



Securing Gains in Fragile States

Using U.S. Leverage in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Beyond

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U.S. decisionmakers and a variety of analysts have generally agreed that broad-based, inclusive governance and institutionalized capacity-building consistent with the rule of law are the long-term goals for stabilizing fragile states. How to realize these goals is much more contentious. This report summarizes research on better understanding the use of leverage in nudging partners toward better governance practices after military interventions.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do improvements in governance—in particular, more-inclusive politics and the building of state capacity governed by the rule of law—help secure more durable peace?
- To what extent and under what circumstances are interventions by the United States and similar international actors associated with improvements in local governance?
- If the United States and the local partner have different priorities for governance, under what circumstances can the United States shape the partner's preferences, with what policy levers, and for how long?
- What are the implications for U.S. decisionmakers and those charged with implementing U.S. policy?



KEY FINDINGS

- The United States was frequently able to move fragile states toward better governance in the near term when U.S. and partner interests aligned or when the United States used its leverage (including conditions on military and economic assistance) and when all the prerequisites for leverage (clarity, observability, and strength of sanction) were in place.

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- Outcomes were much less favorable when U.S. and partner interests diverged and the United States failed to use its leverage, or if one of the preconditions for leverage was absent.
- Although rates of success declined over longer periods, U.S. efforts were almost always at least partially successful when interests were aligned or when the United States had strong leverage.
- These results suggest that the United States can effectively support governance reforms in postconflict states by seizing on opportunities when partner interests align with those of the United States and effectively using its leverage when interests do not align.
- In many cases, the United States can at least secure partial reforms in an effort to buy time and local political support for the longer-term process of stabilization.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Begin with reasonable expectations about what “consolidating gains” means.
- Prioritize the inclusion of as many factions as practical in the postwar order.
- Focus U.S. leverage on critical objectives.
- Clearly and consistently communicate U.S. demands.
- Develop frameworks and capabilities for monitoring partner compliance.
- Carefully select sanctions for noncompliance and side payments for cooperation.

