
PERSPECTIVES

Security Cooperation Pays Off: A Lesson from the Afghan War

By

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One of the essential lessons of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan is the importance of regional access for U.S. military forces. To the surprise of many around the world, the U.S. was able to gain a ring of access for its forces in countries either not regarded as openly friendly or where relations with the U.S. had been strained.

What is not as well known is that the Department of Defense (DoD) already had a foot in the door to most of these countries in Central and South Asia. The U.S. defense officials had developed special relationships and U.S. forces were eminently familiar with both the personnel and facilities in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan due to a series of bilateral and multilateral exercises and consultative talks held every year in the region since 1996. These security engagement activities laid the groundwork for prompt access to key local political and military leaders for temporary bases in the region necessary to support Enduring Freedom. In fact, U.S. security cooperation programs in Central Asia have not only facilitated the alignment of these countries with the U.S. war against terrorism, but have also contributed to the probable establishment of a longer-term U.S. military presence whether permanent or rotational on their territories.

A significant lesson from Afghanistan is that the U.S. cannot necessarily identify where it will be engaged militarily in the future. A year ago, few officials and analysts would have predicted that the U.S. would intervene on a large scale in a country that previously ranked far down the list of U.S. national interests. Although U.S. security engagement programs were not motivated by preparations for Enduring Freedom, they nevertheless proved to be invaluable.

The success of the Central Asian ring of access argues that the Department of Defense should continue to employ and expand its subtle and inexpensive peacetime security cooperation programs on a global scale. Since we cannot accurately guess which failed or failing state will be the next Afghanistan, a global approach is needed that hedges America's bets by preparing for access potentially anywhere. Costing relatively little, security cooperation activities can have a huge impact. In addition to facilitating U.S. operational access to personnel, facilities, and intelligence in these countries, security cooperation activities contribute to building coalitions, augmenting U.S. warfighting effectiveness, promoting military capabilities in partner countries, encouraging adoption of Western international norms, and generating sustained interaction between U.S. and partner country forces.

U.S. Security Engagement's Contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom

U.S. security cooperation programs such as the *Warsaw Initiative* and the defense and military contacts of the cooperative threat reduction program have played a vital role in securing U.S. operational access for operation Enduring Freedom.

The cooperative threat reduction which funds many of DoD's peacetime military activities with the countries of the former Soviet Union has provided DoD with direct access to various levels of military and political decision-makers in Central Asia. It has also facilitated the building of strong professional and personal relationships between U.S. officials and their counterparts in these countries, in some cases for little more than the cost of travel.

Similarly, the Warsaw Initiative program for Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has assisted in the training and development of military capabilities in Central Asian states. Warsaw Initiative activities include English language training funded through the international military education and training (IMET) program, as well as non-lethal training and equipment transfers through foreign military financing (FMF).

Because the militaries of Central Asia are predominantly composed of ground troops, the focus of cooperative threat reduction and the Warsaw Initiative in this region have been on land forces, with the U.S. Army and special forces taking the lead. In recent years, an active exercise schedule has been completed with the bilateral Balance exercise series, which rotates between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan two to four times per year. A multilateral exercise series, Centrasbat/Regional Cooperation, involves these same three countries. Particularly in Uzbekistan, these exercises have proven invaluable for helping the Tashkent government to counter security threats such as the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as establishing and fostering close working relationships between the U.S. and Uzbek militaries. In addition, Kyrgyzstan, which shares a strategically important border with China, has given the U.S. a green light to build a new air force base on its territory at Manas.

Although Tajikistan did not participate in formal security cooperation prior to the conflict, consultative talks between the Department of Defense and the Tajik Ministry of Defense in early 2001 explored possible ways to develop bilateral security cooperation and arguably eased subsequent U.S. efforts to use Tajikistan for overflights and basing.

The story of Pakistan is far more complicated. Most U.S. military assistance activities were terminated in 1998 under the *Foreign Assistance Act* after the South Asian nuclear tests. Yet, long standing military-to-military ties developed prior to this time through activities such as joint combined exchange training (JCET) exercises helped the U.S. to renew operational relationships quickly. Moreover, pre 1998 exercises familiarized U.S. forces with Pakistan's terrain and infrastructure in ways that enabled prompt and effective operations when Enduring Freedom commenced.

Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan, and Tajikistan, coupled with Pakistan, essentially solidified the critical ring of access to support Enduring Freedom. Regardless of the approach and the nature of the activities, a steady campaign of security cooperation activities with these countries has resulted in a relatively high level of access and openness between the U.S. and Central asian political and military leaders.

Operationalizing Future Rings of Access

Uncertainty as to where and when U.S. forces will be called upon to intervene in regional conflicts or to support the war on terrorism demands an active and diversified approach on the

part of U.S. Department of Defense decision-makers. As a matter of top priority, the U.S. most pursue security cooperation programs most intensively with those countries that rank highest among U.S. interests. For example Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, because of their possession of significant petroleum reserves and their likely roles as staging areas for any operation against Iraq, necessarily should benefit from a more expansive U.S. security relationship than Ecuador. Yet, because of the unpredictability of global events, countries such as Ecuador should be engaged as well even if at only modest levels. While large-scale joint exercises might be appropriate for allies such as Kuwait, low-cost defense and military contacts should be applied as widely as possible, laying the groundwork for future rings of access wherever they may be needed.

Tailored security cooperation programs can serve as an effective means of building critical relationships with state political and military leaders and subsequently providing access. To assist in building effective security cooperation programs, the Department of Defense has a number of different tools of engagement available in its toolbox. These tools can be used to implement a security engagement strategy based on a regional or country-specific approach. Since choices must be made and priorities must be established, the U.S. should prioritize its security engagement strategy around U.S. national security interests and likely hot spots, in that order. Beyond that, the U.S. should be building relationships as widely as resources will allow.

Laying the groundwork for future rings of access around the globe will provide an important foundation for the Department of Defense's capacity to deter, defend against, and decisively defeat potential threats to U.S. national security.

Building "Rings of Access" Around Potential Conflict-Prone Regional Hot Spots

- DoD should focus on securing initial access to countries with potential to serve as forward bases from which to support and sustain operations.
- Thus, as a matter of priority, DoD should employ its security cooperation programs to promote access and influence in "Front Line" states, i.e., key states within close proximity to regional hot spots, that can provide a "ring of access" during a crisis.



DoD Tools of Engagement

Security Assistance

- International Military Education and Training (IMET/E-IMET)
- Foreign Military Financing (FMF)
- Foreign Military Sales (FMS)
- Excess Defense Articles (EDA)

Defense and Military Contacts

- Counterpart Visits
- General Officer/Flag Officer (GO/FO) Visits
- Ship Port Visits
- Bilateral and Multilateral Staff Talks

Combined Training Exercises

- Joint Combined Exchange Training (JECT) Exercises
- Bilateral and Multilateral Exercises
- MEDFLAG medical Exercises

Combined Education

- DoD Regional Security Centers
- George C. Marshall Center
- Africa Center for Strategic Studies
- Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies
- Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies

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