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Attributes of a Democratic and Competent Defense Partner

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The ultimate goal of defense institution building (DIB) is to assist in the development of partner armed forces that are competently organized, trained, and equipped in accordance with democratic civil-military principles, and that plan and conduct military operations skillfully while under the full political direction of a democratic government. Historically, such partner nations have consistently served in coalitions with the United States against authoritarian regimes from the Soviet Union in the Cold War, through Serbia in the Balkans, to Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War, and the Taliban in the Afghan War. It is these nations that share the United States' vision of a prosperous, peaceful, secure, and free world and are willing to use their armed forces to achieve that vision.

Only a few armed forces around the world—primarily longstanding treaty allies in NATO and Australia in the Pacific—meet these criteria in full. While there are many other countries with which the United States cooperates and interacts, it has found that its most reliable partners are those that are democratic in their governance and competent in their military capabilities. Simply put, the objective of DIB is to work with the defense organizations—military and civilian—of other countries to build the strength of democratic, civil-military relations and the competence of their armed forces in a balanced manner.

In order to plan and carry out an overall DIB campaign with a specific country, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) must first, formulate a logical approach to selecting from the many diverse DIB programs available. This begins with an understanding of the characteristics of democratic civil-military relations, and the skillsets or competencies of effective defense ministries and uniformed military forces. The next step is an assessment of a prospective state recipient of DIB programs, a potential partner for defense and military cooperation. The assessments must cover both the state of civil-military relations and the competence of the defense and military organizations. It is not in the U.S. interest to help develop the military competence of a defense organization that can be directed by an authoritarian government to suppress its own people, or to give it greater capability to take actions hostile to the United States. In some circumstances, the United States may offer military assistance to authoritarian governments for immediate strategic imperatives, but an overall DIB campaign should take the long-term view of balanced development of a

potential partner's capabilities. The final steps in a DIB campaign are executing, monitoring, and adjusting—then continuing, evolving, or terminating—the programs over time.

This chapter begins with a description of “what good looks like” in a competent democratic defense partner. It details an idealized model meant to portray what the United States is working toward with a partner. The chapter then describes seven characteristics observed in the armed forces of mature democracies, and summarizes the most important areas of functional defense and military competence. Next, an outline of a process for planning, executing, and adjusting a military-military program using the DIB toolkit is described. Finally, the chapter discusses some of the lessons that have been learned in using military interactions to transform armed forces in transitioning countries into competent organizations, responsive to democratic government. The reader should understand that though building defense institutions is not an exclusive prerogative of the United States, the author is writing from the perspective and experience of a U.S. military officer. Therefore, the characteristics and competencies described, not surprisingly closely resemble those of the United States armed forces, and will be those most readily recognized by an American military officer. While differences exist among the armed forces of democracies across the world, these seven characteristics, or similar variations, can be found in most mature democratic forces. It should further be noted that while the professionalization that results as DIB progresses does instill transparency and civilian-control of the armed forces, DIB is undertaken in both democratic and nondemocratic settings.

The Seven Characteristics of Democratic Armed Forces

The best, short description of democratic armed forces is as follows, “Armed forces in a democracy are competent, honest and respected defenders of the nation’s interest, loyal and responsive to the elected national government.”¹ Building on this, this section discusses seven particular characteristics observed in the armed forces of most mature democracies, which DIB efforts can help nations to establish. These characteristics are derived from the author’s own experience and research, and include: a constitutional and legal basis; clearly delineated internal and external missions; an inclusive force representative of the demographic makeup of the country; political neutrality and loyalty to the elected government; an established ministry of defense; developed budgetary, pay, and procurement systems; and finally a reputation that earns the respect and backing of their populations at large.

Constitutional and Legal Basis

In a mature democracy, the roles and functions of the armed forces are established in the constitutional and legal framework. The roles, functions, and loyalty of the armed forces are in service to the nation (that is, the people of their country and their elected representatives), rather than to a ruling person, family, tribe, religion, or political party. In the transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic governments, while the process of

creating and promulgating a new legal framework for the armed forces can take years, it is of vital importance to ensuring the accountability and civilian oversight of a professional defense sector.

Legal frameworks specify the authority of the head of state to give orders to the armed forces, and the authority and responsibilities of other officials in the government—including ministers of defense and their staffs, chiefs of defense and their staffs, and the role and authorities of legislative bodies. They set out the procedures for sending units of the armed forces into combat, appointing and approving senior officers, providing military budgets, and purchasing military equipment and supplies. Importantly, they provide the basis for legal orders to the armed forces.

The responsibilities of the legislature for the armed forces are especially important in a democracy. Although the government directs the armed forces on a day-to-day basis, and the head of government generally serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the legislature in a democracy has vital responsibilities. It is the legislature that approves the budget and the appointments of the most senior officers. The legislature also approves a government's decision to go to war and has oversight responsibility for the armed forces to investigate mistakes and failures and hold the government accountable for them. Legislatures in mature democracies develop experience and expertise in military matters to provide effective oversight, exerting an important constraint on executive power.

Mission

In most mature democracies, armed forces have the primary mission of defense against external threats. External threats include both immediate military threats within the region and more distant threats to the international order that have provoked a collective response from the United Nations or other international authority. For countries that do not have an immediate external threat, the primary mission for armed forces is to maintain sovereignty over land, air, and maritime territory—a minimum capability that can be expanded should future threats arise—and to support international peacekeeping operations against common threats to the international community.

Armed forces in democracies also have internal missions. Military units often conduct national development projects, such as building roads and bridges, or providing medical care in remote areas. When disasters occur, armed forces are expected to be among the first to respond to save lives, provide emergency supplies, and restore transportation and communications systems. Armed forces can also perform internal counterinsurgency or counternarcotic operations, or support law enforcement or border patrol authorities. Internal operations like these in democracies are always under strict legal controls, especially regarding the use of force and handling of detained citizens. They are conducted to the extent possible in support of domestic government agencies (most often domestic law enforcement agencies) and are conducted for limited periods, subject to renewal by established government procedures. Military intelligence agencies in democracies are

permitted to gather information about a country's citizens only under strict controls that are approved outside the intelligence services themselves through an established legal process.

Demographic Representation and Contribution to Society

Armed forces in democracies reflect the ethnic, regional, religious, and tribal makeup of the country. Recruitment programs and promotion procedures are established to ensure representation of the groups making up the country's population. This mixing of groups in the armed forces is intended not only to provide service opportunities for different segments of the society, but also to ensure that the armed forces retain a national perspective: not favoring one group within the country because of its dominance in the armed forces, either in numbers or in leadership positions. Mixing of minority groups within the armed forces has been most successful when it has been carried down to the unit level—for example, to the brigade or regiment level in an army. In democracies, when veterans of military service return to civilian life, they are expected to contribute to a country's overall objectives through the skills and knowledge they gained during their service.

Political Neutrality

In democracies, the armed forces are expected to be just as loyal and responsive to the orders of a new government on its first day in office as they were to the previous government on its last day. Active duty military personnel play no role in elections beyond casting their individual votes, and they do not make any political preference known publicly. During political crises, armed forces remain neutral.

In countries without long-established democratic traditions, there will often be strong pressures on military leaders during times of political and economic stress and crisis: popular opinion may call for them to take power in times of social disorder and economic hardship; civilian political leaders vying for power may seek their support; and once elected, heads of government may abuse their authorities to consolidate or extend their power, moving toward authoritarianism. There are rarely simple and correct guidelines to follow in situations like these; rather, military leaders must carefully think through the issues at stake and make decisions based on supporting the long-term democratic development of their countries.

Ministries of Defense

In democracies, military leaders provide advice on military policies, but the ultimate decisions on the structure and funding of the armed forces and on their employment are made by the elected government. Ministries of defense perform the function of receiving professional military advice from the uniformed services and then implementing the national decisions that affect the armed forces. Usually, there is an appointed and confirmed Minister of Defense with a staff that has the authority and skills for these responsibilities. The Minister of Defense is responsible both to the head of government and to the legislature

for defense policy, budgets and major equipment purchases, the appointment of senior military officers, and the overall direction of military operations. Although military officers can serve in assignments within the Ministry of Defense, the top positions in democracies should be all civilian politicians or senior career government employees, and a majority of the staff should not be not serving military officers. A strong and competent Ministry of Defense ensures that the military leaders of the armed forces are not making policy decisions that have consequences beyond the military sphere, and in addition it insulates them from policy responsibility. For example, if a war is unpopular, the armed forces are not held responsible for it, and can still be respected and supported by the population for doing their duty. In a transition from an authoritarian government to a democracy, the development of a competent Ministry of Defense staff is one of the most difficult and lengthy challenges.

Budgets, Pay, and Procurement

Military budgets are big, and with big budgets come powerful incentives for both control and corruption. Established democracies have developed systems to ensure that their armed forces are adequately funded for their missions, and that the funds are spent on the intended purposes and not siphoned off into the pockets of the powerful. In mature democracies, military budgets are funded entirely by the national government as approved by the legislature; the armed forces do not own and operate businesses. Military budgets are published. Systems to purchase supplies and equipment are transparent. The competitive procedures, costs, and responsibilities of all officials involved are established by law, audited, and published. Legislatures have the staff, authority, and responsibility to closely track the expenditure of defense funds, and to initiate independent audits to ensure that they are being used for their intended purposes. Military personnel of all ranks are compensated adequately in the armed forces of mature democracies through salary, housing allowance, medical care, and pension. Adequate pay both ensures that capable people serve in the armed forces and reduces the incentives for corruption.

Prestige, Reputation, Rights, and Opportunity

In established democracies, the armed forces routinely rank in opinion polls as one of the most respected institutions in the country. They are considered defenders of their country who are willing to serve—despite personal hardship and the obligation to risk their lives—out of patriotism and a higher sense of service. When they are committed to action, popular support grows, and even if popular opinion turns against a war effort, the citizens of democracies are expected to understand that the armed forces who fight those wars are performing honorable duties, and continue to support them and honor the sacrifices they make in their countries' service.

Members of the armed forces in democracies do not enjoy all of the personal freedoms of the other citizens in their countries; while on active service, they give up some of their rights to free speech and political activity, and much of their right to privacy. In return,

they are owed fair treatment within the military system through promotion based on merit, adequate compensation, and a military justice system that protects the rights of the accused as it pursues just verdicts and supports military discipline.

Competencies of Armed Forces

In addition to the seven characteristics described above, there are important areas of functional competence of armed forces in mature democracies, which are drawn from the standard organizations of ministries of defense and uniformed staffs of advanced democratic countries. The six competencies described below are areas in which the DOD, and in particular DIB programs, can help build the capability of its partners. These areas of competency are closely related to many of the democratic characteristics listed above, and in some cases they overlap.

Strategy and Budgets

It is a combined responsibility of ministries of defense and military staffs to write national defense strategies and draw up budgets for the armed forces for approval by governments and legislatures, and to then execute those budgets. A national defense strategy generally includes a description of the security environment of a country, its overall nature, as well as specific vulnerabilities and threats. It describes and prioritizes the nation's security objectives, and provides at least the outline of a plan to meet the objectives. The national defense strategy provides the foundation for directing, prioritizing, and assessing the full range of military activities.

Based on its national defense strategy, the Ministry of Defense and military staffs draw up budgets for submission to the government and the legislature. The most important budget categories are personnel, operations, and procurement. In most countries, budgets are approved by legislatures one year at a time, but budget planning must extend into the future: at least five years in detail, and then another five or more years in more general terms.

Once a budget is approved, it must be executed competently. Accounting systems are required to transfer and account for funds, procedures to handle changing requirements within a budget cycle, and auditing functions to verify proper expenditures and to prevent the diversion of funds.

Personnel Management

Some democracies fill their ranks through conscription, and others recruit volunteers. In either case, it is important to draw from all of the ethnic, religious, regional, or tribal sectors of a country, and to assign them so that all units—even down to the tactical level (i.e. brigades or regiments)—have diversity. There must be a regular system for promotion based on merit, although provisions can be made to ensure that the senior ranks also are diverse. Military training and education systems are extremely important, and democracies

have extensive professional military education systems for both the enlisted ranks and officers; the quality of training and education must be continually assessed and improved. Finally, compensation at all levels must be adequate so that service is attractive and there is no excuse for accepting bribes and practicing extortion.

Intelligence

The armed forces in democracies need intelligence systems to plan and conduct their missions. The components of an intelligence system include technical collection systems (such as photo-reconnaissance aircraft and satellites), personnel to collect intelligence and to analyze it, and secure communications systems. The scale and sophistication of intelligence systems will depend on available resources. However, this basic intelligence cycle is common to all military intelligence operations: the establishment of intelligence requirements by planning staffs and by operational commanders, the collection of intelligence, analysis of the intelligence, and then distribution of intelligence reports to all levels of the armed forces, from tactical units through top-level command.

Doctrine, Operational Planning, and Execution

Armed forces in democracies have established procedures to develop and approve doctrine (that is, the standard approach of that country's armed forces to the major military functions). In addition, military forces develop sets of tactics, techniques, and procedures that provide more detailed direction for the military functions. Doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures provide the basis for military education and training, and for the full range of activities performed by the armed forces.

Initial planning of a military operation or campaign is a process of translating political objectives received from the government into military objectives and a specific plan to reach those objectives. Once the plan is approved and the order to execute is given, the operational cycle commences. The operational cycle is an interactive, continuous system of assessing the situation, directing actions, carrying out those actions, and repeating the cycle. Intelligence and reports from operational units flow up to commanders with recommendations, assessments are then made by the commander and his staff, and fresh direction in the form of orders is sent to the operating units. There are variations in this cycle depending on the level of skill of commanders and units, the quality of communications systems, and the style and experience of commanders, but the fundamental cycle takes place in all military operations.

Logistics and Medical Services

Military logistics systems provide food and water, fuel, ammunition, spare parts, and other replacement materiel to tactical units. Logistics systems are both "push" and "pull" systems. The "push" component is the pre-stocking or automatic supply of items based on estimates of what will be needed; the "pull" component is filling requirements that are sent in by operational units as they maneuver, engage, and use up their supplies. Like military

operations themselves, military logistics require initial planning and flexible decisions once operations begin. Transportation is an integral part of logistics, as the supplies must be moved from storage areas, depots, and stock points to meet the operational units.

Adequate medical care is an essential part of logistics in democratic armed forces. One of the characteristics of a democracy is the emphasis on the importance of individuals. Mature democracies take care of their soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines by providing medical care for service members, including during peacetime. When operations begin, the wounded receive immediate care, and if necessary, they are evacuated and treated in hospitals. Individuals are provided with continued care if they have to leave the service because of injuries and when they retire at the end of a career in the armed forces.

Communications

Virtually all the competencies describe above depend on extensive communications within the armed forces. Communications systems are used to send plans and orders, to submit reports, to gather and disseminate intelligence, to order and distribute logistics support, and to schedule transportation and medical support, among other purposes. Military communications systems all require security, depending on the nature of the information.

Increasingly, communications systems consist of computer networks with linked databases, enabling the sharing and exchange of large amounts of data, written messages, voice, and video. Often, military networks are embedded within the global communications network, using the Internet for communication, and commercial hardware and software for both data storage and communication. The increased use of military communications networks linked to the Internet has led to more informed and effective military capabilities, but has also opened up major vulnerabilities for adversaries to infiltrate networks for both espionage purposes and to interfere with communications. Therefore, the security of military networks has become another important function.

Planning, Prioritization, and Execution of Defense Institution Building

Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 5205.82 lists ten objectives for DIB programs, along with another seven types of activities, one of which includes nine major “principle functions of effective defense institutions.” With such numerous and complex objectives and activities, selecting the right DIB programs for a particular country depends on careful assessment and prioritization. The DIB programs do not exactly correlate with the objectives, activities, and principle functions listed in DODD 5205.82; some contribute to multiple objectives, and other DOD programs and activities that are relevant are not classified as DIB programs. A planning process is needed that can prioritize and synchronize the various programs that the United States can bring to bear to improve the democratic development and functional competence of partner armed forces.

Any Department of Defense planning process follows the same basic approach: specifying strategic objectives, assessing the situation, defining the mission, executing the plan, and monitoring and adjusting execution of the plan. This same process can be applied

to bring order and coherence to the large number of DIB programs in a geographic region and in a specific recipient country.

The characteristics and competencies described earlier in this chapter provide the ultimate long-term objectives for DIB programs for the many countries the United States Department of Defense deals with. However, an assessment process is necessary to set realistic short- and medium-term objectives for a recipient country.

Assessment

Every country is unique. Each has its own history, culture, and is at a different stage of military and political development. The influence of the United States, and of the Department of Defense, is often an important factor in that development, but in most countries internal factors are most important. Understanding these internal factors is crucial if DIB programs are to be applied effectively.

The first, and probably most important, step to take in planning a DIB program is to analyze the potential recipient country's internal situation. Overall, is it moving toward a stronger democracy and greater military capacity, or is it becoming more authoritarian or even deteriorating militarily? What is the power and what is the relationship of the armed forces to other branches of government and organizations—the ministry of defense, the head of government, the legislature, the police, the coast guard, etc.? What is its relationship to other powerful individuals, political parties, or ethnic, regional, religious, or tribal groups and their leaders? Which leaders in the government, the ministry of defense and the armed forces are the most influential, and are they reformers or are they resisting reform? What do the armed forces consider their primary missions? What is the overall level of corruption in the country, and which officials and officers are the most and the least corrupt? The current intelligence estimates of most countries that the United States works with do not ask these kinds of questions, but the information can be gathered from intelligence staffs, attachés, and military assistance officers, and from other knowledgeable observers, like journalists, academics, think tank officials, and on-the-ground observers from NGOs, among other organizations. An overall understanding of the state of development of a country provides the foundation for the selection of DIB programs.

A Model for Combatant Command Planning

Combatant Commanders are required to submit Theater Security Cooperation Plans (TSCPs) for approval by the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.² The TSCP planning process provides an orderly way to assess the armed forces of the countries with which the United States has military relations—allies, partners, neutrals, and adversaries—and to prioritize the full range of military-to-military programs the United States conducts with a particular country, including specific DIB programs.

The assessments of individual countries need to strike a balance between completeness and usefulness. For overall planning purposes, a “stop-light” matrix provides about the right level of detail without becoming incomprehensible. For each country in the area

of responsibility (AOR), the Combatant Commander can draw up a matrix of the seven democratic characteristics and the six functional competences described above and assign one of three assessments: red for inadequate, green for adequate, and yellow for partially adequate. In addition, an arrow can be added to each assessment, with its direction indicating a favorable, unfavorable, or steady trend in that assessment in recent years. The author has observed the value of this matrix in various regional combatant commands (CCMDs), but cannot confirm whether this type of a matrix is required under current procedures. The assessment should be a qualitative judgment, based on the observations of the country officers on the CCMD staff, with input from the CCMD intelligence (J-2) staff, the attaché and military assistance staff at the embassy in that country, and—where it would add value—the service component staffs.

This overall assessment will provide a solid foundation for the selection process for DIB programs. However, before making that selection, an additional planning step is needed: defining realistic near- and medium-term objectives for each country in the AOR based on the state of democratic development and functional defense and military competence that country can be reasonably expected to achieve in the near future (about five years). This judgment is important for several reasons: it recognizes that in most cases development is primarily caused by the efforts of the country itself, rather than by DIB programs; it identifies countries that are unlikely to make much progress, even with heavy application of DIB programs; it identifies countries that are motivated and likely to make progress on their own without extensive outside assistance; and finally, it identifies countries that are likely to improve their functional competence without making progress on democratic development, or vice versa.

This step of assessing the potential future development of different countries will narrow the scope of candidates for most DIB programs to ensure that the limited resources of the United States are used in countries in which the investment will yield the most effective and sustainable results. Such an assessment will help eliminate those countries—Russia, for example—that have little chance of progress. This assessment will distinguish those countries that have their own plans for democratic and functional competence development and need little assistance from the United States (such as Japan), from countries with little official intention of democratic development, but strong incentives for development of military competencies. The countries for which DIB programs are likely to be the most effective, like Myanmar for example, are those that are motivated to make progress in both democratic development and functional competence, and have clear needs in both areas (as identified by red and yellow assessments in individual areas in the matrix described above). Because DIB programs are limited, they should be used sparingly focusing on countries with potential but little chance of making significant progress on their own, or those already making progress which could be enhanced by U.S. partnership.

Matching DIB Programs to Assessed Partner Needs

Once a country has been given an overall, detailed assessment, then the final planning

step can be taken: matching DIB programs to the assessed needs of the country in both democratic reform and military capability improvement. These decisions should involve the regional and country knowledge of the Combatant Commanders' staffs as well as the functional experience of the DIB program managers and the relevant offices of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Some DIB programs have been running for several years, so there is experience to draw from as to what works and what does not.

Careful judgments are required for countries that both want and could benefit from military improvements, but are resistant to democratic development. In the long run, it is not in the U.S. interest to support only the military capability of an autocratic government, however friendly to immediate U.S. interests. In some cases, however, U.S. strategic imperatives will be decisive in a decision to offer military assistance to an authoritarian country. Examples include counter-terrorism training and assistance, or the sale of arms to strengthen a country's defenses against a powerful neighbor threatening both that country's and U.S. interests. However, in these cases, DIB programs and similar programs that can encourage democratic development, such as International Military Education and Training, should be included to encourage greater democratic characteristics in that country.

Ongoing Monitoring and Adjustment

The final step in the cycle of DIB programs consists of monitoring and plan adjustment. The Theater Security Cooperation Plans are submitted annually, and as part of each year's submission (an evaluation of the trends in the overall assessment), any changes to the seven democratic characteristics and the six functional competencies should be highlighted. In addition, there should be a careful assessment of the effectiveness of specific DIB programs that have been going on in the recipient countries. Although the results of these programs will often take several years to be clear, the process of continual evaluation is important to ensure that the resources are being used for their maximum value.

Conclusion

Two important lessons have been learned over time in DIB programs and their predecessors. The first is that democratic development and military capability improvement are long-term processes. A one-year program assisting, for example, financial planning and comptrollership capacities in a country will not usually produce a much higher level of self-sustaining skills. Often, the first year is spent in identifying the true obstacles to progress and necessary internal reforms that were not known in detail before the program started. Programs should be planned on a multi-year basis, with flexibility to adapt once there is a full understanding of the most effective approach.

The second lesson learned is the importance of skilled instructors and facilitators working for extended periods—generally several years—with officers and officials from the recipient country. Progress in the important and sensitive areas that DIB programs target

proceeds “at the speed of trust.” There is very little chance that successive waves of new U.S. faces coming to a country for short periods will earn the trust to make real progress. It takes multiple interactions over several years for instructors and facilitators to be trusted sources of advice, and for them to figure out how to work productively with the different officers and officials in the recipient country.

With these lessons in mind, the seven characteristics and six competencies of a democratic and competent armed forces provide a basis for assessing the countries considered for DIB programs by the Department of Defense. The Theater Security Cooperation Plans of the combatant commanders provide an existing cycle in the Department of Defense that can be readily applied to plan and execute the DIB programs. Due to the large number of countries and programs involved, procedures need to be kept straightforward to avoid staff overload; however, this process can ensure that the Department of Defense achieves the maximum benefit from the substantial human and financial investments made in these programs.

Notes

1 The seven characteristics in this chapter are drawn from: Dennis Blair, *Military Engagement: Influencing Armed Forces Worldwide to Support Democratic Transitions*, Volume I (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 15.

2 DOD Directive 5132.03 directs the combatant commanders to “Develop campaign plans, as appropriate, to conduct security cooperation programs and activities.” Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, *DOD Directive 5132.03: DOD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, December 19, 2016).