



# Building Armies, Building Nations

## Toward a New Approach to Security Force Assistance

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This report explores the relationship between armies and nation-building and argues that U.S.-sponsored Security Force Assistance (SFA) could become more effective by focusing less on force structure, military capabilities, and readiness, and focusing more on ideology and the extent to which a client army complements a host nation's larger nation-building project.



### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- In what ways can SFA provision be improved?
- What can case studies of three historic large-scale U.S. SFA programs—South Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq—tell us about the relationships between armies and nation-building and the potential role of SFA?
- What can case studies of three attempts by postcolonial states—Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria—tell us about the relationships between armies and nation-building and the potential role of the SFA?



### KEY FINDINGS

#### Armies Must Be Assisted with an Eye Toward Enhancing Legitimacy

- The extent to which a client military contributes to nation-building by enhancing state legitimacy might be more important to U.S. SFA goals than its military capabilities.
- As indicators of SFA success, national cohesion and identity can matter as much, if not more, than military capability.

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The Case Studies Make Clear That Critical to the Success of a Fragile or Beleaguered State Is the Extent to Which Its Leaders Are Committed Nation Builders

- The United States is unlikely to make much headway unless the host-nation's own government is itself engaged in a comprehensive nation-building project, which must include promoting a specific national identity that supports its legitimacy.
- The United States can influence and strengthen another country's nation-building efforts.



There Is a Range in the Extent to Which Host-Nation Leaders Have Engaged in Nation-Building Projects

- Some have clear ideas about how to proceed and are actively working toward nation building goals but could benefit from assistance.
- Other nations lack any vision or program and will have to be convinced of their importance.
- The United States should recognize the limits of what SFA can do especially if it determines the host nations to be inattentive to nation-building.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- SFA providers should focus less on improving the force structure or military readiness of the client military and more on the client military's place in the host nation's overall nation-building project.
- Military capabilities alone often are insufficient in the face of enemies with compelling rival claims to legitimacy, indicating that the identity and cohesion of a force and the extent to which it serves the nation-building project can be critical.

