



# Paradoxes of Partnership

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**D**efense institution building (DIB) requires a well-calibrated approach to establishing working partnerships with host-country counterparts. The past 15 years of assistance leave no doubt that host-country officials are the change agents responsible and vital for ushering in new institutional processes, and ensuring they are underpinned by the necessary competencies of individuals and systems. This insight highlights two critical elements necessary for DIB success: local buy-in and local ownership. While this lesson is reflected in the discourse and increasing attention on DIB, planning and implementation are plagued by significant confusion about how partners and partnerships fit into the endeavor. Indeed, approaches to host-country partners and partnerships differ greatly. An ad hoc approach to partnership, and confusion on how to build effective relationships with host governments and individual officials, can pose significant impediments to sustainable and successful DIB activities—particularly when there is a tendency in the Department of Defense (DOD) and the U.S. foreign policy community to influence the behavior of host-country counterparts and institutions to primarily achieve U.S. interests.

Herein lies the paradox of partnership: a relationship founded on a donor nation influencing the host nation to act in the donor's interest—rather than one in which the donor and host nation find common ground on a mutually beneficial plan that addresses both nations' interests—is unlikely to lead to sustainable solutions.

## Understanding Narratives on Partnership

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) briefings for various audiences at the Pentagon on the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense (MOD) advising missions underway in Afghanistan consistently fail to adequately address where Afghan ministry officials fit into the change management process, at what stage they were involved, and what their roles were in the process. Similarly, during a January 2014 briefing in Washington, an astute Ministry of Defense Advisors (MODA) returnee asked, “Where are the Afghan counterparts in all of this?” The briefer responded, “We know we are supposed to engage them but there is no time.” In conflict or post-conflict environments, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, the characteristic urgency of operations may lead practitioners to bypass labor and time-intensive processes. Well-meaning practitioners may feel the need to “do the

job for them (host-nation counterparts),” as it is not uncommon for practitioners to be skeptical of host-nation capacity, and impatient for results. Cultivating local buy-in and local ownership, however, are critical for success.

These reflections demonstrate how partnerships are viewed by many who work on strengthening host-country government institutions, privileging a utilitarian approach rather than a mutually beneficial enterprise. Indeed, a recent RAND Corporation study of DIB in Africa focused on the interests of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), seldom mentioning the recipients of the assistance.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Theater Campaign Plans emphasize the goals of the Combatant Commander (CCDR), with little or no mention of partner goals. And during the working group discussions that led to the development of the Directorate of Building Partnership Capacity (BPC), the most frequently discussed issue—and subject of heated disagreements—was whether the P in BPC stands for “partner” or for “partnership,” the latter being the goal of the doctrine.

These narratives and approaches to partnership have led to significant confusion about what works in capacity-building efforts, and in turn, have had negative impacts on the countries receiving the assistance. For instance, some host-country counterparts have learned to leverage the inequality inherent in this approach to partnership by effecting little or no real change in their systems, while acquiring large quantities of equipment donations. The result is a partnership in which the donor country promotes changes to little or no avail, because the recipient country does not agree to the plan—often because the changes do not make sense to them or because the plan threatens an order that suits various actors benefitting from the status quo.

A key question that DIB strategists, planners, and implementers must contemplate is: What is the role of partnership in DIB? It is important for the DOD and the entire U.S. government to understand the merits and pitfalls of the various conceptualizations and strategic uses of partnerships. This chapter explores the concept of partnership in the context of DIB activities. The notion of partnership is central to the development of the necessary and complex capacities of defense institutions, as well as other government entities. Indeed, the right kind of partnership facilitates the transfer of knowledge, skills, and expertise, and a mutually beneficial exchange of information. It is the key ingredient for the establishment of a new normal of enhanced ability of a country to provide security for its population and territory.

The concept of partnership is the cornerstone of doctrines such as BPC and security cooperation, and of planning and project design throughout the security assistance community. Less evident and clear is the role that partnership plays in these endeavors. Is the development of a partnership with a recipient or host country a means or an end? Are partnerships grounded in national security imperatives or the more altruistic, long-term notion of capacity building? What is the nature and scope of the type of partnership that is conducive to long-term institution building? Which partnerships will not lead to a sustainable new normal? The answers to these questions are by no means intuitive; in fact, they can be quite counterintuitive for practitioners who are often from tactically-

driven agencies. Indeed, they present the four layers of the paradox that the chapter will subsequently examine in greater detail:

- First, the term “partnership” is politically courteous, but imprecise and ambiguous, as “partners” in the DIB field can refer to either allies within a capacity-building coalition or recipient countries. The intention is to express mutual respect. Paradoxically, by conflating two essentially separate roles this prioritization of political courtesy leads to misunderstandings and confusion in program discussions and planning, as well as inefficiencies in implementation.
- Second, a partnership established for the purpose of developing effective institutions must be understood as instrumental—a means to an end. The paradox is that while good partnership is essential for effective capacity building, the opposite is not true. Good partnership can also be cultivated by sharing information and intelligence, joint training and education, and shared coalition experience. Such partnerships will not necessarily lead to effective capacity building.
- Third, partnership implies joint ownership and shared interest; what happens when interests diverge? Does the United States partner with another nation in order to have a collaborator or proxy in remote regions that can effectively burden-share or provide support when needed in their region? Or is a partnership a means to strengthen the partner’s ability to pursue its own, self-defined national interests? Is the partnership about the U.S. interests or the interests of the host country? Or both? Most will answer both, but then institutional reform in the host country may adversely affect the interests of stakeholders in the status quo, paradoxically threatening the very partners upon whom we depend for effective capacity building.
- Fourth, security assistance providers tend to see partnerships as a useful mechanism to establish interoperability as they aim to help host countries develop systems and processes that mirror existing DOD systems and processes. This is an approach and a mindset which by imposing systems and processes inorganic to the partner country has paradoxically led to more problems than solutions in the recent history of security assistance, and even various DIB efforts, as we will see.

This chapter aims to describe and explain the problems inherent in differing views of partnerships. It offers suggestions for more effective leveraging of partnerships to meet the goals of capacity building and national security through the design and planning of DIB initiatives. In general, an effective partnership prioritizes mutual goals over the partnership itself. This is a mindset which has yet to permeate capacity-building practices, leading to less than stellar strategies, missions, operations, and activities in the past 15 years or more of security sector reform. This chapter offers insights and reflections on the concept of partnership as it can best be leveraged for conducting defense institution building.

## There are Partners, and There are Partners

Partnership has various connotations, and it is useful to inventory the various notions of who and what partners are. In the context of assistance, partners may include allies or a coalition of countries operating together in a specific country or mission. Alternatively, they may call on each other to work together to deliver assistance to conflict-affected countries or fragile countries in the case of violent extremism, terrorism, or other non-traditional conflict scenarios. According to this understanding, U.S. partners include the UK, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, and others like Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Alternatively, partners may be understood to mean recipient countries, i.e. those countries receiving the assistance from the U.S. and its donor community partners. This second category of partners comes out of lessons learned concerning local ownership, which highlights the importance of local solutions for local problems.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, assistance is cognizant of the need to involve host-country officials in reform processes. However, such involvement is often superficial. Even the confusing use of the term “partners” for both allies and for host countries who receive assistance demonstrates that the language is evolving, but real partnerships have not caught up with the narrative. It is safe to state that recipient partners do not see themselves as the same types of partners as those who provide assistance alongside the United States.

The impacts of using the same term for very different actors in the assistance arena cannot be overlooked. Understanding partners interchangeably as members of a coalition and as host-country recipients of assistance confuses assessments, planning, and actual activities on the ground. An assessment of the capabilities of the French to operate alongside the U.S. Special Forces in Mali and even the strengthening of those capabilities if necessary for mission success is not the same activity as the assistance to a host-country recipient’s Ministry of Defense to address its ghost payroll problem. The first engagement is one in which partner countries develop their joint capabilities to achieve readiness for a set of capacity-building activities. The second is about reforming an institutional system and/or processes to strengthen the ability of the Ministry of Defense to administer and manage defense activities in their country. The approaches to these two distinct engagements as well as the interests that underpin them are quite different and should be approached differently. It is important to distinguish between the development of joint capabilities to carry out a set of activities, and the target of the capacity-building or DIB activities. These partnerships are not the same, in nature or scope.

Henceforth, “partner” will be used to describe the recipient country whose ownership and buy-in of the reform and change processes is crucial to building institutional capacity. In the case of Liberia, the national defense strategy designed by the U.S. DOD was not implemented because there was no real buy-in—meaning that Liberian defense sector actors had not been part of the process early or often enough.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, “engagement” means merely “assessing” to DIB implementers, but engagement goes far

beyond assessment; indeed, host-country counterparts must be involved in the process of identifying solutions, not just sharing vulnerabilities in their systems (in some cases, the vulnerabilities in their systems are observed by outsiders but not accepted by host-country counterparts). While these vulnerabilities may well be the legitimate source of fragility of the system, the only viable and sustainable practice is for the host-country partner to be involved in the identification of both problems and solutions, which will in turn improve assessments, analysis, ideas, and solutions to address gaps in capacity.

## **Operationalizing Partnerships: Ends or Means?**

It is important to distinguish whether partnerships are a means to an end, or an end in themselves. In other words, what are the varying strategic uses of partnerships? There are partnerships that are established and maintained in order to ensure a specific behavior from a partner either on an ongoing basis or in times of crisis. This approach privileges the influence of the United States on host-country partners to ensure that their decision-making processes align with and reinforce the interests of the United States in a given scenario. This approach is one in which a partnership is based on expectations of behavior and is primarily operationalized through financially-based assistance. The approximately \$1.4 billion assistance package that Egypt receives annually from the United States is intended to maintain the geopolitical status quo in the Middle East region. In this instance, given the primacy of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) portion of the assistance package, the partnership is an end to itself—a partnership designed to sustain a specific international relations architecture, and predicated on strengthening operational capabilities rather than building institutional capacity. This approach to partnership should not be seen as strengthening defense institutions, as it carries expectations of specific behavior but does not address gaps in defense institutions' capacity to support, administer, and manage defense activities. Confounding this type of assistance with programs designed to strengthen procurement capacity, logistics management, and human resource management systems is problematic and counter-productive to the efforts to build up security institutions effectively.

Under Title 10 of the U.S. Code of Laws, training and equipping activities underpinned by FMS programs operationalize the concept of partnership through the exchange of interest-based concessions.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, equipping and training host-country militaries has been the conduit to developing relationships which are seen as strategic partnerships. These partnerships have many inherent expectations that are often miscommunicated and difficult to manage. Essentially, the expectation of this approach is that the partner who enters in a partnership through the reception of equipment will behave according to (or at least not against) U.S. interests (and may be reminded of the nature of the partnership so they may behave according to its unspoken terms).

These geopolitical and mission-specific partnerships are an end in themselves. When

DIB activities were incorporated in these scenarios, it was mainly to introduce conditions for receiving materiel assistance; for instance, transfers of trucks to send security forces to border areas incorporate DIB by requiring that inventory or maintenance programs be in place prior to delivery.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, defense technology transfers require specific security mechanisms to be in place to ensure proper use of the newly implemented systems.<sup>6</sup> Neither of these scenarios represent a capacity-building ethos; rather, they bring back a logic akin to that of structural adjustment programs.<sup>7</sup> This precondition-based approach has been discredited for failing to build sustainable capacity in host-country contexts.<sup>8</sup>

Defense institution building seeks to operationalize partnerships differently by establishing a partnership with a host country, its institutions, and its key actors as a foundation for identifying capacity gaps. This approach facilitates the development of joint capacity-building projects which address the institutional weaknesses identified by the partner. This approach leverages a partnership as a means to an end, which offers more hope for sustainability. The end becomes enhanced capacity rather than the partnership itself. Indeed, capacity-building activities require access to and candid interaction with host-country counterparts, and successful planning depends on understanding failures, vulnerabilities, and obstacles. These are very difficult to identify without a solid partnership among peers. This type of partnership takes time to develop, but developing the partnership is only the very beginning of the capacity-building activity.

The role of DIB activities is to promote and support host-country officials and their institutions in identifying and developing a change management process that will result in enhanced institutional capacity. By developing partnership as the means, the partnership becomes the foundation for catalyzing change, which must be led and genuinely accepted by local stakeholders and officials. For example, in order to uncover a ghost payroll problem plaguing an army's operational capacity, a solid relationship, based on information-sharing and some level of trust regarding what the partners might do with such information, is necessary. While this type of partnership is not easy to achieve, it should be prioritized for the purposes of DIB.

While partnerships as an end can be an effective tool of diplomacy or international relations, they are not generally effective for building institutional capacity to provide security. The onus is not only on implementers and planners to leverage partnerships effectively as a means to a capacity building end. Success also depends on specialized training, policies, and decisions. When assistance is for the purpose of capacity building, additional training is required to improve the practitioner's familiarization with the country, its culture, and its language. The message that many receive from this heavy investment in understanding the context is that the partnership itself is the end goal, as such efforts help to ensure that culture is respected and partners view the United States favorably, and will cooperate when needed. However, this is an incomplete picture of how to build capacity overall.

## Balancing National Goals and Interests with Capacity-Building Principles

A major obstacle to successful defense institution building is ambiguity regarding our motivation, and its purpose. “Why do we do it?” The question is vital for DIB planning and implementation. In fact, it is important to ask the question even prior to making the decision to implement DIB as part of a security cooperation strategy. This is not merely a philosophical question, as it affects the strategy, design, and implementation of any DIB effort. Indeed, it is important to define the motivations of both providers and consumers, as well as an understanding of the foreign policy that underpins the overall assistance program. Governments articulate their reasons for engaging in assistance in various ways, and have several audiences, including the domestic public, donor partners, and the recipient partners (whose institutions are fragile and require strengthening). The narrative can be one of assistance in order to better sell international assistance with domestic audiences, as is the case with Canada and its police missions. Alternatively, it can be to ensure that the language and culture of a host country remains intact through the provision of assistance and beyond, as is the case with France. It can also be about securing the homeland and addressing threats to security before they have a chance to reach home, as is often the case for the United States.

A country’s motivations in offering assistance programs tell a very complex tale of goals and interests, which may fit awkwardly with the interests of the host or recipient country. Each country has a specific narrative justifying assistance programs. Those motivations and the many factors that shape them can lead to a strategic view of partnerships that does not fit well with the key requirements of capacity building. As in most security assistance and cooperation efforts, the leading reason for engagement in DIB is national interest. Indeed, the U.S. government’s goals are to increase a partner country’s capacity to address common security challenges, and become partners in supporting U.S. interests including promoting good governance and universal norms, and strengthening international security agreements and collective arrangements. While these goals translate into first rate military operations, the narrative they convey is less conducive to effective institution building activities.

As DIB is expected to complement the Title 10 mission and render it more sustainable, it is important for strategy and planning efforts to take stock of the tension that arises when simultaneous goals exist to build sustainable capacity and secure U.S. national security interests. Effective capacity-building partnerships are often the main casualty in the use of partnership to directly pursue U.S. national security interests; such use can violate key capacity-building principles, including respect for local ownership, “do no harm,” and especially sustainability. The emphasis on transparency and/or accountability, for example, demonstrates that U.S. stakeholders often impose specific changes that are not envisioned or even deemed necessary by host-country counterparts. DIB cannot be achieved without integrating systems and processes that make the defense ministry accountable for its actions, decisions, policies, and procedures. As imposing accountability requires systemic

institutional reform as well as the development of the competency of key individuals, DIB efforts require built-in partnership development, which takes time, strategy, and the right skills.

It is possible to reconcile effective capacity building and goals defined around the national interest. The bad news is that such an approach takes much more time, skill engaging host-country actors, and agility in transferring capacity. But the good news is that if host-country actors are truly seen as equal partners with whom capacity-building projects are designed, the footprint of international assistance that is necessary for impact is much smaller. Indeed, effective institution building only requires a few, but the right, experts. Therefore, capacity building in DIB should be perceived as a strategy to render a fragile defense sector more capable of providing security, which will, in turn, contribute to the U.S. goal of national security; a much better investment-to-impact ratio than having to provide assistance every time the need arises without building sustainable capacity. This narrative can be particularly insightful for strategy, planning, and implementation. It is rooted in a logic of focusing on capacity building in order to reach the goals of national security, which is less direct and more challenging, but more rewarding in terms of sustainability and successful exit strategies (i.e. those more than simply the abandonment of a precarious environment likely to ignite upon the departure of international agents).

Too often, assistance amounts to putting in a familiar system with the goal of achieving interoperability, but ends up depending heavily on a permanent funding support. This is often referred to as the “cookie cutter solution”: bringing in the U.S. procurement system to fix the host-country system. While experience clearly shows that this approach fails time and again, identifying an alternative has proven difficult. And even when an alternative is identified, it is difficult to convince policy, planning, and implementation communities to do things differently. This undermines any capacity-building effort (especially DIB) and underestimates the potential that constructive partnerships with host-country stakeholders offer. Partnerships are the cornerstone of DIB as well as other capacity-building efforts. Without a strong partnership with defense ministry officials and other relevant government actors, no DIB efforts—let alone other Title 10 assistance activities—will be sustainable, and repeat engagements will undoubtedly be necessary. However, the right kind of partnership may lead to the development of sustainable local solutions (although these have proven easier to invoke than to achieve).

According to this logic, the partnership with a host-country’s defense institution is a means to an end. It is the means to finding local solutions, by learning about the sources of problems and how the problems matter to those with the authority to usher in change in their own institutions. Such partnerships look quite different than the older generation of partnerships. They are based on mutual learning about the realities on the ground, what has been tried, why it worked, or why it did not, and the exchange of ideas about how to address the gaps in capacity.

Sustainable defense institution building depends heavily on establishing a partnership based on the honest sharing of vulnerabilities, problems, gaps, and sources of resistance



that change agents are likely to encounter. A partnership based on this access to host-country counterparts will allow for a more targeted, even surgical, approach to capacity building, and one which ensures that the only actors with the authority to affect this change in their country—the host-country officials—will do so in a manner that can be accepted by the contributing stakeholders. This kind of partnership allows for the exchange of ideas for addressing problems, and is rooted in a true understanding and respect for existing dynamics and other realities such as culture, socio-economics, and political contexts.

## The Illusion of Interoperability

The question “Why do we do it?” often brings the response that the goal is “interoperability.” It is important to understand both the opportunities and the risks of that presumption. Closely tied to the idea of providing assistance as a means of achieving national security (by addressing a threat before it comes to the shores of the United States) is the desire for compatibility of materiel and non-materiel systems between the United States and the recipient country. This motivation begs a much subtler articulation of how defense institutions are strengthened. Helping a fragile defense sector strengthen its institutional practices in the mirror image of the donor’s defense institutions colors all aspects of interaction with host-country counterparts. However as one astute advisor recounted, host defense officials approach this type of assistance with the attitude of, “don’t worry; when they leave, we will do it our way again.”<sup>9</sup>

Such misalignments are not only about the size of an army or of budgets, nor are they the inevitable results of differing cultural and historical contexts. They result from pursuing the wrong approach to establishing capacity-building partnerships. Interoperability may be a worthy goal among allies or coalition partners conducting counterterrorism missions side-by-side or addressing belligerent states; and in the context of DIB, it requires a different kind of partnership, characterized by mutuality, interdependence, and equality. When describing host-country counterparts, advisors sometimes refer metaphorically to parenting; counterparts are like children, or teenagers. The relationship then should be carefully crafted to ensure that the teenagers adopt the image of their role models. This is possibly the most alienating mindset to a host-country counterpart. It conditions the words chosen as well as the tone, the body language, and the content of all aspects of the partnership.

Further, emphasizing interoperability can reinforce the perception that the United States and some of its allies are strictly self-serving and not genuinely interested in the strategic concerns and interests of the counterpart country. Other concepts that illustrate this challenge are anti-corruption and merit-based staff recruitment. Prioritizing interoperability results in a view of partnership based on the assumption that there is only one correct way to manage a process. This assumption is detectable in all interactions with counterparts, as well as in the advice shared by advisors deployed to strengthen institutions. Besides losing credibility as a legitimate resource for strengthening fragile

defense institutions, DIB efforts driven by the quest for interoperability are likely to be crafted in a manner that privileges the “cookie cutter solution.”

In the case of DIB, this implies establishing acquisition, technology, and logistics systems that can operate in sync with those of the U.S. Army. An ISAF briefing in 2015 described the U.S. approach to building the capacity of the Afghan procurement system as “making their system communicate with ours and ensuring the Afghan Ministry of Defense procurement department only has to push a button to order equipment.” This is not developing a partnership, nor will it lead to interoperability, because it is not driven or supported by ministry officials. This method also fails to strengthen the capacity of the various operators in the ministry who contribute to a procurement system. Such approaches based on interoperability and mirroring donor systems have been adopted because there is “no time to engage counterparts.” DIB activities need to pay closer attention to the problems of championing interoperability and recognize that institutions will become sustainable if partnerships are approached as a means to building sustainable capacity, and if the assistance provided is not something akin to “assistance for dummies”; an abridged version of how to create and maintain strong, effective, and interoperable institutional systems.

## **A More Systematic Approach to Partnerships**

As mentioned above, a common approach to security assistance assumes that once partnership has been established, based on sharing of information or transfer of equipment, knowledge, or skills, it is the duty of the host country to undertake the changes advised by the donor country. This reflects an “I owe you” logic that will not likely lead to the desired results, because it is based on the notion of the donor giving something in exchange for influence over recipient actions. This often leads to host-country institutions and officials receiving equipment they may or may not deem desirable for their own needs. A more sustainable approach would empower host-country counterparts as the change agents who can contribute to more effective functioning of their institutions.

The emerging DIB paradigm developed from the recognition that security sector reform is ineffective when founded on training and equipping programs. It also rests on empirical experience and lessons showing that sustainable solutions are vital to success. Sustainable solutions are both locally identified and driven in order to be accepted by both operators (those who contribute to the enhanced functioning of an institution) and the end users, such as the population. Establishing partnerships to enhance fragile defense institutions is about more than strengthening capabilities to counter specific threats at a given single point in time. Rather, it is about increasing capacity to manage, administer, strategize, and plan for the use of the equipment and skills for enhanced operations and improved security.

Successfully building human capacity depends on establishing partnership built on commitment to learning the realities and competencies of host-country counterparts, in

addition to the more general demographic, cultural, and socio-political dynamics that constitute the counterpart operating context. Many security sector assistance providers attempt to build capacity without understanding those realities. However, bypassing that step signals dismissiveness to host-country counterparts, sending a message that the relationship is one between parent and teen, or doctor and patient.<sup>10</sup> This asymmetrical approach comes significantly short on delivering a level of trust and credibility vital for sustainably building capacity. In fact, many who have used this approach have found themselves reverting back to train and equip programs in hope of influencing the counterpart. This short-term approach may seem effective, as assistance recipients are well disposed to accepting material and equipment as the solution to their capacity gaps, especially—as they often state—since it is so willingly offered. From an impact perspective, though, this is not a desirable path, as it delivers very little in terms of long-term solutions to capacity gaps.

Essentially, DIB is a reform and change management process. Partnership has long been based on the assumption that change must be managed by outsiders—those providing assistance to a fragile government. This has proven to be wrong for a number of reasons, particularly as it misinterprets the nature of the relationship between the capacity builder and the host-country government official. Formulating a strategy to strengthen a defense institution based on the notion that the change belongs to the United States or any other provider of assistance sets the mission up for failure.

Defense institution building demands significant changes of host-country stakeholders. An effective change process can only be managed effectively by those who work and operate within the target system on an ongoing basis. The assisting partner must have a keen understanding of its role as a supporter, a peer, a promoter of change, and a facilitator of reflection about gaps in capacity and capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, the partnership that will lead to long-term solutions is predicated on partners being positioned as equals, each having much to bring to the relationship—a crucial concept that underpins any successful DIB effort.

Partnership in this context must emphasize the two parties' respective interests, identify how they can reinforce each other, and develop capacity-building activities that implement a long-term change management process. As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development recently stated, better political engagement and more change management are needed to improve security and justice programs.<sup>12</sup> This requires partnerships that leverage existing host-country capacities, and recognition that stronger processes are necessary from the host-country partners.

## Existing Opportunities

Current Theater Campaign Plans (TCPs) of geographic combatant commands state goals that lend themselves to DIB activities, in addition to goals of other security cooperation programs. AFRICOM's TCP, for example, seeks to neutralize al-Shabaab, contain the

instability in Libya, contain Boko Haram in Western Africa, disrupt illicit activity in the Gulf of Guinea and in Central Africa, and build African partners' peacekeeping and disaster assistance capabilities.<sup>13</sup> All of these goals provide opportunities for implementing DIB activities, which aim to strengthen the institutional processes of these countries' militaries. Disrupting illicit activity requires a myriad of capacities for strategies and the management of systems necessary to put these strategies in place. This includes investigative capacity, intelligence capacity, analysis capacity, and strategy development capacity, as well as procurement and logistics systems which provide the security actors with a steady stream of the tools they need.

## **Additional Capacity for Effective DIB**

Establishing and maintaining a partnership that lays the foundation for sustainable capacity-building activities is the missing link that is required for effective DIB activities. There is a gap at DOD and throughout the U.S. government that inhibits institution building efforts in many instances: the lack of a standardized, evidence-based, and consistent approach to the development of partnerships with host-country counterparts and between the DOD and MODs. Engagement strategies are chosen with the best intentions, with the existing tools that each individual brings to the endeavor, but they are also very ad hoc. There is a critical and urgent need to develop a set of protocols for U.S. DIB capacity builders—those assisting MODs and other host-country institutions to become more effective.

DOD planners and implementers need a roadmap for building partnerships that are going to develop sustainable and viable institutions, capable of unilaterally and independently assuming the responsibility of defense. The problem with partnerships cannot be defined by the capacity or will of the host-country stakeholder; that part is difficult to control and will fluctuate over time and across borders. What can be controlled is the professionalization and the practices of the practitioners of defense institution building.

There are two skill sets that are crucial to render U.S. DIB planners and operators good partners: an in-depth knowledge of the area requiring strengthening (i.e. procurement, contracting, oversight, recruitment, logistics); and the skill set and mindset for establishing partnerships that will lead to joint capacity-building activities that enable defense institutions to better provide security as part of a country's governance structure. The DIB community needs to invest more systematically in the recruitment of individuals who have the depth and breadth of experience necessary to know how to address capacity gaps in defense institutions. There is a need to invest in transforming these experts into astute advisors with the skills to establish constructive partnerships. Being a good partner is not about pointing out weaknesses, but rather promoting the reflection and analysis by the host-country counterpart to identify sources of ineffectiveness and viable solutions. This is a skill set that will change mindsets and approaches, a skill set that DOD has begun to invest in through the MODA and DIRI programs, which represents great hope for the professionalization of the DIB workforce.

## Conclusion

When asked about how and when to engage host-country partners, DOD consistently responds “early and often.” This demonstrates awareness that partnerships must be based on consultation, information sharing, and a willingness to acknowledge what works and what does not. Engaging early and often is difficult. It requires skills and attitudes suitable to balancing the “can-do” attitude, useful in some situations, but less helpful when providing in-depth advice to host-country counterparts in the identification of capacity-gap solutions.

An effective DIB partnership will entail confronting the challenges associated with influencing a partner’s behavior. It will require a shift in how partnerships are developed, maintained, and leveraged. Establishing this type of partnership is challenging. Indeed, the mutual nature of DIB programs conflicts with the more transactional nature of more traditional security cooperation and security assistance programs. The former takes time and, in theory, should come before the latter. While the security situation often requires security assistance programs, separating these from DIB is worth considering. They are separate activities, and if approached that way they can be managed as separate efforts: one short-term, the other long-term.

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## Notes

1 Michael J. McNerney, et al., *Defense Institution Building in Africa: An Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), available at <[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1232/RAND\\_RR1232.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1232/RAND_RR1232.pdf)>.

2 Timothy Donais, ed., *Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2008); Timothy Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership: Post-conflict Consensus-building* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

3 McNerney, et al. *op. cit.*

4 U.S. Code, Title 10, “Armed Forces”.

5 Statement by an AFRICOM director, June 12, 2015.

6 Defense Technology Security Administration Advisor, interviewed by Nadia Gerspacher, January 9, 2016.

7 Structural Adjustment Programs are economic policies for developing countries, promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund since the early 1980s, regarding the provision of loans conditional on the adoption of certain policies. Structural adjustment loans are loans made by the World Bank. They are designed to encourage the structural adjustment of an economy: for example, removing “excess” government controls and promoting market competition as part of the neo-liberal agenda followed by the World Bank.

8 F. E. Ogbimi, “Structural adjustment is the wrong policy,” *African Technology Forum* 8, No. 1 (2001).

9 International Security Sector Advisory Team/DCAF advisor, interviewed by Nadia Gerspacher, April 18, 2016.

10 This metaphor is often mentioned when discussing the right type of partnership as a way to understand the nature of the relationship with counterparts.

11 Nadia Gerspacher, *Strategic Advising for Foreign Assistance: A Practical Guide* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2016).

12 E. van Veen, “Improving Security and Justice Programming in Fragile Situations: Better Political Engagement, More Change Management,” *OECD Development Policy Papers* No. 3 (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, March 2016).

13 Statement of United States Africa Command Commander General David M. Rodriguez, “United States Africa Command 2016 Posture Statement,” before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 8, 2016.

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