26	0.72	0.32	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.27	0.17	DEU	21	1	0	0	0.75

Figure 1: RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool, Top Sheet sorted for U.S. Central Command, 2013

n Figure 1) serves as a dashboard where users may filter and compare countries by region, time frame, or measure category. The tool's features allow decisionmakers to compare a country's potential for success with current funding levels and strategic priorities, helping to identify potential mismatches.[6]

Developers validated the tool by applying it to 29 historical case studies across a range of countries, conflict types, and outcomes. Results indicated that the tool's measures and scores aligned well with expert assessments. This demonstrated strong reliability and a consistent ability to differentiate between cases of successful and unsuccessful security cooperation. Insights from the case studies informed adjustments to the weights assigned to measures and constructs within the tool, ensuring they better reflected real-world factors contributing to security cooperation success or failure. The tool permits users to toggle weights, which are included on the last tab of the tool's Excel file.

RAND published the original tool and user manual in 2013. A newer version, published in 2017, retained all the same measures, constructs, and categories, but included raw data updates through 2016.[7] As the diagnostic tool "is designed to be reusable and updated by a generalist user (i.e., someone who is familiar with basic Excel) without the assistance of RAND authors/analysts," updates to raw data inputs have yielded two additional user-generated versions – one with data through 2019, and the other, through 2022.[8] Together, these four versions render four complete datasets with values for each of the tool's 66 measures and overall propensity scores for each country that are equidistant across time. Collectively, this enables users to conduct longitudinal studies or other analysis on a global, regional, or country scale over time and across measures of interest.

Assessment of the Diagnostic Tool: Considerations and Cautions

The RAND tool's features bear different favorable or unfavorable impacts depending on the scope of applications. Rather than clear strengths and weaknesses, there are important considerations based on the analysis at hand. For instance, its unclassified nature simplifies user updates since raw data comes from "publicly accessible global data sources," and analysis derived purely with the tool is releasable.[9] However, the quality and relevance of data inputs have limitations, accounted for in their relative weights for the algorithm determining overall propensity scores. For instance, an ASCC might determine and track levels of interoperability with a partner nation across warfighting functions, directly related to security cooperation returns on investment and trajectories, which would likely be controlled unclassified information or classified information.

The tool's data-driven prioritization of

countries is another unique feature. AM&E tools have improved in this regard, but this tool contains an algorithm more complex than other tools, which has been verified with case studies. The tool's robust supply of raw data provides a quantitative foundation for its prioritization of countries. This approach encourages users to move away from biased analysis toward a more objective baseline for assessments. Luckily, users can toggle weights for criteria if they believe certain measures bear a greater or lesser impact on the aspect of security cooperation under study than default weights, which may be the case for cases like special operations engagements or defense institution building.

One drawback from the tool's design is that for some of the variables, datasets are behind subscription walls or no longer exist. For example, raw data inputs for Measure X.3.1 "PN baseline military capability," remain from 2012, since this value pulled from Jane's Country Stability Ratings has been discontinued. Similarly, Measures 5.3.3 "State control of security forces" and 5.3.4 "Professionalism of security forces" remain with data from 2014, since the source of Jane's Country Risk Intelligence Centre Module no longer exists. In one instance, data never existed; Construct 10.1 "US-PN agreements – information sharing" has been a placeholder variable since the tool's creation because "no proxy measure [has been] identified."[10] Of note, based on RAND's case studies to validate the tool, that construct's default weight in the algorithm is 0.013 —equal to Construct 10.2 "US-PN agreements – legal status of US forces."

Another challenge in the tool's application is a lag in data compared to the latest conditions for partner nation dynamics and the bilateral relationship. Even though data sources for the 66 measures are updated annually, a lag between current conditions and those reflected in values of the measures can render results that reflect the past rather than the present. Aspects of these measures can be quite dynamic, such as measures related to governance or security after a coup. Similarly, effects of bilateral policies, such as economic tariffs, could potentially influence security cooperation, but the diagnostic tool would fail to account for such policy changes as it relies on data published prior to those changes. Under certain circumstances, users can adjust values to reflect present conditions, such as depleting foreign aid figures to see possible impacts to security cooperation, but these actions are intended to project theoretical outcomes rather than understand effects based on historical figures.

The tool's nature also generally limits the scope of analysis to bilateral relations – not international dynamics. Its constructs and measures focus on bilateral security cooperation, so it is severely limited in terms of how those variables influence great power competition and international dynamics. Measures like 9.1.7 "External Security Stability Rating" account for some interactions with

other countries and regional security factors, and the "Strategic/Policy Considerations" section of the tool (unweighted and independent of the security cooperation propensity scores) broadens analysis to consider "percentage of total arms shipments that is from China or Russia."[11] Ultimately, however, the tool is designed to determine security cooperation prioritization and propensity as it relates to bilateral relations between the United States and individual countries.

Finally, although this tool aims to assess the propensity for successful U.S. security cooperation with a given country, the tool does not specify what, exactly, successful might look like. Indeed, quite distinct outcomes can constitute success based on the context. Framing success in terms of who will fight with us is an oversimplification that does not account for partner nation dynamics and the myriad ways in which partner nations can contribute to integrated deterrence or burden-sharing. Constitutional restrictions on the use of military forces may prohibit a country from deploying to join a coalition or confront a type of adversary, but those partners could contribute forces to a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation or conduct training with regional partners instead of U.S. soldiers doing so. In a similar sense in terms of specificity, the RAND tool does not include nuanced measures for security cooperation programs, such as dollar amounts for International Military Education and Training (IMET). Rather, IMET is grouped into the total "security cooperation expenditures" value, along with Foreign Military Sales, Excess Defense Articles, Foreign Military Financing, and other accounts listed in the USAID Greenbook.[12] Hence, it can aid analysis on returns on investment for collective security cooperation rather than types or specific programs.

this tool "can serve as a starting point to build the case for security cooperation mission[s]."

Despite this tool's accessibility and practical utility, few papers or articles mention it or harness the tool to investigate research questions. Those that do demonstrate the tool's versatility across a variety of problem sets. Some also highlight its flaws and discrepancies through analysis.

One publication demonstrated the tool's application in assessing the propensity for successful security cooperation for a particular program or enabler across all Department of State-recognized countries in the world to prioritize where to dedicate a limited resource. A Naval Postgraduate School master's student utilized the algorithm to "assess which factors are most critical for special operations forces (SOF) efforts to build partnership capacity."[13] The author determined that "when national policy or campaign plans call for capacity building" involving SOF, this tool "can serve as a starting point to build the case for

security cooperation mission[s]."[14] Circumstances linked to changes in security situations or policy may also "override the 'matching tool' recommendations or ideal partner countries."[15] Nevertheless, the default weights associated with the tool's 10 categories were adequate for the purpose of this study, despite the unique nature of SOF missions and potential for greater relative weights of some factors when considering likelihood of achieving mission objectives. According to the author, who did not adjust the "practical ease engaging with the partner nation" category's default weight of 3% toward a country's overall propensity score, "although it may be easier to build capacity with countries that have a common language or have standing legal agreements with the U.S., this should not be a heavily weighted factor for SOF when choosing partners."[16]

Another publication, in response to a prompt seeking to identify on the "Least Valuable Player" among U.S. Allies in terms of contributing to U.S. national security, used the tool to compare overall security cooperation propensity scores among U.S. Allies over time.[17] Using the default weights, the algorithm revealed that the Philippines consistently ranked last.[18] Other indicators corroborated this assessment, such as defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) to reflect cost-sharing toward shared security interests. Hence, the paper argued that there was a disconnect between U.S. investment and prioritization compared to likely returns. Even so, this study did not account for a variety of strategy and policy factors, such as territory disputes and deterrence in the arena of great power competition, that might lead policy- and decision-makers to continue prioritizing that ally. Of note, the RAND tool contains six variables under the category "Strategic/Policy Considerations," unweighted and independent of the security cooperation propensity scores, but these mostly relate to the bilateral relationship rather than influences on third parties —a limitation when considering the returns on investment of defense pacts in terms of influences on adversaries.[19]

In a different study, the RAND tool yielded insights when analyzing the durability of U.S. security cooperation across significant political shifts in Latin America, where countries have undergone pendulum shifts between left- and right-leaning administrations in recent elections. The algorithm indicated that during the 2010s and early 2020s, in general, right-leaning administrations favored the United States while left-leaning sought to strengthen relations with China, often maintaining pragmatic relations with the United States.[20] Published findings included case studies of Argentina and Brazil, where this algorithm helped to identify how specific variables like economic policies and governance issues influenced security cooperation.[21] Unpublished findings included details on Ecuador's overall propensity score. It had been

0.44 during Rafael Correa's presidency, when the U.S. left Manta Air Base after the Ecuadorian government did not renew the agreement and the U.S. Embassy's Security Cooperation Office closed. The score rose to 0.51 under President Lenín Moreno, when the Security Cooperation Office reopened, and the U.S. Air Force was permitted to utilize the San Cristobal Airport in the Galapagos Islands for counternarcotics patrols. This application demonstrates the utility of the tool for longitudinal studies involving frameworks like Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) to investigate correlations between security cooperation and variables beyond the Military instrument of national power.

Each of these previous applications enhanced investigations about security cooperation at different scopes or scales in terms of geography, policy, and time. They provided some quantitative insights into complex problems and demonstrated the tool's utility in various scenarios. In all studies, users applied default RAND weights rather than define new weights for the diagnostic tool's 66 measurements, but future applications may help to identify situations where user-defined weights are more appropriate for particular studies.

Intended Applications and Potential Research Paths

Based on the nature and purpose of this diagnostic tool, aware of its strengths and weaknesses, political-military practitioners can use this algorithm to analyze several aspects of security cooperation. The tool's developers highlighted two intended applications.

The first is "identifying mismatches between propensity for security

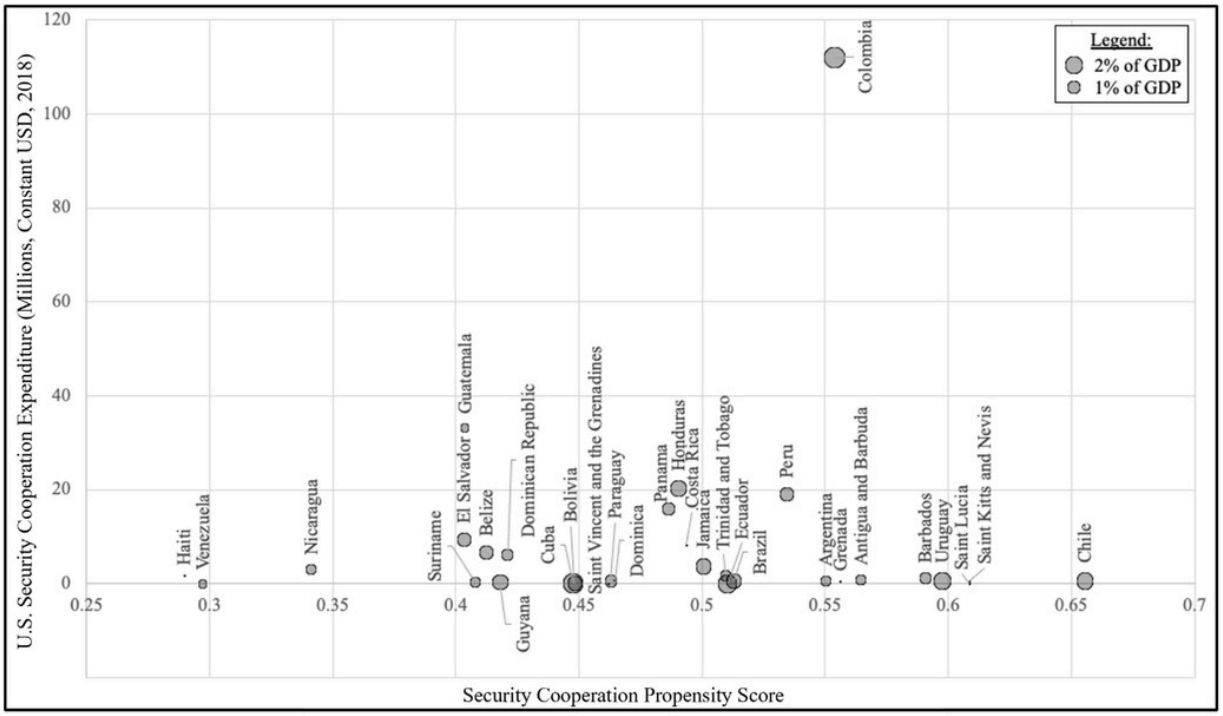


Figure 2: U.S. Security Cooperation Expenditures compared to Security Cooperation Propensity and Military Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP in U.S. Southern Command, 2019

cooperation and current funding levels, and conducting detailed country-specific analyses of those mismatches." [22] The National Guard Bureau could consider the RAND diagnostic tool for analysis and prioritization of new partnerships. Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) and Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs) could compare findings using the RAND diagnostic tool (example in Figure 2) with their own security cooperation assessment tools to see how prioritization among countries in their areas of responsibility compares between internal tools and the RAND diagnostic tool.

Criteria used by GCCs and ASCCs are likely more specific than the RAND tool's measurements, such as interoperability levels across warfighting functions or dollar amounts by security cooperation program. They also benefit from classified inputs to render a more relevant and precise means to prioritize countries and track progress toward policy objectives. Nevertheless, investigating the RAND tool may help planners or operations research and systems analysis (ORSA) personnel challenge the objectivity of measurements for internal tools, develop more refined criteria, and possibly incorporate unclassified sources to inform analysis and introduce variables beyond the "Military" instrument of national power. The RAND tool also demonstrates the importance of consistency of the types of measurements and sources over time for reliable and meaningful assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E); experimentation with the RAND tool may help to improve Department of Defense tools like SOCIUM to track security cooperation operations, investments, and activities to determine returns on investment and optimize efforts.

If one were to investigate outliers among countries, a mismatch for Afghanistan is readily apparent. A clear outlier for security cooperation expenditures, Afghanistan ranked first globally for total expenditures and among the top two or three globally for expenditures per partner nation troop. However, it consistently held among the lowest overall security cooperation propensity scores, with abysmal ratings of 0.36 (2013), 0.23 (2016), 0.23 (2019), and 0.22 (2022). Even after the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, the overall propensity score dropped by just 0.01 – an indication of the dismal conditions for successful security cooperation well before the withdrawal. Analysis of each category and measure during this period may aid a case study of security cooperation in Afghanistan to consider potential consequences of different policy options in hindsight. It could also help to identify what measures may help to accurately assess partner nation willingness and capability, or reinforce the perceived difficulty in doing so.

Applications to fragile states may reinforce results in the RAND paper

Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventative Tool. The study found that "on average, security cooperation has a statistically significant relationship with reduction in fragility," but that, among other details, "the strength of correlation did not increase proportionally with additional funding; most of the effect was concentrated at the low end of SC funding."[23] Nuanced analysis assessed influences by types of security cooperation programs, but applications of this RAND diagnostic tool involving fragile states can help to determine if there are mismatches between the amount of security cooperation funding and propensity for success based on changes in overall stability and institutions. Longitudinal studies can also reveal how security cooperation dynamics have changed over time as state fragility has improved or worsened. Investigating Colombia – a clear outlier in the western hemisphere for security cooperation expenditures – may help in studies seeking to understand spending thresholds for optimal returns and discern legacy programs carried over from an earlier period of turbulence.

Another example could be exploring a specific construct over time for countries to see how the security cooperation relationship has evolved, which may help to identify potential opportunities where conditions are favorable or analyze factors hindering bilateral security cooperation. For instance, Construct 3.2 "PN citizen perception of U.S." with a default weight of 0.08, is an important factor when considering information operations, permanent basing, combined exercises, personnel exchanges, and training. On a broad scale, India's improving values for that construct—from 0.32 in 2013 to 0.55 in 2022—mirrored the expanding defense cooperation relationship as India gained Major Defense Partner status (2016) and signed a Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (2018) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (2020). Values for this construct could inform planners about likely PN perceptions for U.S. presence as a factor for decisions on persistent or episodic employment of advisors with a Security Force Assistance Brigade.

Developers' second intended application was "to conduct 'excursions' or 'thought experiments,' looking at specific cases, making changes to the underlying data or assumptions to see what changes, and creating and exploring 'what if?' scenarios (e.g., 'What if construct X were improved in country Y?')."[24] This approach may contribute to studies on possible policy changes and their consequences for bilateral security cooperation. The tool also provides planners with a means to understand and anticipate possible effects of new policies that have yet to yield measurable results in security cooperation.

Comparing various measurements relating to governance, human rights and civil liberties, security and military,

and diplomatic alignment can help analysts and planners understand post-coup alignment with the United States and potential changes. The tool can also aid analysis in a scenario where a previously stable region experiences sudden aggression by a hostile neighbor, such as China toward Taiwan or Russia toward eastern Europe. Toggling values for measures in Construct 9 "PN Security Situation" and Measure 10.2.1 "PN status of forces (SOFA) agreements with the U.S." could reveal potential impacts of a change to the external security conditions and how propensity for successful bilateral security cooperation might change. Adjusting values and analyzing changes may provide insights on access and potential basing opportunities to set the theater or respond to a crisis, PN willingness to join coalitions, and country prioritization.

One potential thought experiment could focus on policy changes regarding foreign aid and potential impacts to propensity for successful security cooperation. Measure 2.2.1 "Lag correlation between all foreign aid to PN and PN Human Development Index" draws from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and United Nations Development Programme. Toggling that measure and its default weight of 0.08 may help planners understand how, and to what degree, ceasing foreign aid may impact security cooperation.

Conclusion

The RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool offers a structured framework with substantial potential for informing security cooperation planning. However, users should apply it with a critical understanding of its assumptions, data limitations, and the evolving strategic environment. This comprehensive algorithm, validated through case studies, permits users to update raw data and toggle weights to improve currency and relevance for applications. The tool, grounded in data, encourages objectivity with measurable comparisons and predictive analysis. However, data fidelity or access degrades over time as sources cease to exist or may continue behind subscription walls, and the tool focuses on factors influencing collective security cooperation rather than types or for individual programs. The tool's main applications include comparing U.S. security cooperation expenditures with propensity for successful security cooperation to identify misalignments, and thought experiments to see how changes to relevant measures may influence bilateral security cooperation dynamics.

Opportunities for further research abound, as security cooperation AM&E will continue to inform decision-makers and influence the management of security cooperation programs. Future research might investigate how open sources can inform security cooperation, and how automation,

machine learning, and artificial intelligence might enhance analysis.

Comparing this tool with GCC and ASCC internal security cooperation assessment tools may also yield important findings. Such studies may help to refine methodologies for evaluating effectiveness of security cooperation programs. Discrepancies between internal tools and this algorithm may help cue planners to gaps they may bridge through interagency collaboration, depending on the particular construct or measure.

Additional attention regarding this tool's measures can potentially improve the tool's data currency and relevance. As mentioned, values for one of the tool's constructs—Construct 10.1 "US-PN agreements – information sharing" —remain blank because an adequate source has yet to be identified. This may be a topic for further research to determine the appropriate categorization and scores for types of agreements. This is probably not feasible in an unclassified diagnostic tool. Rather, a construct similar to that of 10.2 "US-PN agreements – legal status of US forces" is possible for information sharing agreements, but only if that construct is classified. Finally, the tool may contribute to peripheral studies on related topics like language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC). Studies on LREC and interoperability, for instance, could incorporate Measure 10.3.1 "English is an official language (yes/no)" and its associated weight for the formula in the RAND tool.

Ultimately, the RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool stands as a valuable, if imperfect, asset for planners and analysts seeking to navigate the complexities of security cooperation. When applied with critical judgement and supplemented by additional research, it offers a means to sharpen analysis, challenge assumptions, and contribute to informed decision-making. As security cooperation evolves in response to new strategic demands, continued refinement, critical assessment, and creative application of tools like this one will be essential to ensure efforts are not only measurable, but meaningful.

End Notes:

1. U.S. Congress, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, Public Law 114-328, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (December 23, 2016)," § 1205.
2. U.S. Congress, *NDAA for FY2017*, § 1205.
3. Christopher Paul, Michael Nixon, Heather Peterson, Beth Grill, and Jessica Yeats, *The RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool* (RAND Corporation, 2013), iii.
4. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 28.
5. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 21.
6. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* x-xi.
7. The original version from 2013 and the 2017 update (with data from 2016) are available for download at https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL112.html.
8. Paul, et al., RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool, xi

and 3. Although RAND has received these user-updated versions for 2019 and 2022, RAND will not post them for download as they were not compiled by RAND authors/analysts. Due to copyright, they may not be posted elsewhere in the public domain but may be shared through correspondence. To obtain these updated versions, email the author (and producer of these updates) at matthew.a.hughes22.mil@army.mil. To make updates to the diagnostic tool and update raw data, consult Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* Appendix D.

9. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 21.

10. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 37 (footnote 2).

11. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 17.

12. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 22.

13. William R. Hermann III, "Choosing to Win: How SOF can Better Select Partners for Capacity Building" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA607835.pdf (accessed 16 April 2025), V.

14. Hermann, "Choosing to Win," 3.

15. Hermann, "Choosing to Win," 51.

16. Hermann, "Choosing to Win," 46.

17. John Quincy Adams Society, "2021 Student Foreign Policy Essay Contest," https://jqas.org/2021-student-foreign-policy-essay-contest/ (accessed 17 April 2025).

18. Matthew Hughes, "Is the U.S.-Philippines Alliance Obsolete?," *The National Interest,* 24 May 2021, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/skeptics/us-philippines-alliance-obsolete-185722 (accessed 17 April 2025).

19. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 17.

20. Matthew A. Hughes, "Riding the Waves of Change: U.S. and Chinese Security Cooperation in Latin America During the Pink Tide and Blue Wave" in DSCU 2024 Security Conference Report (Defense Security Cooperation University, 2025), https://www.dscu.edu/bgcy-ralli/sc-conference.

21. According to the tool, propensity for successful security cooperation with Brazil decreased from 0.53 (2016) to 0.51 (2019) due to decreasing foreign direct investment flows and governance challenges, and then to 0.48 (2022) with decreased government effectiveness and worsening security conditions. Yet, the bilateral security cooperation relationship grew substantially during the Jair Bolsonaro administration with new agreements, combined exercises, personnel exchanges, and a partnership with New York through the State Partnership Program. This is one example of the tool's limited scope and incompleteness regarding security cooperation success or failure, as well as the inherent lag between metrics in the tool and current conditions (data currency).

22. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool,* 27.

23. Michael J. McNerney, Angela O'Mahony, Thomas S. Szayna, Derek Eaton, Caroline Baxter, Colin P. Clarke, Emma Cutrufello, Michael McGee, Heather Peterson, Leslie Adrienne Payne, et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventative Tool* (RAND, 2014), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR350.html.

24. Paul, et al., *RAND Security Cooperation Prioritization and Propensity Matching Tool*, 27.

Major Mathew A. Hughes, USA, Western Hemishphere FAO

Major Matthew A. Hughes is an Instructor of the Command and General Staff Officers Course (CGSOC) in WHINSEC at Fort Benning, Georgia. He is a native of Clinton, Connecticut and received a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Military Intelligence (MI) Corps from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 2011, where he earned a BS in Arabic/Spanish and minored in Terrorism Studies. He also holds a Master of Arts in Intelligence Studies from American Military University and a Master of International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Major Hughes served in several Military Intelligence assignments including: Assistant S-2, 1-26th Infantry Battalion, 3/1 Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), Fort Knox, Kentucky; Signals Intelligence Platoon Leader, Special Troops Battalion, 3/1 IBCT; S-2, 3-227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas; Commander, C Company, 229th MI Battalion at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Presidio of Monterey, California. He completed one combat deployment to Zabul Province, Afghanistan in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM and one operational deployment to Germany in support of OPERATION ATLANTIC RESOLVE. MAJ Hughes conducted In-Region Training as a Foreign Area Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Brasília, Brazil. In 2022, he managed security cooperation activities with Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay as a Plans Officer at U.S. Army South in San Antonio, Texas. From 2023-2024, he served as the Security Cooperation Liaison to the U.S. Army South Command Group, where he advised the Commanding General during all foreign engagements and prepared official correspondence with senior leaders.

China's Atlantic Gambit: Power Projection Beyond the Indo-Pacific Through Strategic Deception

Colonel Michael Gacheru, US Army

In April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a new conceptual framework outlining China's vision for global security governance as an alternative to the U.S.-backed international rules-based order.[1] In a 2023 concept paper, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expanded on this vision, identifying six core concepts and twenty priorities for cooperation to address global security challenges in a "conflict-ridden world. [2] This marked an inflection point from the economically focused Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to a security-focused China foreign policy. The GSI aims initially to protect Chinese interests abroad but likely contains long-term Chinese ambitions to disrupt international norms and power dynamics, expand the People's Liberation Army (PLA) global posture, control strategic choke points along sea lines of communications (SLOC), and increase diplomatic influence.

By examining the historical strategies of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong, China's security and economic activities since the announcement of GSI in 2022, and weighing them against U.S. strategy, this paper argues that Beijing's focus on Africa is not merely an economic endeavor but a long-term strategic 'encirclement' plan, aimed at establishing posture locations in the Atlantic. This paper posits that as the United States focuses on military alliances and postures for a potential conventional conflict in the Indo-Pacific, China is advancing a Sun Tzu-Mao-inspired strategy along the African coast. By leveraging the BRI and GSI, Beijing is securing economic partnerships and dual-purpose (commercial and military) strategic infrastructure investments, allowing it to gain and control access to the Atlantic. This positioning enables China to challenge U.S. influence and establish 'strategic strong points' for future power projection and disruption along key terrain. Concurrently, China draws U.S. attention and resources away from Africa through a calculated feint in the Indo-Pacific, creating strategic space through deception for it to implement its Atlantic strategy. This dual-theater approach compels Washington to recalibrate its priorities and counter Beijing's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic regions through a National Security Strategy (NSS) that contends globally with the pacing challenge.

Historical Context: Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong Concepts

China's present-day calculated realpolitik strategy draws upon key principles from historical strategists like Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong to implement a long-term, multi-theater approach to global dominance. Rarely in Chinese history has victory been achieved through a single decisive Clausewitzian confrontation; instead,

Rarely in Chinese history has victory been achieved through a single decisive Clausewitzian confrontation

China has traditionally relied on protracted, indirect maneuvers to gain relative advantage.[3] Subtlety, deception, and strategic patience define the Chinese approach, echoing Sun Tzu's lessons emphasizing winning without direct confrontation. Mao expanded on this doctrine by describing the importance of the encirclement of the enemy state through alliances and posture to compel them to submission.[4] China's most enduring strategy game, Wei-Chi, likely inspired this doctrine centered on encirclement rather than brute force and was taught to warriors and kings from the 24th century B.C.[5] Mao "required all his officers to study Wei-chi and become proficient" in the game strategy.[6] Wei-Chi is a game in which players position stones across the board, building incremental advantages while working to encircle and neutralize their opponent's pieces. Multiple contests unfold across different regions of the board. This seems to mirror China's contemporary geopolitical maneuvers where Beijing methodically expands its influence through economic leverage, strategic partnerships, and power projection, ensuring that by the time the balance shifts, its dominance appears inevitable rather than forced. China's profound respect for its history acknowledges foremost its national identity, governance, and strategic thinking. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) often invokes historical narratives to shape contemporary policies, guide decision-making, and form strategy.[7] Ancient and modern military thinkers like Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong are central to informing China's strategic culture, actions, and ambitions on the global stage. It is through this lens that we should understand China's long-term strategy – one that prioritizes incremental advantage over direct confrontation. While tensions in the South China Sea may appear to signal an impending clash, China's true ambitions lie in a deliberate, pragmatic approach aimed at rebalancing the global security environment in its favor.

Sun Tzu's Calculation and Deception

In The Art of War, Sun Tzu emphasized the importance of calculation and deception in military strategy. Sun Tzu stressed both the need for thorough calculation before engaging in warfare to predict the battle's outcome before it begins and deception to mask your true intent. Calculations include evaluating whose army is the strongest, has the most capable leaders, or has the best training

before engaging in battle.[8] To this end, the CCP is executing its "Military-Civil Fusion" strategy to develop the most technologically capable, world-class military by 2049, ensuring China has the 'most capable army' before engaging in battle.

Simultaneously through the BRI and GSI, China is occupying "pivotal ground" – another strategically important calculative principle in The Art of War described as a "strategic area from which one can control other states, intersecting highways, and where multiple states meet."[9] China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, a strategically important ground, and is laying the foundation for dual-use ports or likely future strong points in Morocco, South Africa, and other key locations in Africa. These moves position China to occupy ground at intersecting maritime 'highways,' a key component of Sun Tzu's strategy, while also aligning with the Sun Tzu directive to "never separate your forces from your supplies."[10] China's present-day selection of BRI and GSI investment locations assures future control of key SLOC choke points that can help protect critical supply lines and control transcontinental movement.

Sun Tzu also considered deception a central component of warfare. Is the war with China coming in 2027, the date President Xi instructed the PLA to be ready to invade, or is it 2049 when the CCP anticipates having a world-class military, or will it be at a date and time when China assesses they are ready to attack? By getting the enemy fixated on a date, China is executing a straightforward deceptive tactic described by Sun Tzu: "When ready to attack, appear unready; when capable, appear to be incapable."[11] These arbitrary timelines have influenced U.S. strategic estimates that the 2027 date, known as the "Davidson Window," has become a focal point of American defense planning.[12] The term originates from former Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Philip Davidson, who testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2021, and expressed concern that China could invade Taiwan within the next six years. This was echoed in a recent National Defense University President's Lecture Series by a U.S. service chief who stated that their service readiness goals were to be ready by 2027 in anticipation of a potential confrontation with China. Other U.S. military agencies are likely driving modernization and readiness goals to align with this expectation. What is clear based on Chinese historical strategy is that China will not announce a date for their annexation of Taiwan and will likely not opt for a direct confrontation. Instead, China opts to implement an approach that pushes Taiwan to concede through other coercive means. One need only review all historical writings on Chinese culture to draw this conclusion.

The deception campaign goes beyond a timeline and geography. China's calculated feint in the South China Sea has drawn U.S. strategy to plan for a

Clausewitzian direct confrontation in the South China Sea, creating the space for China's global expansion and encirclement of the U.S. The U.S. Department of Defense Joint Publication 3-13.4, Military Deception, describes a feint as "a tactical maneuver designed to deceive the enemy by creating a perceived threat or action, typically away from the actual point of attack, to draw their attention and resources, allowing the military to gain an advantage elsewhere."[13] China's saber-rattling and harassing tactics in the South China Sea are likely a Sun Tzu-inspired feint articulated in The Art of War as "when attacking a point that is far away, make it seem as if attacking a point that is nearby." While the U.S. is fixated on China's harassing tactics in the South China Sea, China is preparing or staging to attack a point far away by making it seem they plan to attack a point that is near - Taiwan. The U.S. focus on the South China Sea has drawn attention away from other geostrategically important locations, allowing China the opportunity to secure posture locations to complete its encirclement strategy before implementing its ambitions to annex Taiwan.

"when attacking a point that is far away, make it seem as if attacking a point that is nearby."

One final lesson from Sun Tzu is his emphasis on the indispensable nature of intelligence. As outlined later in the paper's BSI and GSI section, China has secured two dual-purpose ports at the northern and southern tips of Africa, serving as strategic gateways to the Atlantic. These key ports in South Africa and Morocco position the PLA to monitor maritime traffic transiting between the Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. China's international policing initiatives take various forms, including the export of surveillance technology, security systems, and traditional police equipment.[14] These two geostrategic locations are positioned to facilitate monitoring and, if necessary, the disruption of commercial and military naval operations through these maritime chokepoints.

Mao Zedong's Deception and Encirclement

Although Mao's strategy aimed to defeat Imperial Japan in a guerilla campaign, many of his principles explain Beijing's present-day actions. The Maoist strategy of protracted warfare and strategic deception parallels China's modern geopolitical moves, especially in Africa and the Atlantic. Mao emphasized indirect confrontation, leveraging asymmetry, and controlling key terrain over time—principles that align with China's approach under the BRI and GSI. In "On Protracted Warfare," Mao provides the example of "making a feint to the east but attacking in the west" [15] to create misconceptions and deceive the enemy of your intent as you prepare to launch a surprise attack where he least expects it.

China's efforts in the Indo-Pacific are intended to keep the United States focused on that theater while it shapes the geopolitical and economic battlefield closer to the U.S., completing the Chinese encirclement campaign. The strategy also mirrors Mao's idea of "encircling the cities from the countryside."[16] In his writings, Mao describes three types of encirclement, the third of which is "international encirclement," which seeks to form allies to counter your enemy.[17] Mao describes this form of encirclement in terms of the "front of aggression (Japan and her allies) and the front of peace (China and her allies)."[18] Per Mao, these alliances aim to encircle one's enemy in a "gigantic net from which the fascist can find no escape, then that will be our enemy's day of doom."[19] Instead of confronting the U.S. head-on in the Pacific, China likely aims to encircle the U.S. in its 'gigantic net' woven in Africa, South America, and the Atlantic before taking decisive action that could lead to confrontation. Politically, this campaign has been underway since 2009 with the formation of the BRICS intergovernmental organization and with China's active efforts to reduce international recognition of Taiwan. Thirty African countries have recognized Taiwan since the 1950s; today, only one remains – Eswatini (formerly Swaziland).[20]

The military doctrines of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong converge in shaping the battlefield through deception and misdirection. They both emphasize gaining an asymmetric advantage, positioning, and leveraging indirect means – economic, diplomatic, and hybrid warfare – to advance strategic objectives. If China successfully controls key Atlantic ports, it could disrupt U.S. and NATO supply lines, global maritime trade, and force projection. The Atlantic presence also enhances China's nuclear deterrence and blue-water naval expansion, placing pressure on the U.S. from the Pacific and Atlantic.

Considering China's historically rooted Sun Tzu-Mao strategy, it is now crucial to understand the strategic frameworks of the PRC's BRI and GSI to highlight how present-day actions align with these concepts. Particularly concerning are African port investments along key maritime SLOCs into the Atlantic that will complete China's encirclement campaign.

The Belt and Road & Global Security Initiatives: Vehicles for Strategic Encirclement

Belt and Road Initiative

Since its inception in 2013 as the One Belt, One Road, the initiative's investments have quickly expanded globally to 147 countries, accounting for two-thirds of the world's population.[21] Figure 1 below depicts the global scale of this initiative.

These investments have been predominantly in transportation (rails, ports, and roads), real estate, and

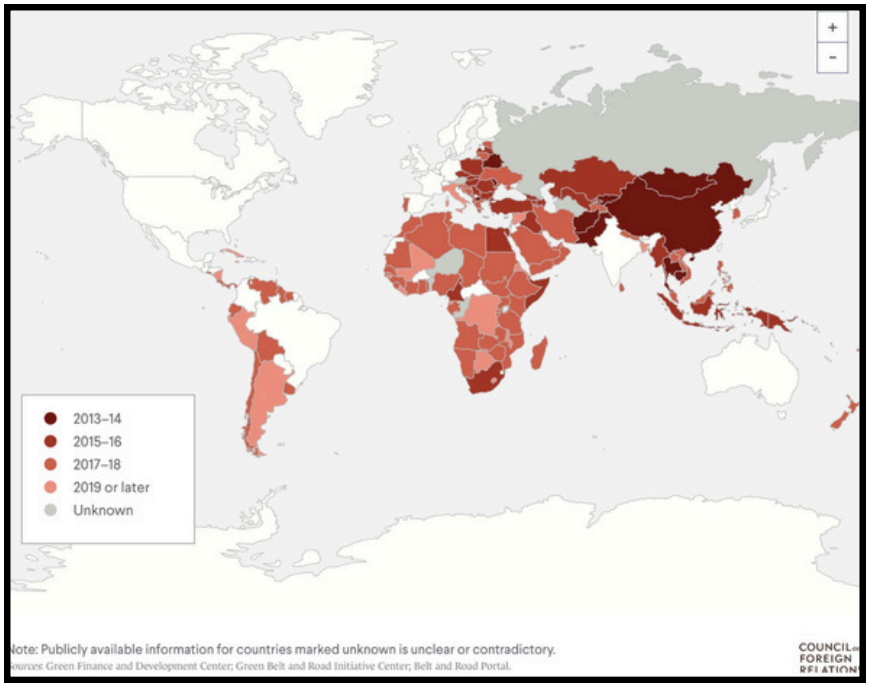


Figure 1. Official BRI participants by year of joining [22]

energy. In 2023, Africa became the largest recipient of BRI investments, which increased from the previous year by 114 percent, otaling $21.7 billion in 52 countries.[23] This surge was driven by China's strategic investment in key infrastructure projects, particularly in the port and shipping sectors, which increased by 47 percent. Chinese state-owned firms financed, constructed, and operate 61 of Africa's 231 commercial ports– 33 along the Atlantic coastline. [24] Those encapsulated in dashed

Figure 2. PRC port projects in Africa [25]

boxes in Figure 2 will be highlighted in subsequent discussion. Although China's investments in these ports through the BRI are billed as economically driven, at least one of these port projects has led to the establishment of a PLA military base in Doraleh, Djibouti, capable of accommodating aircraft carriers and submarines.[26] It is important to note that the PRC avoids the term 'overseas military base' due to its historical association with foreign imperialism, making it a politically sensitive term. Instead, the PRC uses the term 'strategic strong point' to describe locations supporting overseas military operations, securing SLOCs, and safeguarding Chinese interests abroad.[27] The PLA Navy (PLAN) doctrine calls for assuring strong points are mutually supporting and reinforcing when operationalized, indicating an ambition to create more to secure Chinese interests abroad.[28]

This Djibouti and Chinese-operated strong point is located at a key strategic, economic, and geopolitical location at the entrance of the Red Sea, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the busiest maritime chokepoints. China's strategy to establish a Djibouti strong point followed a pragmatic approach, which it replicated across the African continent. First comes financial investments in major infrastructure projects, including rail, roads, and port development, then award of contracts for the construction and operation of these projects to select Chinese state-owned firms. These loans result in indebtedness to the point where countries are unable to defray debts from these projects without significant concessions, garnering China leverage to achieve its ambitions for overseas posture.[29] In Djibouti, China justified the need for the posture location by citing the necessity to combat piracy and protect global trade through the Suez Canal. Yet, it has not joined the European Union's (EU) Operation ATALANTA, which includes non-EU states and has been successfully combating piracy in the region since 2008.[30]

China has created economic dependency through these large-scale investment loans

China has taken a similar predatory investment approach, often called debt-trap diplomacy, in several strategically located African countries along the Atlantic. Four states – Angola, Nigeria, Morocco, and South Africa – have received the highest Chinese investments since China initiated the GSI in 2022. These investments have been in similar sectors to those seen in Djibouti, leading up to establishing a PLAN strong point and using the same state-owned companies. China has invested $6.5 billion in Angola, $5.8 billion in Nigeria, $2.2 billion in Morocco, and $1.6 billion in South Africa, in port and infrastructure investments.[32] China has created economic dependency through these large-scale investment loans and again awarded the development projects to the same handful of Chinese state-

owned enterprises. The U.S. government, the European Union, and other entities have sanctioned these companies for their involvement in corruption, militarization, and human rights violations.[33] Several are also designated as 'Chinese military companies' by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) for their role in building illegal artificial islands and military outposts in the South China Sea.[34] This debt trap diplomacy will likely result in these low-income countries falling behind on debt payments and acquiescing to Chinese demands to establish dual-use port facilities or strategic strong points.

Angola is China's third largest source of oil, and the Lobito Port is critical to China's maritime trade and mineral exports from Central Africa.[35] Angola owes billions to China and has negotiated debt restructuring deals as oil price fluctuations have impacted its repayment capacity.[36] Angola is heavily reliant on oil exports, and with price fluctuations influenced by global tensions, its debt burden to China could become even more pressing, making it increasingly susceptible to Beijing's demands.

Nigeria is Africa's fourth-largest economy and China's second-largest oil supplier after Angola. Nigeria's offshore oil and gas reserves are critical for China's long-term energy strategy.[37] China's investments in Nigerian ports will also likely become a crucial hub for China's illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing fleet. Over 75 percent of ships fishing off the west coast of Africa are registered to Chinese companies.[38] Challenged with repaying its mounting indebtedness to China, Nigeria is negotiating debt restructuring and repayment schedules.

Morocco is China's new investment darling and the only African country President Xi visited in 2024.[39] Morocco's Tanger Med Port sits at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, making it an ideal hub for trade, logistics, and manufacturing. Morocco also has free trade agreements with the European Union and the United States, making it an ideal location for joint manufacturing ventures for exports to these markets.[40] Its proximity to the Strait of Gibraltar, key terrain, allows China to expand its influence along the Mediterranean and Atlantic trade routes, where it can monitor and disrupt commerce or naval operations.

The South African port of Durban at Richards Bay is strategically located at the Cape of Good Hope, a crucial node for international maritime trade between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. This southern access to the Atlantic and Pacific theaters has become even more critical with the recent instability in the Bab al-Mandab Strait caused by the Houthi rebel group. As of January 7, 2024, 354 container ships, 16.4 percent of the global container fleet, were rerouted to the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Red Sea crisis.[41]

China's economic predatory tactics are advancing its ambitions to likely future strong points in Africa along the Atlantic and strategically critical locations. Such locations enable China to monitor and disrupt naval operations as China seeks to complete its encirclement of the U.S. This next reinforcing economic investments with security sector investments. This approach enables Beijing to normalize its military presence on the continent while gaining access to local security and intelligence agencies. This enhances China's capacity to monitor, coerce, and influence internal state affairs by aligning with security institutions – often the most capable government entities in African states – while leveraging this influence to secure strategic posture locations.

Global Security Initiative

While China has had a significant economic role on the African continent through the BRI, 2024 saw an unprecedented change in emphasis on its role in Africa's security landscape. In September 2024, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit, President Xi formally introduced the GSI to 53 African heads of state and the African Union (AU) Chairperson.[42] President Xi outlined an action plan for 2025-2027, which includes joint military and law enforcement training, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism capacity building, peacekeeping operations, and maritime security cooperation aimed at securing shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Guinea, and Indian Ocean.[43] The operationalization of the GSI framework is opaque. Still, there are indicators that China is increasing its provision of equipment, training, security, and police partnership presence in Africa, where China has significant economic investments.[44] This implies that GSI efforts aim to secure Chinese economic investments through enduring presence. Before establishing the GSI, China's public security agencies were more active than the PLA in Africa, including having established extradition and security agreements with over 40 countries. Angola, Nigeria, Morocco, and South Africa are four of only thirteen that have full extradition agreements with China, further underscoring their strategic importance to China's long-term ambitions.[45]

Still, there are indicators that China is increasing its provision of equipment, training, security, and police partnership presence in Africa,

Accurately assessing China's security force assistance (SFA) figures and donations remains challenging due to the opaque nature of China's transactions and the limited transparency surrounding its defense and aid agreements. However, a 2024 Report on the Implementation Progress of the GSI published by the China Institute of International Studies revealed a glimpse of what Beijing attributed to the GSI. These include financial and troop contributions to

the United Nations (UN) and an $80 million donation to the UN Peace and Security Trust Fund. China has also engaged in joint training and exercises with ten African countries and currently has 4,100 PLA soldiers and sailors deployed in Africa, with 2,000 stationed in Djibouti, 1,400 assigned to UN missions, and 700 sailors on ships around the African coast. Also lumped under the GSI are China's internal security forces, which have conducted police training in over 40 African countries and supplied equipment, supplies, and training to the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf of Guinea regions. Finally, the report touts China's establishment of the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization counterterrorism training base, which hosts international seminars on counterterrorism.[46] Not captured in the report was the $306 million in arms sales in 2023, a marked 288 percent increase from 2022.[47]

It is clear Beijing prioritizes its economic and military investments in Africa. China emphasizes states at key maritime chokepoints and strategically located ports along the Atlantic coast that could provide dual access for economic and military use through economic leverage or coercion. China is employing historically inspired stratagems to encircle the U.S., assert control over strategically vital terrain, and obscure its true intentions.

The U.S. Response: An Indo-Pacific Pivot

China's masterful game of Wei-Chi is unfolding across multiple theaters. China is leveraging historical precedents of strategic misdirection in the Indo-Pacific to divert U.S. attention while concealing its true objective – encirclement. By engaging in the reclamation of reefs, illicit expansion of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), growing militarization, and intimidation tactics in the South China Sea, China has successfully drawn U.S. grand strategy and policy focus to the region. This deliberate maneuver not only absorbs American resources and strategic bandwidth but also allows Beijing to quietly consolidate influence in other critical arenas, advancing its long-term geopolitical ambitions with limited resistance.

In 2011, the Obama administration announced a U.S. "Pivot to Asia," that prioritized long-term engagement in the Indo-Pacific by bolstering relationships and posture in the region to counter China's growing influence.[48] This strategic shift concentrated U.S. resources in the region but deemphasized other theaters, including Africa. During a March 2022 Congressional testimony, a former U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) commander affirmed this claim when he described U.S. efforts in Africa as an "economy of force" operation – underscoring the relative neglect of the African theater in U.S. grand strategy.[49] Subsequent Trump and Biden national security strategies (NSS) recognized China's global aspirations and called for the redoubling of U.S.

commitments and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) went as far as to recognize "China's predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries and reorder the Indo-Pacific region to its advantage."[50] Again, this limits the focus of China's effects on the Indo-Pacific and not on the global context.

The most recent 2022 NDS, under Biden, described China as America's most "consequential competitor that challenges U.S. security through coercive and increasingly aggressive behavior."[51] Again, this document focused efforts on countering China's activity in the South China Sea and China's attempts to destabilize the region. This NDS further directed a deterrence approach focused on increasing regional posture locations, building resilience to sustain the fight, and imposing costs on China's actions in the region.

What is common to the three past administrations is that their number one priority remained to defend the homeland from threats posed by China. All were drawn to developing a response and strategy centered around the South China Sea – the distraction.

Implications for the United States: The Emerging Dual-Theater Challenge

This paper does not seek to discount China's ambition to control the vast economic resources in the South China Sea or that it seeks to annex Taiwan. This paper nonetheless seeks to illuminate that China aims to distract and deceive the United States in the South China Sea while it shores up its encirclement and global posture before acting to assert its territorial claims from a position of strength. While the United States and its allies are focused on the Indo-Pacific, China is implementing a calculated strategy that encircles the U.S. by establishing global posture locations, controlling 'pivoting' ground, and growing the 'front of peace.'

While significant attention has been placed on China's military aggression and economic coercion in the Indo-Pacific, Beijing is notably advancing its influence in Africa, an underappreciated yet strategically critical theater, to reshape global power dynamics. Through the BRI and GSI, China is establishing "dual-use" port facilities – ostensibly commercial ports or logistics hubs –that can be quickly converted for military purposes. This approach enables strategic positioning under the guise of economic development. It allows China to establish a base and posture within five to seven days of the U.S. East Coast by sea; control strategic maritime choke points, including Tanger Med Port in Morocco and Durban Port in South Africa; monitor and potentially disrupt U.S. military and economic vessels moving between the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific; and contest U.S. logistics support in a future Indo-Pacific conflict.

A military presence in West Africa would also enable China to expand its influence into the Atlantic. This positions China closer to its other BRI investments in South America and the Caribbean – regions traditionally within the U.S. sphere of influence.

Recommendations: New Administration, New Approach

Each new U.S. presidential administration has a new opportunity to recognize the long-game approach of China's strategy and develop an NSS that contends globally with the pacing challenge. While the Indo-Pacific remains critical, the U.S. cannot ignore the strategic implications of China's activities in Africa and the Atlantic closer to home. Efforts to strengthen ties with African nations, particularly in West Africa, should be prioritized to counter China's influence. Using tools such as Prosper Africa, which started in the last Trump administration, the U.S. can offer countries viable alternatives to Chinese investments that benefit both the U.S. and local economies.

Finally, the U.S. should closely monitor Chinese investments in ports and transportation networks in Africa to assess their potential for dual-use (commercial and military) purposes. Where indications of illicit intent exist, the U.S. should intensify diplomatic and economic efforts to counter China's potential base-building. This is similar to the 2022 Biden administration efforts in Equatorial Guinea, where the U.S. reportedly engaged directly with Equatorial Guinea's leadership to discourage military agreements with China. The U.S. initially underestimated China's military ambitions in Djibouti, and if the U.S. does not develop a new approach to counter Chinese expansion in the Atlantic, it may face a new strategic surprise in its backyard.

Conclusion

China's Global Security Initiative marks a pivotal evolution in its foreign policy, signaling a shift from an economically centered strategy under the Belt and Road Initiative to a multidimensional global posture grounded in historical doctrine, strategic deception, and military encirclement. Drawing on the teachings of Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong, Beijing is executing a long-game strategy that prioritizes indirect confrontation, misdirection, and incremental advantage. By establishing dual-use infrastructure across Africa's Atlantic coast, China is methodically positioning itself to challenge U.S. dominance, control strategic maritime chokepoints, and enable global power projection. While U.S. national security strategies have remained Indo-Pacific focused, China's calculated actions in Africa reveal a broader encirclement strategy designed to stretch American resources and attention. If left unchecked, China's consolidation of Atlantic access and partnerships will severely undermine U.S. strategic flexibility and homeland defense. To meet this dual-theater challenge, the

United States must recalibrate its national security priorities to recognize Africa not as a secondary front but as a critical arena in the global contest with China.

End Notes:

1. China Institute of International Studies, "Report on the Implementation Progress of the Global Security Initiative (2024)," Assessment (China Institute of International Studies, July 2024), https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/NEWS_183/202407/t20240718_9313.html.
2. Peoples Republic of China, "The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper," 2023, http://cr.china-embassy.gov.cn/esp/ndle/202302/t20230222_11029046.htm.
3. Henry Kissinger, On China (Penguin Books, 2012).
4. Mao Tse-Tung, "ON PROTRACTED WAR," in Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung (Elsevier, 1965), 113–94, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-022981-2.50011-9.
5. "Wei-Chi: The Game of War," U.S. Naval Institute, August 1, 1999, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1999/august/wei-chi-game-war.
6. "Wei-Chi."
7. Kissinger, On China.
8. Sunzi, The Art of War: An Illustrated Edition, The Illustrated Library of Chinese Classics (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).
9. Sunzi.
10. Sunzi.
11. Sunzi.
12. Isaac Kardon and Jennifer Kavanagh, "How China Will Squeeze, Not Seize, Taiwan," Foreign Affairs, May 21, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/how-china-will-squeeze-not-seize-taiwan.
13. U.S. Joint Staff, "Joint Publication 3-13.4 Military Deception" (U.S. Department of Defense, January 26, 2012).
14. "The Global Security Initiative: China's International Policing Activities," IISS, accessed January 24, 2025, https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2024/10/the-global-security-initiative-chinas-international-policing-activities/.
15. Tse-Tung, "ON PROTRACTED WAR."
16. Tse-Tung.
17. Tse-Tung.
18. Tse-Tung.
19. Tse-Tung.
20. Kristina Kironska, "How Taiwan Lost Africa," CEIAS, December 21, 2022, https://ceias.eu/how-taiwan-lost-africa/.
21. "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative | Council on Foreign Relations," accessed February 3, 2025, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative.
22. "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative | Council on Foreign Relations."
23. Derek Scissors, "China Global Investment Tracker," Data (American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation, 2025), https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/.
24. Isaac Kardon, "(IN) ROADS AND OUTPOSTS, Critical Infrastructure in China's Africa Strategy," NBR Special Report, China's Ports in Africa (National Bureau of Asian Research, May 2022), https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr98_inroadsandoutposts_may2022.pdf.
25. Kardon, 21.
26. Sam LaGrone, "AFRICOM: Chinese Naval Base in Africa Set to Support Aircraft Carriers," USNI News (blog), April 20, 2021, https://news.usni.org/2021/04/20/africom-chinese-naval-base-in-africa-set-to-support-aircraft-carriers.
27. Conor Kennedy, "Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy," China Brief, March 22, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/strategic-strong-points-and-chinese-naval-strategy/.
28. Kennedy.
29. Indu Saxen, Robert Uri Dabaly, and Arushi Singh, "China's Military and Economic Prowess in Djibouti: A Security Challenge for the Indo-Pacific," Air University (AU), November 18, 2021, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2847015/chinas-military-and-economic-prowess-in-djibouti-a-security-challenge-for-the-i.html.

30. European External Action Service, "Mission | EUNAVFOR," EU Naval Force Operation ATALANTA, December 16, 2024, https://eunavfor.eu/mission.
31. Scissors, "China Global Investment Tracker."
32. Scissors.
33. Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Sanctions List Service," Specially Designated Nationals List, Data List (OFAC, February 20, 2025), https://sanctionslist.ofac.treas.gov/home/sdnlist
34. DOD, "Entities Identified as Chinese Military Companies Operating in the United States in Accordance with Section 1260H of the William M. ('Mac') Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283)1*," January 7, 2025, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jan/07/2003625471/-1/-1/1/ENTITIES-IDENTIFIED-AS-CHINESE-MILITARY-COMPANIES-OPERATING-IN-THE-UNITED-STATES.PDF.
35. "Crude Petroleum in China," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed February 12, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/crude-petroleum/reporter/chn.
36. "Angola Agrees Lower Monthly Debt Payments to China Development Bank," Reuters, March 19, 2024, sec. Finance, https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/angola-agrees-lower-monthly-debt-payments-china-development-bank-2024-03-19/. 37. "China (CHN) and Nigeria (NGA) Trade," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed February 12, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/nga. 38. Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, "China's IUU Fishing Fleet: Pariah of the World's Oceans," International Law Studies 99, no. 1 (April 20, 2022), https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol99/iss1/10. 39. "Xi Jinping Meets with Moroccan Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," accessed February 16, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202411/t20241125_11532378.html.
40. Christian Géraud Neema Byamungu, "Morocco, an Unexpected Winner of China's Strategy to Circumvent the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act," January 23, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/morocco-unexpected-winner-chinas-strategy-circumvent-us-inflation-reduction-act.
41. "Red Sea Crisis: What It Takes to Reroute the World's Biggest Cargo Ships," January 21, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240119-red-sea-crisis-how-global-shipping-is-being-rerouted-out-of-danger.
42. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027)" (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit, Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024), https://2024focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hyqk_1/202409/t20240906_11486213.htm.
43. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
44. Maria Carrozza and Nicholas J. Marsh, "Great Power Competition and China's Security Assistance to Africa: Arms, Training, and Influence," Journal of Global Security Studies 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2022): 1n, https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogac027.
45. Paul Nantulya, "China's Policing Models Make Inroads in Africa," Africa Center (blog), accessed January 24, 2025, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/chinas-policing-models-make-inroads-in-africa/.
46. China Institute of International Studies, "Report on the Implementation Progress of the Global Security Initiative (2024)."
47. Timothy Ditter | Thursday, October 10, and 2024, "Africa Is China's Testing Ground for Overseas Military Missions," accessed January 31, 2025, https://www.cna.org/our-media/indepth/2024/10/africa-is-chinas-testing-ground-for-overseas-military-missions.
48. "FACT SHEET: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific," whitehouse.gov, November 16, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/fact-sheet-advancing-rebalance-asia-and-pacific.
49. "Commander Details How U.S. Africa Command Furthers Defense Goals," U.S. Department of Defense, accessed February 1, 2025, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2966710/commander-

Michael Gacheru, Colonel USA, sub-Saharan FAO

Colonel Michael Gacheru has served in military assignments at tactical – through strategic – levels. During his service, he has deployed in support of Operation Desert Spring (Kuwait), Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation United Assistance (Liberia), and Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq).

COL Gacheru began his career as an Engineer Officer. After his promotion to Captain, he was assigned as an Infantry Officer until he was selected to be a Foreign Area Officer (FAO) in 2017. As an Infantry Officer, COL Gacheru commanded an Infantry Company in Iraq and served as a battalion operations and executive officer in Afghanistan. He has filled key staff positions at the brigade, division, and Army Service Component Command (ASCC), including serving as the Executive Officer to the Commander, U.S. Army Africa. COL Gacheru has also served with other U.S. agencies when he was selected as an interagency fellow with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency – Office of Counterterrorism. As a FAO, COL Gacheru has served at the U.S. Mission in Iraq, U.S. Mission to the EU, U.S. Mission to NATO, U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, U.S. Africa Command, and U.S. Army Africa. Prior to his selection to attend the Senior Service College at the National Defense University, he served as the Senior Military Advisor to the Minister of Peshmerga Affairs in Erbil, Iraq. His military education includes the Basic and Advanced Officer company grade courses, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Defense Language Institute, where he earned an associate degree in French. As a Sub-Saharan FAO, COL Gacheru is fluent in French and Swahili. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Manufacturing Engineering from Western Illinois University and a Master's in Engineering Management from the University of Missouri. COL Gacheru recently completed a Master's in Strategic Security Studies at the National Defense University and is now assigned to US Africa Command.

End notes continued:
details-how-us-africa-command-furthers-defense-goals/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.defense.gov%2FNews%2FNews-Stories%2FArticle%2FArticle%2F2966710%2Fcommander-details-how-us-africa-command-furthers-defense-goals%2F.
50. “2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.Pdf,” accessed March 21, 2025.

An Analysis of the United States – Thailand Defense Alliance

Lieutenant Colonel Pete Roongsang, US Army

Introduction

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) prioritizes alliances and partnerships and the Department of Defense (DoD) invests significant resources on operations, activities, and investments (OAI's) in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance its "greatest global strategic advantage."[1] Recent announcements include the modernization of the U.S.-Japan defense alliance; U.S.-Australia posture initiatives and trilateral cooperation under the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS) security pact with Australia; new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites in the Philippines; and increased strategic asset rotations to the Korean Peninsula.[2] These initiatives to enhance integrated deterrence with four out of five of its Indo-Pacific alliances signal the United States' commitment to improving its strategic advantages vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China (PRC). The U.S. theory of victory posits a strengthened network of alliances and partnerships bolsters integrated deterrence and provides tactical, operational, and strategic advantages in crisis and conflict should deterrence fail.

However, recent U.S. policy and strategic documents omit similar references to bilateral initiatives with Thailand, one of the United States' longest-standing Indo-Pacific allies. What explains the lack of similar activities with one of the United States' longest-standing defense allies in the Indo-Pacific? To what extent does the U.S.-Thai defense alliance remain functional and militarily valuable to both nations? Recent Thai strategic decisions and both states' unwillingness or inability to strengthen the alliance indicate strategic misalignment. By examining the U.S.-Thai defense alliance through Walt's balance of threat theory and Snyder's theory on alliance management, policymakers will be better equipped to recalibrate the alliance and mitigate the risk associated with alliance underperformance. Not doing so jeopardizes U.S. integrated deterrence of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific and would be a missed opportunity for the United States.

The U.S.-Thai defense alliance is the weakest of the five U.S.-Indo-Pacific alliances. Its underperformance presents risks to the United States in the context of great power competition with the PRC. To a great extent, the absence of U.S.-Thai alignment on strategic threats explains the current state of the alliance. U.S.-Thai history and alliance theory indicate the defense alliance will continue to underperform

until Thailand views the PRC as a strategic threat to its national interests. The United States must improve its bargaining power vis-à-vis Thailand in regards to alliance management. The United States should identify effective mechanisms to compel Thailand to abandon its current strategy of hedging between great powers. This process of reaching strategic alignment may be accelerated by real or perceived PRC threats and coercion.

The United States and the Kingdom of Thailand share one of the longest-standing relationships in the Indo-Pacific.

Background

The United States and the Kingdom of Thailand share one of the longest-standing relationships in the Indo-Pacific. The 70-year-old defense alliance between the two countries emerged from the aftermath of World War II and strengthened in response to the shared threat from the spread of communism during the Cold War. Thailand's decision to deploy soldiers to fight in the Korean War in 1950, the signing of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954, the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communique, Thailand's troop deployments to fight alongside the United States in Vietnam, and Thailand's willingness to host tens of thousands of U.S. forces until 1976, [3] signaled Thailand's unwavering commitment to the defense alliance. Both allies shared a common threat perception against communism and this set the conditions for seemingly limitless defense cooperation.

After the end of the Cold War, Thailand continued to support the United States, however to a lesser extent. For example, Thailand deployed modest troop rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan and allowed U.S. forces access to Utapao Naval Air Station in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other regional contingencies.[4] President Bush named Thailand as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) after Thailand allowed the use of Utapao in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).[5] In addition, Thailand reportedly hosted a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) black site, known as "Detention Site Green," where close associates of Usama Bin Laden were whisked away for enhanced interrogation.[6] Done with the full knowledge and consent of the Thai authorities, such cooperation represented Thailand's willingness to support the alliance against common threats such as global terrorism. Furthermore, Thailand also co-hosts the annual COBRA GOLD joint military exercise with its U.S. partner. However, in recent years, the Indo-Pacific's largest multinational and longest-running joint military exercise remains stagnant, is increasingly symbolic, is prone to coup sanctions, and its focus on preparing for joint-combined large-scale combat operations (LSCO) is questionable.

The U.S. military seeks enhanced access, basing, and overflight (ABO) in

Thailand to improve integrated deterrence of the PRC and to gain a more favorable posture in the event of crisis or conflict. The U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) strategy identifies Thailand as key terrain for its "Western Approach," one of its four operational approaches in the Indo-Pacific.[7] USARPAC views alliances and partnerships as critical to achieving U.S. Indo-Pacific commanders objectives by accomplishing four tasks: 1) presenting credible deterrent capabilities, 2) denying key terrain to adversaries; 3) assuring allies and partners; and 4) setting conditions to prevail in war. At this time, it is not likely the United States will get all of what it wants from its ally because Thailand does not view China as a strategic threat to its national interests. Like many Southeast Asian nations, Thailand prefers to hedge between the two great powers to maximize its economic and security gains. Further complicating the relationship, Thailand's economy is exposed to PRC economic coercion while some Thai elites continue to resent U.S. criticism of its internal domestic political disputes putting into question each other's commitment to the defense alliance.

Analytical Framework: Walt and Snyder

Walt's Balance of Threat Theory

Analyzing the U.S.-Thai defense alliance through two prominent theories provides perspectives to better understand the conditions that led to alliance formation and offers observations on alliance management that should contribute to national policy prescription. What explains the formation of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance after World War II? What explains the current state of the alliance today? The answers to these questions will aid national security practitioners in charting a new course for the U.S.-Thai defense alliance. The first theory predominantly focuses on the structural aspect of the threat.

In The Origins of Alliances, Stephen M. Walt provides several hypotheses explaining alliance formation. His balance of threat hypotheses provides several conclusions valuable for an analysis of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance. Most saliently, Walt posits that "states balance against the states that pose the greatest threat," and "states will ally with the side it believes is the least dangerous."[8] The focus is principally on the threat and not necessarily the relative power of each state. Walt identified four factors contributing to the level of perceived threats including aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.[9] After taking stock of these strategic conditions, states either choose to balance or bandwagon. It is important to note that Walt approaches his analysis of the threat through a structural lens. It is not based on Parson's other three causal logics to explain a state's behaviors (i.e. ideational, psychological, or institutional).[10] Walt defines balancing as "allying with others

against the prevailing threat," and bandwagoning refers to "alignment with the source of danger." [11] Regarding its alliances, the United States advances its strategic objectives by cultivating partners willing to engage in balancing and dissuading them from bandwagoning with U.S. enemies and competitors such as the PRC, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran, and Russia.

Walt also concluded that shared ideology is "less important than external threats as cause for alliances," and "neither foreign aid and penetration has proven to be much as an explanation for alliance formation." These two observations have significant implications for national security practitioners as they are at odds with the traditional U.S. approach to developing allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. A common interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based international order is assumed to be a significant unifying ideology. Additionally, U.S. security cooperation across the region seeks to enhance alliances and partnerships to build new partnerships and strengthen existing alliances.

U.S. security cooperation across the region seeks to enhance alliances and partnerships to build new partnerships and strengthen existing alliances.

However, according to Walt, ideology and aid do not lead to alliance formation, but are either extraneous factors or visible signs of the formed alliances. More simply put, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Australia perceive the threats from the PRC and/or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are so great that they have more fully embraced their alliance with the United States. This observation is particularly important for U.S. defense policy practitioners because some policymakers mistakenly measure success through the amount of foreign security assistance dollars given to partners. Instead, the U.S. senior leaders must better understand how potential allies and partners perceive the PRC as an existential security threat.

Snyder's Alliance Management

Glenn Snyder provides foundational insights into alliance management in his book Alliance Politics. He argues alliance management is a constant process in which states bargain to pursue both common and competitive interests. They seek to maximize joint benefits gained from the alliance while minimizing independent costs.[12] Looking at the U.S.-Thai defense alliance as a constant negotiation offers insights on how to best approach the future of the relationship.

Snyder presents three determinants of intra-alliance bargaining power: 1) the less dependence one ally has on the other, the more bargaining power they have ; 2) the more commitment one

state has to the alliance, the less bargaining power they have; and 3) the degree of interest in a specific issue in which they are bargaining.[13] This paper will evaluate these determinants from both the United States and Thailand's perspectives to determine the extent of each state's bargaining power. By determining their respective bargaining power and bargaining range, more sound analysis of the current state of the alliance and more sound policy prescriptions for alliance management may be found. Interestingly, Snyder's focus on analyzing allies' dependence, their measurable commitment, and alignment on interests places more emphasis on the structural logic explaining states' behaviors. Both Walt and Snyder do not seem to place a strong focus on analyzing the state's institutions, ideational factors, or ingrained psychological factors.[14] This perhaps indicates national security practitioners must place increased focus on analyzing the structural factors, physical and physical-like elements, contributing to national power.

Application of Theory

U.S.-Thai Defense Alliance Formation

After World War II, Thailand chose to ally with the United States because of the threat of communism. Despite only two Southeast Asian signatories, Thailand and the Philippines, the 1954 Manila Pact demonstrated eight nations' shared view that communism was a strategic threat. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was comprised of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States and signaled their nations' commitment to collective defense against communism.[15] Thailand perceived the aggregate power of communism as high, geographical proximity as extremely close, a high degree of offensive power, and a very high degree of aggressive intentions towards Thailand. These factors contributed to further bilateral strengthening of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance as captured in the Thanat-Rusk Communique, where Secretary of State Rusk expressed the firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting Communist aggression and subversion." Furthermore, both leaders agreed that the alliance was "an effective deterrent to direct communist aggression against Thailand," and "the treaty provides the basis for the signatories collectively to assist Thailand in case of communist armed attack."[16]

Quite simply, Thailand made a strategic decision to ally with the United States against the prevailing threat of communism. Thailand chose to do this because they would place their survival at risk if they had failed to curb the communist threat.[17] Communism posed an existential threat to the Thai monarchy, Buddhism, and military elites. Further research should be undertaken to analyze how the threat communism posed to traditional Thai sources of power and legitimacy: the

Thai military, the monarchy, and Theravada Buddhism. Perhaps lessons learned from the analysis may be applied to how PRC influence may impact these core Thai national interests.

Current U.S. Threat Perception of the PRC:

The United States currently views the People's Republic of China as "the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order, and increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so,"[18] and "remains our most consequential strategic competitor for the coming decades."[19] Since the end of the Obama Administration, the U.S. has and will continue to prioritize great power competition with the PRC. This strategic competition frames the U.S. approach toward building security partnerships and alliances around the globe. To a high degree, the United States has been left rather disappointed in its defense alliance with Thailand. The alliance has been underperforming in the context of U.S.-PRC great power competition.

"We are facing a common threat, which is now the overreach of the Communist Party of China."

President Trump's administration seems to continue placing special emphasis on strategic competition with the PRC and focusing on enhancing deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's visit to the Philippines underscored U.S. threat perceptions of the PRC. Secretary Hegseth said "We are facing a common threat, which is now the overreach of the Communist Party of China."[20] This message resonated with allies such as the Philippines, Japan, and Australia, but likely fell flat with Thailand.

Thailand's Threat Perception of the PRC:

From a recent high-level visit between Thailand and the PRC, Thai Prime Minister Shinawatra and PRC President Xi committed to advancing "their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership." They also committed to "enhance traditional and non-traditional security cooperation including military-to-military exchanges at various levels, joint military exercises and training, cooperation in defense industry, capacity building, personnel training, and technology transfer."[21] Thailand also sought the PRC's support to becoming a full BRICS member, a move to join an organization aimed at challenging the U.S.-led world economic order. Lastly, Thailand, unlike several countries in Southeast Asia, does not have land or maritime territory disputes with the PRC. Thailand does not share the United States' view of the PRC as a strategic threat. In the aggregate, Thailand's policy decisions towards the PRC do not meet U.S. expectations for a defense ally. Lastly, the PRC's economic leverage will weigh heavily

on Thailand's strategic decision-making and its approach to managing the defense alliance with the United States.

Thailand's decision to move forward with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) purchase of PRC diesel-powered submarines - despite previous efforts to scuttle the deal;[22] the Royal Thai Air Force's continued willingness to host People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) advanced platforms for Exercise Falcon Strike;[23] Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) desire to invite the PRC to participate more fully in Joint Exercise Cobra Gold;[24] and permission to allow a recent Russian naval task force for a port call [25] demonstrate a continued string of decisions not expected for a U.S. defense ally.

Recent news concerning Thailand's forced return of Uyghurs to the PRC further underscored the extent of PRC influence over Thailand. Despite offers of asylum from third-party countries and the action directly countering international human rights conventions, Thailand made the strategic decision to return 40 Uyghurs to the PRC.[26] Despite the PRC's history of forced labor and torture, Thailand chose to believe the PRC's assurances that the Uyghurs would be treated humanely. Thailand was ultimately sanctioned by the United States, and was admonished by the European Union, other nations, and even by its citizens.[27] The incident demonstrates the extent of influence the PRC currently wields over Thailand vis-à-vis the United States.

Thailand Abandons Balancing & Bandwagoning for Hedging Strategy:

Given Thailand's current strategic environment and its relationships with both the United States and the PRC, what expected behaviors should national security observers expect to see? What explains Thailand's hedging strategy towards both great powers? Analyzing the PRC through Walt's four levels of threat factors may aid observers in anticipating Thailand's current and future strategic decisions. In terms of aggregate power, the PRC wields a "tremendous population, industrial and military capability, and technological prowess"[28] that outmatches Thailand's capacity across all instruments of national power. Although geographically close to Thailand, the PRC does not present territorial challenges to Thailand's sovereignty. However, its control of the headwaters of the Mekong River represents the leverage the PRC has over many mainland Southeast Asian nations. The PRC military is capable of offensive operations but has not fought a war since it invaded Vietnam in 1979.[29] However, the PRC does employ aggressive gray zone tactics in the South China Sea and has not renounced the potential use of force to achieve unification of the island of Taiwan. Although the PRC has continued to pursue aggressive strategies across the Indo-Pacific, Thailand does not view those intentions directed at Thailand. In the aggregate, Thailand does not perceive a significant threat from the PRC, thus it will not

balance against it more fully through its defense alliance with the United States. Instead, Thailand adopted a hedging strategy to advance its national interests.

Instead of balancing against the PRC by aligning more closely with its U.S. defense ally or abandoning the alliance completely and bandwagoning with the PRC, Thailand adopted a double-hedging strategy towards both states. Hedging is an attractive alternative to balancing and bandwagoning and represents a middle position [30] for smaller states caught in between great powers. By employing a mixture of engagement, cooperation, and confrontation against the hedging target, Thailand adopts a hedging strategy as an insurance policy against insecurity and risk caused by the strategies and behaviors of great powers. [31] This type of strategy is particularly appealing to Thai elites as well as ordinary citizens given Thailand's proud narrative of successfully managing relations between great powers. Thais take great pride in their country avoiding colonialism in the 19th century, the only Southeast Asian country to do so.[32] Thailand's adoption of a bamboo-hedging strategy where it bends against the powerful currents of great powers is not helpful and certainly not expected from a U.S. defense ally.[33]

U.S. and Thailand Bargaining Power:

The least desirable outcome for both the United States and Thailand, regarding the defense alliance, is a complete dissolution of the security partnership. The unraveling of the alliance would feed the PRC narrative that the United States is an unreliable ally while leaving Thailand increasingly vulnerable to PRC economic and diplomatic coercion. Militarily, what little access, basing, and overflight remaining for the United States in Thailand would no longer be a viable military option for crisis or conflict. This jeopardizes U.S. military operations, activities, and investments (OAI's) to enhance integrated deterrence and to build positional advantages required to support contingencies or conflict should deterrence fail. By measuring both parties' dependence on the alliance, their commitment to the relationship, and their interests at stake, practitioners may better understand both the United States and Thailand's bargaining power to better manage the alliance.

Snyder measures dependence with three variables: "state's need for military assistance, degree to which the ally fills that need, and alternative ways of meeting the need."[34] The United States is not particularly dependent on Thailand for military purposes. Enhanced access, basing, and overflight on mainland Southeast Asia would provide increased military options and reduce risk to operational plans, but the United States has invested in other alliances and partnerships. The addition of additional Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites in the Philippines, ongoing access in Singapore, and an emerging relationship with Vietnam

seem to provide more appealing options to the United States. Thailand, on the other hand, is slightly more dependent on the United States for military assistance. The Thai armed forces were modeled after the United States and the Thai military is quite familiar with U.S. military doctrine, professional military education, training, and weapons systems. New security partners and military alternatives could fill future capability gaps, perhaps with a lower financial cost, but Thailand does depend on the United States more than the United States depends on Thailand. In regards to its commitment to the alliance, the United States is loosely committed to Thailand. Facing no existential threats from external actors, there has not been a need for the United States to verbally express itself to defend Thailand. In regards to strategic interests in Thailand, the United States does not have a lot at stake except for positional military advantage on mainland Southeast Asia. Thailand is not a significant supplier of natural resources, critical rare earth metals, or advanced technological components like other partners around the globe. Thailand is also loosely committed to the alliance as it does not have enough significant military capability to contribute to the United States. Additionally, Thailand is not seeking U.S. security guarantees to meet current or future strategic or military requirements.

Lastly, on U.S. interests on specific issues for negotiation. Specifically, how interested is the U.S. in negotiating with Thailand over military preparedness, diplomacy, or military action? On this matter, the United States would have a high degree of interest in discussing military preparedness and actions with its defense ally. The United States would also have a very high level of interest in wanting Thailand to align itself with the United States across a broad spectrum of diplomatic decisions. Thailand's vote in the United Nations or its influence within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) would greatly enhance the U.S. efforts to compete against the PRC in great power competition.

Risk & Policy Recommendations

The potential long-term or permanent risk of the continued degradation of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance is the complete dissolution of the alliance and the possibility of Thailand choosing to bandwagon with the PRC. These risks are for the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and the President of the United States (POTUS) to underwrite as they directly impact U.S. national security interests in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. These potential strategic outcomes will negatively impact U.S. leadership in the Indo-Pacific, enhance the PRC's strategic and military advantage of interior lines, and further erode U.S. regional interests across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements of national power. SECDEF and POTUS should direct the Office of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD/P), the State Department, and

the National Security Council (NSC) to identify ways in which to better align threat perceptions with Thai allies and to develop novel and innovative approaches towards alliance management to recalibrate the U.S.-Thai defense alliance to advance U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific.

To avoid the negative consequences of the erosion of the U.S.-Thai alliance, U.S. policymakers must pursue a strategy to compel Thailand to 1) Abandon any notion of bandwagoning with the PRC; 2) Strengthen the U.S.-Thai defense alliance; and 2) Retain its hedging strategy should previous COA 1 or 2 fail. To advance its regional interests with Thailand, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, the United States must significantly influence how Thailand perceives the threat from the PRC. Additionally, the United States must adjust how it manages the alliance to maximize desired gains in the short, mid, and long term. A strategy of coercive diplomacy will involve the use of leverage as well as a combination of assurances, persuasion, and inducements.

A strategy of coercive diplomacy will involve the use of leverage as well as a combination of assurances, persuasion, and inducements.

Altering Thailand's threat perception of the PRC must focus on PRC actions that directly impact core Thai national interests. Border security issues (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia), transnational crime, the Mekong sub-region, PRC economic leverage over Thailand, and maritime security issues in the Gulf of Thailand are directly linked to Thai national security interests. Taiwan and the South China Sea are over-the-horizon areas for Thailand and are not directly linked to more short-sighted national security interests. Potential areas for enhanced engagement with Thailand include increased 1) Synchronized U.S. and multinational (Japan, Korea, Australia, Philippines) partner intelligence sharing of PRC nefarious activities in the aforementioned regions; and 2) Thai liaison officers embedded at the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Headquarters. These approaches to better inform Thailand of the strategic threats from the PRC will advance U.S. interests. The United States must also continue to credibly signal costs to Thailand for continuing to bend to PRC demands. However, the United States must also prepare to offer inducements such as preferential trade deals and assurances of not publicly weighing in on domestic Thai politics. U.S. engagement with Thailand in areas where Thai national security interests and PRC malign activities intersect will provide actionable areas for further cooperation to achieve strategic alignment on common threats.

The 2023 U.S. decision not to offer to sell the F-35 to Thailand showcased the United States' lack of strategic creativity and risk aversion. Citing technical issues and timelines, the U.S.

decided not to offer the F-35 to Thailand. However, insiders also posit the U.S. was not comfortable with the Thais potentially exposing advanced technology to the PRC.[35]The F-35 fighter sale represented an opportunity for the U.S. to exert leverage over Thailand vis-à-vis the PRC. The U.S. should have fully explored offering the capability, encouraged Thailand to make necessary technical upgrades to its infrastructure, sought Thai commitments to protect U.S. technology, and stipulated terms to roll back Thai-PRC military-to-military engagement. In return, the Thais would have gained regional and international prestige for fielding the F-35. Potential concessions the U.S. should have pursued were: 1) Cancellation or downgrading of Thai-PRC exercise FALCON STRIKE; 2) Cancellation of Thailand's procurement of PRC submarines; and 3) Enhanced access to Thailand's air bases and airspace for anticipated F-35 training and engagement. These transactional approaches communicate U.S. seriousness towards identifying ways to deepen the alliance while also protecting its defense technology and achieving buy-in from Thai partners.

In coordination with the national defense aspects of the alliance, the U.S. must seek to create inducements for the Thais to more strategically align with the United States. Incentivizing U.S. businesses to invest in Thailand instead of China would be a fruitful start in the economic arena. However, carefully crafting its diplomatic engagement and information approach toward Thailand would likely yield better results. Thai elites would offer considerable concessions in exchange for consistent U.S. support. More specifically, the U.S. should avoid publicly involving itself in Thai domestic political issues. From the Thai perspective, elites and ordinary citizens are baffled when the United States criticizes Thailand for its domestic political turmoil but turns the other way in the case of another U.S. critical ally - Saudi Arabia's execution of a prominent journalist. Perhaps, the U.S. message to its Thai ally, indirectly or behind closed, is that there are tangible and mutual benefits for achieving strategic alignment on the threat from the PRC.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Thai defense alliance faces challenges due to diverging threat perceptions and Thailand's hedging strategy. To better preserve and enhance the alliance, the U.S. must refine its strategic engagement, utilizing diplomatic, economic, and military tools to counterbalance the PRC's influence in Thailand. The U.S. must creatively leverage all aspects of its national power to alter Thailand's perception of the PRC threat and to better align shared threat perceptions. Enhancing its relative negotiating power will also improve the United States' position concerning U.S.-Thai alliance management. A more proactive and transactional approach will demonstrate that Thailand will achieve security gains through an enhanced

defense alliance with the United States.

The worst-case scenario is the dissolution of the defense alliance as it would further the PRC's strategic aims for the Indo-Pacific while seriously degrading both U.S. military, informational, diplomatic, and economic advantages. At best, Thailand would fully recognize its security interests are threatened by a rising and more coercive PRC. However, if the alliance cannot be strengthened in the short term, the U.S. should bide its time by allowing Thailand to hedge in the space between competition and conflict. The U.S. must continue to invest in developing relationships and capabilities that may result in desired outcomes should crisis or conflict occur in the Indo-Pacific, or elsewhere in the world. According to several scholars and senior leaders, the U.S. is facing the most challenging international environment in its history. [36] It is increasingly important to cultivate its defense and security alliances in a manner that yields tangible results for the United States. Underperforming alliances, such as the defense relationship with Thailand, represent strategic risk. The United States must endeavor to mitigate this risk through innovative approaches to alliance management to achieve desired outcomes.[37]

End Notes:

1. Richard Halloran, "Thailand's Pivot," Air & Space Forces Magazine, September 2013, https://www.airandspaceforces.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Documents/2013/September%202013/0913pivot.pdf

2. Evan Medeiros et al, "Thailand." Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise. RAND Corporation, 2008,143. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg736af.14.

3. "CIA Director Gina Haspel's Thailand Torture Ties," BBC News, 03 May 2018, Accessed on 07 April 2025 from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43496212.

4. United States Army Pacific (USARPAC), Theater Army Strategy, September 2024, Accessed on 07 April 2025: https://www.usarpac.army.mil/Portals/113/PDF%20Files/USARPAC%20Theater%20Army%20Strategy.pdf.

5. Stephen M. Walt, The Origin of Alliances (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 263–264.

6. Walt, 22.

7. Craig Parsons. How to Map Arguments in Political Science. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 12-13.

8. Walt, 17.

9. Glenn H. Snyder, Alliance Politics (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). 165-166.

10. Snyder, 166-170.

11. Parsons, 12-13

12. "Story of SEATO," Central Intelligence Agency, Accessed on 19 February, 2025 at https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83-00036R001100170006-5.pdf

[1] U.S. Information Service, The Eagle and the Elephant: Thai-American Relations Since 1833—Golden Jubilee Edition; Appendix 8 (Bangkok: USIS, 1997)

13. Walt, 18.

14. White House, "National Security Strategy," November 2022, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf

15. U.S. Department of Defense, National Defense Strategy 2022 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022), https://dod.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3243217/national-defense-strategy/

16. Simone McCarthy, "On First Asia Trip, US Defense Chief Hegseth Calls for 'Deterrence' in Face of China 'Threats'," CNN, March 27,

2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/27/asia/pete-hegseth-asia-tour-philippines-marcos-intl-hnk/index.html.
17. Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the People's Republic of China. "Joint Statement between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Advancing the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership and Building a Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future for Enhanced Stability, Prosperity, and Sustainability through a Forward-looking and People-Centred Vision." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand, 8 February 2025, https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/joint-statement-th-ch-2025-en
18. "Thailand's China Submarine Deal 'for Relations, Not Defense,' Say Experts." Voice of America, February 19, 2025, https://www.voanews.com/a/thailand-s-china-submarine-deal-for-relations-not-defense-say-experts-/7638606.html
19. Chinese EW/SIGINT Platform Joins Thai Exercise." Australian Defence, February 19, 2025, https://www.australiandefence.com.au/news/news/chinese-ew/sigint-platform-joins-thai-exercise
20. “China to Joint Cobra Gold 2024 Military Exercise in Thailand,” PRC Ministry of National Defense, February 10, 2024, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16286381.html
21. “Russian Pacific Fleet Ships Arrive for Friendly Visit to Thailand,” TASS Russian News Agency, November 21, 2024, https://tass.com/defense/1875505
22. U.S. Department of State. "On Thailand's Forced Return of Uyghurs to China." Press release, February 27, 2025.Accessed March 25, 2025. https://www.state.gov/on-thailands-forced-return-of-uyghurs-to-china/
23. Rising, David. "U.S. Disputes Thailand’s Rationale for Deporting Uyghurs Back to China." Time, March 7, 2025. https://time.com/7265574/us-thailand-deportation-uyghurs-china-repression-asylum-resettlement-human-rights/.

Pete Roongsang, Lieutenant Colonel USA, Asia-Pacific FAO

Lieutenant Colonel Pete Roongsang graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2004, earning a commission in the Military Intelligence branch with a branch detail to the Field Artillery. He began his military career in Germany, serving as a Fire Support Officer with the 1st Infantry Division and later with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team from 2005 to 2008. Following these assignments, Pete was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, with the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, from 2009 to 2012, where he served as the Deputy Brigade Intelligence Officer and Troop Commander of the Brigade Combat Team's Surveillance Troop.

Lieutenant Colonel Roongsang's ational deployments include a tour in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2008 as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom VII-VIII, during which he served as the Troop Fire Support Officer in Paktika Province. From November 2009 to November 2010, he deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom X and Operation New Dawn, fulfilling roles as Deputy Brigade Intelligence Officer and Fusion Cell Liaison Officer.

In 2015, after completing a year of in-region training in Singapore, he transitioned to the FAO program. From 2015 to 2017, he served as the Chief of Defense Cooperation at the Embassy in Dili, Timor-Leste. He subsequently served as the Director for Strategy and Plans at the JUSMAG–Thailand from 2017 to 2020. From 2020 to 2022, he was assigned to the OSD for Policy as the Country Director for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. He then served as the Military Assistant to the ASD for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs from 2022 to 2023. From 2023 to 2024, Pete served as the Foreign Area Officer (FA48) Branch Chief at the Human Resources Command in Fort Knox.

Lieutenant Colonel Roongsang's academic credentials include a Bachelor of Science degree in International Relations from West Point and a Master of Advanced Studies in International Affairs from the University of California, San Diego. He is recent graduate of the United States Army War College.

U.S. Attempts to Deter Assad from Using Chemical Weapons: Misperception in Action

LTC Jeff Jager, US Army Retired

On 21 August 2013, the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad used chemical weapons (CW) to attack the rebel stronghold of Ghouta,[1] killing 1,429 civilians[2] and initiating a crisis with the United States (U.S.) that seemed destined to lead to U.S. military strikes.[3] Russia brokered a diplomatic deal by 9 September, in which Syria promised to give up its CW to avoid U.S. intervention. This averted those strikes. US President Barack Obama, who had appeared set on military action,[4] decided not to use military force. Not enforcing the "red line"[5] he established against CW use cost Obama dearly in terms of credibility and reduced America's global influence.[6] While Obama[7] and other revisionists[8] cast the U.S. threat of force as deterring Assad, Assad neither gave up his CW stockpile[9] nor stopped using CW. Why did the U.S. not use military force against Syria in the fall of 2013? The answer, at least partially, derives from the concept of misperception in international relations, most influentially described by Robert Jervis.[10] Most clearly, Obama misperceived international norms against CW use and misperceived the value of his established "red line" in deterring Assad.

History of the Crisis

The catastrophic events of 11 September 2001 ushered in a new era of global U.S. interventionism. The U.S. Congress passed an Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) to counter those responsible, which opened a "floodgate of presidential power"[11] that has reverberated across the world since. Evidence of Assad's massacres of civilians emerged at the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011.

Despite the immense power to intervene unilaterally authorized by the 2001 AUMF, Obama pursued a Syria policy of, essentially, doing nothing.[12] In August 2011, Obama finally voiced a policy preference for Syria: that Assad step down to create space for negotiations. However, the U.S. took no action to pursue this policy.[13] In October 2011, France, Germany, and the UK submitted a draft proposal to the United Nations (UN) Security Council (SC) condemning Syria's assault on its own civilians; Russia and China immediately blocked this proposal.[14] In February 2012, the U.S. tried a similar tactic at the UNSC, this time to condemn Syria for its human rights violations; Russia and China also blocked this effort.[15] Five months later, the UK and the U.S. presented a joint proposal against Syrian violence along with a plan to address it, which again Russia and

China intervened top.[16] These represent but a few select Western efforts at the UNSC and elsewhere to address the widening crisis in Syria, all of which failed. They also set the scene for Assad's announcement, in the face of advancing rebel forces on Damascus in late July 2012, that Syria possessed an active CW capability and had the willingness to use it.[17]

On 20 August 2012, Obama gave a defining speech of his presidency, proclaiming that the U.S. had "been very clear to the Assad regime...that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus."[18] Obama followed this with equally forceful language in a speech on 3 December 2012, in which he for the first time messaged that Syria would be "held accountable"[19] for CW use. Assad apparently was not listening: 23 December 2012[20] witnessed the first documented use of CW by Syria,[21] the first of many CW attacks, including one on 19 March 2013 in Aleppo[6] and others throughout the spring.[22] On 25 April 2013, the U.S. intelligence community (IC) confirmed that Assad had been responsible for the use of CW.[23] Calls for U.S. action increased with the escalating conventional violence and introduction of CW use in Syria, and Obama's strong rhetoric against it. Still, Obama did not act.

In May 2013, given the lack of action at the UNSC, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for an end to the violence in Syria.[24] Momentum for a U.S.-led intervention started to pick up in June 2013, with the announcement that the IC had identified several CW attacks attributable to the Syrian regime since 2012.[25] Also in June, Obama replaced two of his senior advisors. Susan Rice assumed duties as his National Security Advisor and the Senate confirmed Samantha Power as the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. Both Powers and Rice had established reputations as liberal interventionists committed to the concept of a responsibility to protect (R2P) based on humanitarian grounds.[26] Obama's first concrete actions to address the catastrophe in Syria, consisting of a decision to provide lethal support to the anti-regime rebels, followed in mid-June 2013.[27]

This decision for U.S. intervention occurred at the same time as UNSC efforts finally started to produce meaningful agreements. On 18 August 2013, the UN team that Syria (and Russia and China at the UNSC) had agreed to allow to enter Syria to investigate claims of CW use arrived, specifically to check claims of CW attacks in Aleppo in April and Idlib in May.[28] This appeared to provide Assad an opportunity to send a message: on 21 August 2013, Syria attacked civilians in Ghouta with CW,[29] killing 1,429.[30]

Obama largely had ignored the conventional violence in Syria and earlier reports of CW use. However,

the Ghouta attack appears to have changed his calculus.[31] Yet, in the first ten days after this despicable act, Obama made no public remarks on Syria's CW use. Administration officials, though, started to indicate that Obama was considering military strikes and that the U.S. would act unilaterally, in line with expanded presidential war-making powers.[32] By 24 August, the IC had reported to Obama that CW rockets fired at Ghouta originated from regime positions and senior administration officials coalesced around a 48-hour air campaign to start on 2 September.[33] On 26 August, Secretary of State John Kerry stated publicly that the Syrian regime had used CW.[34] The hard evidence of CW use by Syria seemed to fulfill Obama's desire for absolute proof of Syrian CW use,[35] a requirement for a president extremely wary of another Iraq.[36] For its part, Syria denied[37] use of CW, blamed the rebels,[38] and watched as the U.S. and UK deployed warships to the Eastern Mediterranean.[39]

The UK again proposed military invention in Syria at the UNSC on 28 August.[40] With Russia and China opposed to intervention[41] and continuously blocking resolutions, the UNSC deadlocked.[42] The U.S. confirmed, on 28 August, that the Syrian regime had used CW in Ghouta.[43] The announcement substantially strengthened evidence that had previously emerged. With strikes appearing imminent, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, John Boehner, formally requested that Obama seek an AUMF from Congress, and Obama and Boehner spoke multiple times to consult on the matter.

"this menace must be confronted,"

Momentum for U.S. military intervention began to fade on 30 August, when the UK Parliament rejected Prime Minister Cameron's request for approval for military strikes in Syria.[44] The UK withdrew the warships it had deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean, and U.S. ships replaced them.[45] A senior administration official stated that Obama desired an AUMF and planned not to strike without formal authorization.[46] President Obama dismissed Secretary of Defense Hagel's plans for a strike on Damascus, indicating a shifting perspective.[47] After learning of Cameron's defeat in Parliament, Obama sought out the most anti-interventionist official in his administration, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, to accompany him on a walk. Upon return, Obama informed his staff, to their surprise, that he would seek legislative approval for a Syria strike, with a vote intended for 9 September.[48] The next day, on 31 August, senior White House staff sought the advice of American foreign policy elites about an AUMF, which many advised against.[49] On 31 August, Obama made his first public remarks about Syria's use of CW and his plans for responding.[50] Making the case the "this menace must be confronted,"[51] Obama announced his

decision to take military action against the Assad regime and to seek an AUMF from Congress.[52] The next day, Kerry testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the Administration's plans and revealed that, in addition to an air campaign, the U.S. intended to deploy ground troops to secure Syria's CW.[53]

Interstate and intrastate negotiations and discussions continued for the next six days, and culminated with a lunch between Obama and Russian President Vladamir Putin on 7 September, during which Putin proposed an alternative to U.S. strikes: that perhaps Syria giving up its CW voluntarily could persuade the U.S. to call off military intervention.[54] Discussions between Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who spoke directly on nine separate occasions between 21 August and 7 September,[55] preceded this high-level meeting. On 9 September, Kerry made the Russian proposal public.[56] Seizing on this opportunity, Lavrov made the Russian proposal formal, and Putin publicly claimed responsibility for it.[57] Later that day, Obama requested Congress postpone the AUMF vote,[58] effectively ending the crisis by removing the option of military intervention.

"Hypotheses on Misperception."[59]

Jervis, in a seminal 1968 article, presented fourteen hypotheses that describe sources of misperception and offers methods to manage risks associated with each.[60] For Jervis, in international relations a requirement exists for one actor to guess the actions of others, which necessitates the development of mental constructs that can help predict others' intentions. Inaccuracies in these mental constructs lead to misperception regarding the actions and intentions of others.[61] Jervis observed that misperception almost always accompanies armed conflict,[62] making his approach resonate for the 2013 Syria crisis, for which at least four of his hypotheses are relevant.

Firstly, Jervis hypothesized that actors' worldviews and theories shape the way they interpret information; that is, that decision-makers see what they expect to see.[63] The limitations of human cognition result in decision-makers not understanding how their biases impact their perceptions.[64] This is compounded by the ambiguity of information that exists in international relations, which increases an actor's reliance on their worldviews, especially if the actor has a high degree of confidence in their beliefs.[65] To guard against this source of misperception, Jervis suggested that decision-makers be open to new data.[66]

Secondly, Jervis hypothesized that decision-makers are unwilling to change course, as they are too highly committed to conventional wisdom, unwilling to accept new information, [67] and overestimate common interests.[68] Compounding these issues, actors often only have access to ambiguous information, sometimes

contradictory, that permits more than one interpretation, and actors "consciously and explicitly"[69] ignore at least some information.[70] Jervis hypothesized that decision-makers strive for awareness of their biases and accept new information, especially that which opposes their established views, to guard against this source of misperception.[71]

Thirdly, Jervis hypothesized that actors from different backgrounds, cultures, and political environments likely misunderstand the messages they send each other.[72] This source of misperception plays a palpable role in deterrence, as "threats of coercive war can misfire if the state does not understand what the opponent values." [73] If a decision-maker cannot understand the views of the counterpart the decision-maker desires to deter, the probability of deterring that counterpart decreases.[74]

Fourthly, Jervis hypothesized that decision-makers heavily invested in their chosen course of action, based on the amount of time and effort required to reach a decision, believe in the clarity of their message and that other actors understand it, which they might not, given lack of obvious message clarity. [75] This belief creates a range of issues, especially given the difficulty inherent in decoding an adversary's true intentions from those the adversary desires others to believe.[76] Jervis' baseline recommendation to counter sources of misperception applies to this hypothesis and the three others identified above equally well: because decision-makers cannot overcome fully uncertainties in international relations, decision-makers should develop "policies that will not fail disastrously even if they are based on incorrect assumptions."[77]

Misperception #1: A Norm Against CW Use?

International legal prohibitions against CW use abound, including the 1899 Hague Convention, the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).[78] High awareness of these de jure norms exist, and in the lead up to the fall 2013 crisis, Obama pointedly referenced them in his public messaging to Assad,[79] perhaps because Obama believed in them strongly,[80] including in R2P.[81] This "Obama Doctrine of humanitarian intervention"[82] derived from beliefs in universal human rights,[83] which shaped Obama's view of a just war theory modified to account for current events,[84] consistent with the "American Liberal Tradition"[85] that drove his Administration's foreign policy decision-making.[86] These de jure norms legally bound Syria, given Syria's status as a party to the Charter of UN, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Geneva Protocol, all of which prohibit CW use.[87] While Syria only ratified the CWC after the 2013 crisis, these de jure international norms dictated that Syria had a responsibility not to use CW.[88]

In fact, though, an international norm against CW use does not exist. Lack of major international response against regimes that have used CW, including Assad's use of CW prior to 2013, Egypt in the 1960s, and Iraq in 1980s,[99] demonstrates that no de facto norm has emerged from these de jure norms. Russia and China do not accept the concept of R2P, as exemplified by the Syria crisis.[100] The international community, in its lack of a response to Assad's CW use, decided that "the massacre of the Syrian population by the Assad government does not justify international humanitarian intervention."[101] The U.S. Administration acknowledged that intervention in Syria in response to Assad's CW use would be illegal under international law,[102] as did the UK, despite its efforts to obfuscate this point in the legal case it presented on the matter.[103] Most tellingly, Syria's use of CW prior to, during, and after the fall 2013 crisis without facing meaningful consequence shows that no de jure norm against CW use exists.

Obama's world view in this case constrained him into seeing what he desired to see

Obama's misreading of de jure and de facto international norms against CW use provides one of the better of the many examples of misperception in the fall 2013 crisis. As per the first and second of Jervis' hypotheses above, Obama's world view in this case constrained him into seeing what he desired to see, namely, that a set of rules (including a norm against CW use) shapes international relations. Committed to this theory, Obama was unwilling to accept contradictory information, including that continuously provided by Russia, China, and Syria (along with past CW use gone unpunished) that, if recognized, may have changed his perspectives. His beliefs in common interests and his unwillingness to counter conventional wisdom about de jure norms against CW use translated to a fixation on Syrian CW use as a basis for intervention. Had Obama followed Jervis' advice to acknowledge bias and accept new information, he may have arrived at a more legitimate reason to intervene in Syria.

Misperception #2: A "Red Line" That Wasn't.

In international relations, for a deterrent threat to compel another actor to abandon a certain course of action or choose a different option, the deterrence-seeking state must demand a specific change, threaten a military or other substantial response if the actor-to-be-deterred opts not to make this specific change, and communicate the threat at the state-to-state level.[104] Obama's "red line" against CW use only met the last of these three requirements, and as such was unlikely to succeed.[105] To compound this issue, as Jervis' third hypothesis above suggests, the different backgrounds, cultures, and political environments of the actors involved amplify the potential for misperception in

deterrence.[106] Unfortunately, Obama's actions never matched his rhetoric against CW use.[107]

While Obama clearly believed his statements that CW use by Syria would change the U.S. approach to the crisis and thus deter Assad,[108] the available evidence suggests Assad remained undeterred. The Obama Doctrine described above may have had a rhetorical flourish, but detecting its meaning proved more difficult to detect,[109] given the "yawning chasm between the administration's tough talk and its ineffectual actions."[110] This gap created challenges for U.S. credibility,[111] as Obama's "centrist, cautious, and compromising"[112] mindset and "aspirational rhetoric" did not deter Assad.[113]

The lack of clarity in Obama's message to Assad reflects Jervis' fourth hypothesis above: decision-makers believe in the clarity of their messages to others even when said message clarity does not exist. Obama's strong belief in international and domestic norms,[114] including the desire for UN or Congressional authority for military intervention, muddied the message Obama attempted to send to Assad. The vagueness of the language Obama used to communicate his deterrent threat created ambiguity about the consequences of CW use. Even though Obama may have intended this ambiguity to control domestic foreign policy discussion,[115] Obama did not understand clearly that outsiders like Assad might consume domestic messaging differently. If not even Obama's policy-makers knew where Obama drew his 'red line,' how could Syria?[116]

Furthermore, Obama's belief in U.S. hegemony prevented him from "understanding clearly the larger world."[117] Part of this misunderstanding derived from the differences in background and values between Obama and Assad. Simply stated, the Assads played by their own rules, not by de jure international norms. Assad, like his father before him, subscribed to "Hama rules."[118] Named after the 1982 massacre of more than 25,000 civilians and the destruction of Hama by Assad's father,[119] these rules reflect the premise that "the only way to survive was by letting others know that if they violated you in any way, you would make them pay, and pay dearly."[120] Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds in 1988[121] provides an example of Hama rules in action, as does Assad's use of CW against civilians in 2013. With its mix of tribalism and brutal authoritarianism, Hama rules succeed because the strongmen implementing them know when to stop: just before crossing any line that might provoke a response or intervention from the outside.[122] To his detriment, Obama never grasped this basic difference in perspectives and, by not responding to Assad's use of conventional weapons against civilians or first reports of CW use, may have actually signaled to Assad that the U.S. would not intervene in 2013, just like it did not

intervene in 1982.[123] The 21 August 2013 CW attack in Ghouta, just three days after the UN CW inspectors arrived to Syria,[124] demonstrates Assad's "record of audaciousness"[125] in pushing the line but not crossing it. Obama's admirable moral fiber meant that he could not understand that Assad's morality (or lack thereof) allowed Assad to use CW.[126] With no U.S. response to Assad's initial use of CW attacks in late 2012, which Assad designed as small scale and hard-to-attribute to test Obama's "red line," [127] Assad clearly did not feel deterred.

Assad clearly did not feel deterred.

Obama's expectation that his deterrence strategy would work was pure misperception. Assad acknowledged this on 22 September 2013, days after Obama took military intervention off the table: "American officials--they say something in the morning and they do the opposite in the evening. You cannot take them at their word, to be frank. We don't listen to their statements, we don't care about it, we don't believe it."[128]

Conclusion

In the crisis that developed in fall 2013 after Syria blatantly used CW to attack civilians, crossing the "red line" Obama had attempted to establish, several hypotheses proposed by Jervis on misperception in international relations help explain the U.S. decision not to intervene militarily to punish or deter Assad. Most prominently, Obama misperceived the nature of the international norm against CW use. Due to his belief in the international system and constrained by his world view, Obama focused on the de jure nature of this norm, ignoring that de facto no such norm actually exists. Separately, Obama misperceived the value of his established "red line" in deterring Assad, a misperception steeped in differences in background, culture, and politics that Jervis argues drives or exacerbates misperception in deterrence situations.[129] These two examples of misperception in the 2013 Syria crisis provide substantial support for several of Jervis' hypothesis. Learning from this discussion, policy-makers, practitioners, and implementers aware of the basic theory of deterrence and Jervis' hypotheses on misperception can strive to avoid the mistakes the Obama Administration made in attempting to deter Assad from CW use.

End Notes:

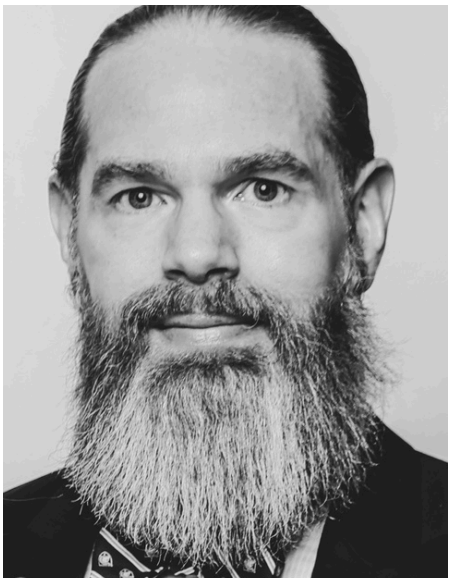
1. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria," (remarks, Washington, DC, September 10, 2013), The White House, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria, accessed February 24, 2018.
2. R. Kim Cragin, "Semi-Proxy Wars and U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy," Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 38, (2015): 311.
3. Charles Tiefer and Kathleen Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue: Analysis of the Syrian and ISIS Conflicts," Cornell International Law Journal 49, no.689 (2016): 692.
4. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 692.

5. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps," (remarks, Washington, DC, August 20, 2012), The White House, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps, accessed February 24, 2018.
6. Nicholas D. Kristoff, "That Threat Worked," The New York Times (New York, New York), September 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opi
7. Leonard Cutler, President Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy in the War on Terror: An Assessment (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2, 153; Max Boot, "Cleaning Up Obama's Syria Mess," Commentary, November 2016, 22; Richard Haass, A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 167.
8. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," The Atlantic, April 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/, accessed February 24, 2018.
9. Daniela Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria: A Legal Responsibility to Protect?," Denver Law Review 95, no.1 (2017-2018): 65; Briggs, Soderlund, and Najem, Syria, Press Framing, and the Responsibility to Protect , 133;
10. Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," World Politics 20, no.3 (April 1968): 454-479; Robert Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," International Security 7, no.3 (Winter, 1982-1983): 3-30; Robert Jervis, "War and Misperception," The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 18, no.4 (Spring, 1988): 675-700.
11. Ken Gormley, The President and the Constitution: A Living History (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 593-594.
12. Amos N. Guiora, "Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No: Deciphering the Obama Administration," Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law 44, no. 251 (2011): 269.
13. Haass, A World in Disarray, 163.
14. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 54.
15. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 54-55.
16. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 55.
17. Christopher Phillips, The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016): 175.
18. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps."
19. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Symposium," (remarks, Washington, DC, December 3, 2012), The White House, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/12/03/remarks-president-nunn-lugar-cooperative-threat-reduction-symposium, accessed February 24, 2018.
20. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 177.
21. Michelle Bentley, "Strategic Taboos: Chemical Weapons and US Foreign Policy," International Affairs 90, no.5 (2014): 1036.
22. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 177.
23. E. Donald Briggs, Walter C. Soderlund, and Tom Pierre Najem, Syria, Press Framing, and the Responsibility to Protect (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017), 107.
24. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1036.
25. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 25.
26. Briggs, Soderlund, and Najem, Syria, Press Framing, and the Responsibility to Protect , 116.
27. Briggs, Soderlund, and Najem, Syria, Press Framing, and the Responsibility to Protect , 116.
28. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 177.
29. Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria."
30. Cragin, "Semi-Proxy Wars and U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy," 311.
31. Bentley, "Strategic taboos," 1034.
32. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 692.
33. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 179.
34. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 179.
35. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1036.
36. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1036, 1039.
37. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 25.
38. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 28.
39. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 179.
40. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 28.
41. Donette Murray, "Military Action But Not As We Know It: Libya, Syria and the Making of an Obama Doctrine," Contemporary Politics 19, no.2 (2013): 153.

42. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 178.
43. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 25.
44. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1037.
45. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 693.
46. "Syria crisis: Cameron loses Commons vote on Syria action," BBC News, last modified 30 August 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-23892783, accessed February 24, 2018.
47. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 178-180.
48. Cutler, President Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy in the War on Terror," 153; 26-phillips, 178
49. Cutler, President Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy in the War on Terror," 154.
50. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 179.
51. Haass, A World in Disarray, 165.
52. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1037.
53. Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Syria," (statement, Washington, DC, August 31, 2013), The White House, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria, accessed February 24, 2018.
54. Obama, "Statement by the President on Syria."
55. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 700.
56. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 702; Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 180.
57. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 702.
58. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 702; Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 180.
59. Tiefer and Clark, "Congressional and Presidential War Powers as a Dialogue," 702; Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 180.
60. Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria;" Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 181.
61. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception."
62. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception."
63. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 454
64. Jervis, "War and Misperception," 699.
65. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 454.
66. Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 21, 24.
67. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 455-456.
68. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 459.
69. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 459.
70. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 462.
71. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 460.
72. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 460.
73. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 462.
74. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 473.
75. Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 6.
76. Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 3.
77. Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," 474; Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 4.
78. Jervis, "War and Misperception," 680.
79. Jervis, "War and Misperception," 686.
80. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1033.
81. Bentley, "Strategic Taboos," 1042, 1037.
82. Robert E. Terrill, "An Uneasy Peace: Barack Obama's Nobel Peace Prize Lecture," Rhetoric & Public Affairs 14, no.4 (2011): 768.
83. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 44-70.
84. Murray, "Military action but not as we know it," 146.
85. Murray, "Military action but not as we know it," 150.
86. Terrill, "An Uneasy Peace," 765.
87. Maria Helena De Castro Santos and Ulysses Tavares Teixeira, "Interests and Values in Obama's Foreign Policy: Leading from Behind?," Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional 58, no.2 (2015): 119.
88. De Castro Santos and Teixeira, "Interests and Values in Obama's Foreign Policy," 119.
89. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 31-33.
90. Abratt, "U.S. Intervention in Syria," 33.
91. Haass, A World in Disarray, 69.
92. Haass, A World in Disarray, 117-118.
93. Guiora, "Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No," 273.
94. Christian Henderson, "The UK Government's Legal Opinion on Forcible Measures in Response to the Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Government," International and Comparative Law Quarterly 64 (January 2015): 193; Cutler, President Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy in the War on Terror," 156.

95. Henderson, “The UK Government’s Legal Opinion on Forcible Measures in Response to the Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Government,” 193-194.
96. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,” 1035-1036.
97. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,” 1035.
98. Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” 473.
99. Murray, “Military action but not as we know it,” 160.
100. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,”1033.
101. Murray, “Military action but not as we know it,” 161.
102. Boot, “Cleaning Up Obama’s Syria Mess,” 22; Guiora, “Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No,” 251-252, 270.
103. Haass, A World in Disarray, 164.
104. William F. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, The Unsustainable Presidency: Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Beyond (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 107.
105. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 178.
106. Terrill, “An Uneasy Peace,” 768.
107. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,” 1038.
108. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,” 1038.
109. Grover and Joseph G. Peschek, The Unsustainable Presidency, 126.
110. Thomas L. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem: Updated with a New Chapter (New York: Picador, 2012): 80-101.
111. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem, 80-90; Haass, A World in Disarray, 118.
112. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem, 88.
113. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem, 91.
114. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem, 80-101.
115. Guiora, “Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No,” 266.
116. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 176.
117. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 176.
118. Bentley, “Strategic Taboos,” 1041.
119. Phillips, The Battle for Syria, 176.
120. Boot, “Cleaning Up Obama’s Syria Mess,” 22.
121. Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” 473.

Jeff Jager, Lieutenant Colonel USA(R), Europe/Eurasia FAO



Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Jeff Jager is a doctoral candidate in Salve Regina University's international relations PhD program. His current research focuses on the effectiveness of U.S. security cooperation. He served in the U.S. Army as an infantry officer and foreign area officer from 2000 to 2022, specializing in European and Middle Eastern political, military, and security affairs. LTC Jager served as the Assistant Army Attaché at Embassy Nicosia from 2012 to 2015, at Embassy Ankara from 2015 to 2017 as the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Liaison Officer to the Turkish Army, and at Embassy Beirut, where he served from 2017-2018 as the Foreign Military Sales Officer and from 2018-2019 as the Chief, Office of Defense Cooperation Lebanon. In his final military assignment, he served as a military advisor at the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance at the Department of State from 2019 to 2022. LTC Jager graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2000 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Engineering. He holds an Associate's Degree in Turkish from the Defense Language Institute, a Master of Arts degree in Security Studies from the Turkish Army War College, a Master of Arts degree in German and European Studies from Georgetown University, a Graduate Certificate in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies from Georgetown University, a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from Webster University, and a Graduate Certificate in International and Regional Security from Webster University. He is also certified by the U.S. Army War College as a Defense Strategist and has held a Department of Defense International Affairs Certification (Tier 3).

Fixing IRT Without Leaving the Embassy: The Case for FAO Cadre

Major Calvin Price, US Army

It is the first week of your In-Region Training (IRT) at a U.S. Embassy in your area of concentration (AOC). You have already been assigned several projects, including two general officer visits within a month. You have not fully in-processed the embassy, just received access to the State Department network, and your family is trying to figure out how to get cash in a country with one of the world's highest inflation rates. Many in the office are on summer leave, and you are facilitating a meeting between a functional combatant command and the ambassador in 15 minutes. Luckily, one of the assistant attachés has offered to sit in on this meeting to help fill in the gaps since you just arrived and coordinated it in the last few days. Suddenly, the one member of the Security Cooperation Office (SCO) still on duty, your operations non-commissioned officer, notifies you that the geographic combatant command called, and they need a member of the SCO to be on a video teleconference in five minutes to discuss an upcoming engagement between the chief of defense and the combatant commander. She reiterates that the acting senior defense official/defense attaché (SDO/DATT) is in a meeting outside of the embassy, and you are the only one available. You turn on the VTC and prepare to brief a four-star general officer for the first time in your career.

That is a story of my first week in IRT and one example of the unexpected opportunities I experienced while working at the embassy. These are the kinds of experiences that built my understanding of the expectations of Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) serving in embassies around the world. FAOs who skip IRT or complete it at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) or the George C. Marshall Center miss out on these types of experiences. IRT is an incredible opportunity and has developed generations of FAOs, traditionally by placing them in U.S. embassy environments, but the resources and time invested could be applied in a more focused way to better achieve the Army's goal of developing qualified FAOs to serve in country teams and various staff roles. The key to applying these resources could be a simple tool that every training program should include: instructors.

The recent concept of sending 48B (Western Hemisphere) FAOs to WHINSEC sounded like a good idea on the surface. It was first envisioned by looking at the success of the Marshall Center IRT program in Garmisch, Germany. The major difference is that Germany is within

the 48E (Europe/Eurasia) AOC, thus providing cultural and language training opportunities as well as proximity for travel. Moving 48B IRT to WHINSEC allows the Army to consolidate Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and IRT and limits permanent change of station moves thus providing stability to officers and their families while reducing the cost to the Army. Conducting CGSC at WHINSEC also gives officers a meaningful opportunity to interact with up-and-coming leaders around the region and practice their language skills in the process. Unfortunately, that is where the benefits of WHINSEC IRT end. Officers conducting IRT at WHINSEC consistently speak about the limits to accomplishing the goals of their IRT Program of Instruction (POI) while at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Their experiences stood in stark contrast to my experience working in an embassy where the workload never seemed to wane, but I was constantly learning new things about my newly chosen profession. The WHINSEC IRT supervisor has several duties, only one of which involves overseeing the IRT program. This means that while this officer provides assignments and mentorship to IRT FAOs, supervising FAOs is only an additional duty. WHINSEC IRT officers felt behind their peers working in embassies in understanding embassy norms and culture, knowledge of security assistance activities, and overall confidence to fill a SCO position. These officers were hungry to gain more exposure to these processes but simply did not receive the opportunity. In a survey of officers who recently conducted IRT at WHINSEC, all respondents reported satisfaction levels of neutral, unsatisfied, or completely unsatisfied with their IRT.

FAO branch has attempted to provide more significant exposure to embassy operations through 30 to 60-day temporary duty (TDY) trips to an embassy known as Military Representative experiences (MILREP). These experiences vary with some officers having valuable experiences and others having much less useful experiences primarily based on the specific situation in the embassy at that time. Notably, 80 percent of respondents in the survey rated their satisfaction with their MILREP as neutral. Regardless of the varying

Notably, 80 percent of respondents in the survey rated their satisfaction with their MILREP as neutral.

utility of these short trips, some lessons can only be learned by being permanently stationed at an embassy. Things like learning how the embassy housing pool works, how to use MyServices, how to write an action memo, how to plan/act as a control officer for a VIP visit, how to write a Briefing Checklist (BCL), etc. are not likely to be learned during a brief TDY. This obviously does not include any of the more complex security cooperation tasks that are expected of a section chief and that could never be learned in

a short TDY. Tasks such as how to develop a relationship with international partners require full-time attention, as do others such as how to work with a component command, how to submit a Significant Security Cooperation Initiative, how to work with a Bilateral Affairs Officer, and various other security cooperation activities that occur every day. Additionally, two months on TDY at one embassy is likely not the optimal use of the rapidly dwindling IRT funds. Of respondents in the survey, 60 percent of WHINSEC IRT officers felt that they were not at all prepared to take on the role of a section chief in a SCO with the remainder reporting that they felt somewhat prepared. In comparison, over 80 percent of officers who conducted IRT in a U.S. Embassy or Consulate stated that they felt somewhat prepared or mostly prepared to take on a section chief job. The WHINSEC IRT concept was a well-intentioned, but ultimately sub-optimal modernization of the IRT program. FAO proponent recognized many of these drawbacks and has since cancelled the WHINSEC program with no plans to revive it. However, there are some lessons that can be taken out of this attempt at re-imagining the program and potentially applied to other regions. Chief among them is the recognition that IRT should continue to take place in U.S. embassies.

Traditional IRT has been a time-honored tradition and rite of passage for new FAOs. It provides officers the opportunity to live overseas with their families while working in an embassy. This provides endless opportunities to learn about how an embassy works, what it is like to serve in a SCO, and gives the officer and the family the chance to travel throughout the region. However, over the years IRT has been heavily scrutinized both in and outside the FAO community for its high cost and the perception that the army is paying officers for regional tourism.

There is some truth in these critiques. Each officer in IRT plans and executes their own individual POI, then submits it to the officer's rating chain and FAO proponent for approval. IRT is the only training program in the military that I have attended that requires the trainees to write their own POI. From there each officer is expected to modify their IRT POI as they see fit because it is understood that they will frequently update their POI due to unforeseen circumstances. It is also completely up to the officer how much time they spend traveling versus working in the embassy. There have been some officers who spend virtually all their time traveling throughout the region and others who have only done one or two regional trips and spent the remaining time working in the embassy.

There is also varying and unclear guidance regarding budgeting the various IRT trips. This leaves the officer to plan an IRT POI without understanding the resource limitations nor what is truly expected of them during their IRT experience. Newly selected FAOs are typically senior

captains and junior majors who are self-motivated and will work to find ways to maximize their IRT experience, but the reality is that none of them have experience as a FAO and therefore do not know how to focus their efforts. An interesting metaphor would be to consider brand new second lieutenants going to the Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course (IBOLC) and being told to plan a POI to be fully qualified Infantry Officers without knowing how much ammo they have, what ranges are available, and even what the expected outcomes are. This may seem like hyperbole, but it is not far from the truth. The IRT Manual has not been updated in eight years and gives broad and generic guidance. (Note: FAO Proponent has reported that they are on the verge of approving a new IRT Handbook, but at the time of this writing it has not been published.) FAOs should be capable of self-development and seeking mentorship, but if IRT is a training opportunity it should provide some of the basic building blocks to ensure every FAO knows what is expected. While IRT remains one of the most unique and rewarding developmental experiences available to army officers, the program could benefit significantly from additional structure to maximize its effectiveness.

In developing any training, the first step would be to determine what the desired end state of the training is. Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3 says "the purpose of IRT is to build cross-cultural competence by immersing the officer, accompanied by the officer's family where appropriate, in the local language and culture of their assigned AOC." According to the FAO IRT handbook (7 JUN 2017), the seven competencies FAO trainees should focus on are: Regional Experience and Knowledge, U.S. Policy Goals and Formulation, Language, Military-to-Military Experience, U.S. Military Involvement, Embassy Administration and Offices, and Understanding JIIM (Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational) Environments. The handbook provides very little guidance on how to approach this task outside of conducting internships with various agencies. The handbook advises that all IRT sites are different, and not all officers will be able to focus on each competency to the same extent. The problem with this is that FAOs are not training to be FAOs in one country, they are training to work throughout their region. This should drive the program to develop a curriculum that is focused at the regional level. Each AOC is different and may require a unique way of approaching this. Therefore, this essay proposes that each AOC should have a dedicated IRT Manager responsible for developing a curriculum and coordinating IRT travel and that all IRT officers be assigned to a U.S. Embassy.

Currently, the FAO proponent regional managers fill the IRT Manager role to some extent, but their official relationship with each FAO trainee is primarily as the authorizing official

for travel authorizations and vouchers. The IRT Manager in this proposition would take on a much larger role and given the FAO proponent's many responsibilities may not be feasible without assigning another officer to fill this role specifically. This IRT Manager should be responsible for developing the IRT POI for their region and monitoring each IRT officer's progress on this POI. This could include mandatory reading/writing assignments, security cooperation training, or assignments related to regional travel. This manager could also be looked at as a course director/instructor for IRT officers in training.

Additionally, the IRT Manager would be responsible for planning all regional travel for IRT officers in the region. This is a stark difference from the current program in which each officer develops their own plan and then officers throughout the region informally coordinate trips when it is convenient for their individual plan. The current process is incredibly inefficient because each officer develops their own plan, ideally in coordination with regional SCOs, thus causing SCOs to either accept each officer's plan, causing additional workload for the SCO or causing officers around the region to frequently update their schedules to reflect the availability of the SCOs and their peers. Additionally, these plans are made in large part without full knowledge of the budgeting constraints at that time.

Providing a POI that includes a regional travel schedule upon arrival to IRT would greatly simplify the process of planning IRT travel and allow officers to focus more of their time on accomplishing tasks in the embassy as opposed to coordinating IRT trips. Additionally, the IRT Manager could preserve the institutional knowledge of what military-military (mil-mil) engagements and cultural visits were most impactful to provide a baseline for planning regional travel each year. From experience, the benefits of a visit are greatly increased when there are more IRT officers present. For example, mil-mil engagements are typically more robust, more meaningful relationships are built with peers, and these visits can even provide benefits to the SCO if planned deliberately. Lastly, there are likely budgetary benefits to planning trips together. It may be possible to negotiate reduced lodging rates by booking several rooms at the same hotel or IRT officers sharing hotels or Airbnb properties.

The current process is incredibly inefficient because each officer develops their own plan,

The IRT Manager concept would also be incredibly useful when it comes to budget planning and allocation. If the IRT POIs are approved by FAO proponent early on it would be possible to forecast with much more accuracy the necessary funds and would streamline any adjustments due to unexpected changes. IRT Managers

could quickly make decisions on prioritization of regional travel if the travel budget is unexpectedly cut. The IRT managers would also be better poised to identify ideal travel times to ensure POIs are not impacted by external factors such as Congress' inability to pass a budget or continuing resolution. At a policy level, it would be much easier to explain the importance of IRT budget requirements if the POIs were standardized and intimately understood by regional managers. This structure would help them advocate more effectively for funding against other priorities.

Since the IRT Manager would be intimately aware of each officer's travel it would make sense that they take on a more formal role of mentorship and potentially take on the role of Senior Rater. This would be a more equitable way to senior rate FAO trainees as opposed to rating them against fully trained FAOs as in the current system. The previous metaphor of an infantry officer in training is still very much applicable, wherein an infantry officer in IBOLC would not be rated against fully branch-qualified officers serving as platoon leaders and executive officers. In recent years this system has been greatly improved in some regions by having IRT officers be senior rated by the regional army service component command. However, this still leaves officers in a larger pool with fully qualified officers. In contrast, a system that pools IRT officers together would help provide them a legitimate opportunity to receive a Most Qualified rating while also helping the FAO community identify high performers earlier.

Even though I believe more guidance for IRT trainees would be beneficial in developing IRT officers, the U.S. Embassy is still the best location for IRT to take place. When reviewing the attributes that the FAO Handbook outlines as training objectives, all of these are more effectively obtained at a U.S. Embassy with two important aspects (U.S. Military Involvement, Embassy Administration and Offices) almost exclusively developed through experience working in a SCO or Defense Attaché Office. However, officers do not gain this knowledge simply by being assigned to an embassy. They must have a meaningful role. During my time in IRT, I worked on the Special Operations portfolio. This led me to conduct daily correspondence with Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH), United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), and partners in-country for various security cooperation initiatives. It also provided travel opportunities (funded by USSOUTHCOM/SOCSOUTH).

This may not be feasible in every country, but every country should strive to provide IRT officers with the greatest amount of responsibility possible given the dynamics in the country. This provides the officer with a real portfolio to manage, increasing training value for the officer, reducing workload for the SCO, and maximizing

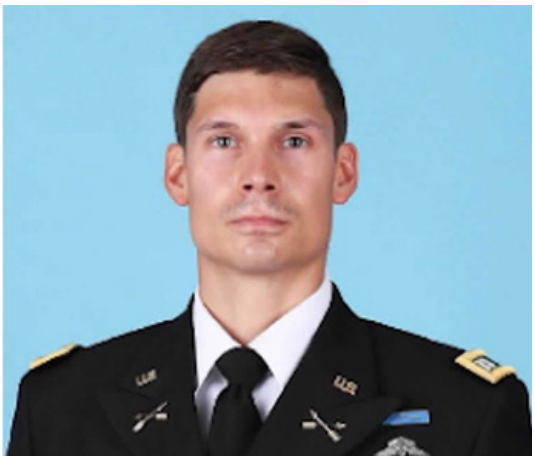
the incredible opportunity of being in a U.S. Embassy. Importantly, the IRT POI should still take precedence over the officer's embassy responsibilities,

the IRT POI should still take precedence over the officer's embassy responsibilities

and this should be reflected through the POI provided to the officer on arrival. This POI should then be shared with the officer's rater with the understanding that the officer will have to conduct the assigned regional travel and complete the assigned tasks as a part of their assignment. This provides predictability for the IRT officer and the SCO. Additionally, each IRT billet should have a portfolio assigned to it and it should be added to that officer's POI. This provides them with an understanding of what is expected of them prior to arrival to allow them to adequately prepare and conduct a handover with the outgoing IRT officer. In "A New Foreign Area Officer Paradigm", Colonel Augie Dominguez and Lieutenant Colonel Ryan Kertis' article in Military Review, the authors proposed sending IRT officers to smaller posts to allow them to take on more meaningful portfolios in the embassy. My proposal takes their recommendation one step further by codifying this portfolio in the IRT POI. This portion of the POI would need to be coordinated with the SCOs but would likely require only a simple annual review. It is unsurprising the WHINSEC officers did not manage a portfolio as a part of IRT, but of survey respondents, only 33% percent of officers conducting IRT in an embassy or consulate managed a portfolio. Providing an assigned portfolio to IRT officers also helps budget-proof the IRT experience by ensuring that they will have meaningful professional development even if travel is interrupted due to unexpected changes in funding.

Viewed through the commonly used lens of Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities (DOTMLPF), this proposal focuses primarily on doctrine, organization, and personnel aspects. From a doctrine perspective, FAO Proponent should look at amending the verbiage in DA PAM 600-3 that states that IRT officers "should not serve to fill long-term manning shortfalls at post". The FAO community should embrace the fact that IRT officers have and will continue to fulfill this role and use this to maximize training value. The way to protect the IRT program is by being transparent and providing predictability for SCOs through the implementation of a fixed IRT travel schedule.

Major Calvin R. Price, Western Hemisphere FAO



Major Price is a native of Kokomo, Indiana, MAJ Price enlisted in the Indiana National Guard in 2010 as a Rifleman. While in the Indiana National Guard he served with Charlie Troop (Long Range Surveillance) 2nd Squadron 152nd Cavalry Regiment in Seymour, IN. In 2013, he graduated from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN and commissioned as an Infantry Officer in the United States Army. MAJ Price was assigned to 2nd Battalion 35th Infantry Regiment "Cacti" at Schofield Barracks, HI from 2015-2018. He served as a Rifle Platoon Leader, Battalion Mortar Platoon Leader, and Executive Officer. MAJ Price completed the Special Forces Qualification Course in 2020 and was then assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (A) as the Detachment Commander of Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha 7132. While at 7th SFG (A), MAJ Price deployed to the Dominican Republic, Spain, and Belize. MAJ Price then served at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany as the Special Operations Forces Deputy Plans and Operations Officer. MAJ Price currently serves as the Deputy Army Section Chief at US Embassy Buenos Aires. MAJ Price has a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Finance from Indiana University. His military education includes the Basic Airborne Course, Air Assault School, Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course, US Army Ranger School, Army Reconnaissance Course, Infantry Mortar Leader Course, Special Operations Forces Captains Career Course, Special Forces Qualification Course, Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Course, Military Freefall Course, and the Special Forces Advanced Urban Combat Course.

AFAOA

ARMY FOREIGN AREA OFFICER ASSOCIATION

Support the AFAOA

Volunteer

Join

Donate

Academic Journal
Awards Committee
Spouse Committee
Mentorship Committee
The Army FAO Handbook

www.armyfaoassociation.com

armyfaoassociation@gmail.com