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THESIS

**FRIENDS IN GREAT POWER COMPETITION:
REFINING PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS TO
COMPETE WITH CHINA**

by

Jason R. Carminati

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Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Kalev I. Sepp
Patricia J. Blocksome

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REFINING PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS TO COMPETE WITH CHINA**

Jason R. Carminati
Lieutenant, United States Navy
BS, U.S. Naval Academy, 2012

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June 2020**

Approved by: Kalev I. Sepp
Advisor

Patricia J. Blocksome
Second Reader

Kalev I. Sepp
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Partnerships with foreign security forces is one significant military activity that contributes to attaining strategic objectives in great power competition. Military planners and practitioners may refine their understanding of how to create and sustain effective partnerships through this study's three-component partnership framework consisting of willingness, capability, and effects. The partnership framework draws from principal-agent theory to illuminate how to influence a potential partner's interests, business partnership literature to improve a partner's capability, and deterrence theory to understand effects on the rival. This study develops and then illustrates the framework through three historical cases that focus on China as a near-peer rival in East Asia; however, the possible applications are broad. The partnership framework provides insights on what traits in a partner are important, what actions the United States should take to develop a partnership, and unique aspects of China's responses to U.S. partnerships. This topic is essential because it is a critical component of the military effort in great power competition and one that could use improvement. U.S. partnerships can also significantly impact local political environments; military planners and practitioners owe it to those partner nations and to the United States to make calculated and deliberate decisions on partnerships.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ARVN	Army of Vietnam
AVG	American Volunteer Group or “Flying Tigers”
CAT	Civil Air Transport or “Air America”
CBI	China-Burma-India Theater
CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CG	Civil Guard
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Groups
CKS	Chaing Kai-Shek
CNA	Center for Naval Analysis
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam or North Vietnam
FDR	Franklin D. Roosevelt
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
GPC	Great Power Competition
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HN	Host Nation
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
JIIM	Joint Interagency Intergovernmental Multinational environment
JP	Joint Publication
KMT	Kuomintang Chinese Nationalist Party
LPA	Loyal Patriot Army (Tai Li’s Nationalist Force)
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAC-V	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MLE	Chinese Maritime Law Enforcement forces

MOOTW	Military operations other than war
MSUG	Michigan State University Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	Nation Defense Strategy
NLF	National Liberation Front of South Vietnam
NMS	Nation Military Strategy
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAFMM	People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia
PARU	Thailand Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit
PEO	Programs and Evaluation Office
PRC	People's Republic of China
RLG	Royal Laos Government
ROC	Republic of China
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
ROMO	Range of military operations
SACO	Sino-American Cooperative Organization
SC	Security Cooperation
SCS	South China Sea
SDC	Self-Defense Corps
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
SF	Special Forces
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SGU	Special Guerrilla Units
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
URAM	Unitary Rational Actor Model
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USOM	United States Operations Mission
UW	Unconventional Warfare

VBI	Vietnam Bureau of Investigation
VC	Vietnamese Communists or Viet Cong
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study is a search for effectiveness and efficiency within security cooperation and partnerships against near-peer adversaries. The purpose of this study is threefold. First, this study aims to develop a mental framework for how the U.S. military should consider potential partners. The mental framework will serve to guide thought and action for staffs who plan and carry out security cooperation, as well as provide insight into the purpose of partnership missions to tactical elements. This framework is intended to guide further discussion at lower levels of command, not to dictate specific actions. Second, this study aims to develop a base of knowledge on historical interactions with a key and emerging near-peer threat, China. The focus on China is increasing for the United States, but U.S. competition with China through partners is not new. Many Americans find it challenging to understand China culturally, consequently additional background into recent history and Chinese decision making may prove useful. Finally, this study aims to provide recommendations regarding opportunities to identify and execute effective partnerships in the future and will consider potential partnerships to support a specific area of tension with China, the South China Sea.

This study will neither *prove* a theory of security cooperation partnerships with the proposed framework, nor will it provide a comprehensive history of Chinese decision making concerning the United States. It offers a qualitative model that is intended as a guide for U.S. military planners and military practitioners on the ground, each who has a vital role in shaping and recommending future actions in partnerships. The model combines existing knowledge and theories into what this study calls *the partnership framework*. The partnership framework is designed to provide the readers with an *aid* to understanding why and how the United States should conduct partnerships and security cooperation with allies with the end goal of competing against other “great powers.” If this study aids understanding in any way, provides the reader with an appreciation of the complexity of the operating environments, or furthers future discussions about security cooperation partnerships in great power competition, it will have more than served its purpose.

A. TOPIC, IMPORTANCE, AND SCOPE

This study is about partnerships with foreign security forces in the context of great power competition (GPC). The primary research question is: How should military planners identify and execute resource-efficient partnerships with foreign security forces in support of GPC? Secondary or supporting research questions include the following. How can military planners analyze who the most relevant and impactful partners are? How can the United States develop a chosen partner efficiently? How should the United States consider the actions' impacts on the great power rival? Does China, as a specific near-peer threat, have specific or unique reactions to U.S. partnerships? The ability to assess the utility of partnerships in order to optimize resources in the current competitive environment will remain critical well into the future.

All of the U.S. strategy documents state the importance of this study's topic—partnerships in GPC. Without a doubt, this topic is relevant to U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) elements, which often work by, with, and through partners. This topic is also relevant, however, to conventional military planners and any other agencies or departments engaging with foreign security forces. The United States' strategy documents and strategic decision-makers have confirmed the importance of this topic.¹ The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the 2018 National Military Strategy (NMS) have all highlighted the reemergence of GPC and the importance that competing through partnerships will have. The 2018 NMS stated that it “acknowledges the unique contributions of allies and partners, a strategic source of strength for the Joint Force. Building a strong, agile, and resilient force requires better interoperability and enhancing the combat lethality and survivability of our allies and partners.”² The 2018 NDS stated, “Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no

¹ Ronald O'Rourke, *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 4, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43838>.

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 3–4.

competitor or rival can match.”³ The 2018 NDS also proposed that Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships, specifically, are a priority. The NDS stated, “A free and open Indo-Pacific region provides prosperity and security for all. We will strengthen our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains.”⁴ All of these strategic documents agree that partnerships are a critical component of GPC.

In addition to the rhetoric from the strategic documents, the NDS strategic framework also relies on improving partnership efforts. Two components from the 2018 NDS’s three-component strategic framework directly reinforce the importance of this study. The first relevant component is “Strengthen Alliances and Attract New Partners,” and the second is “Reform the Department for Greater Performance and Affordability.”⁵ While the first component represents obvious direction to carry out partnerships and security cooperation more effectively, the second component challenges U.S. military planners to do so more efficiently. The United States must find ways to choose and implement partnerships in order to compete against rivals while also optimizing resources and cutting ties with partners that may not be mutually beneficial. Developing the right capabilities with willing partners could be a solution to competing below conventional conflict.

Many U.S. strategy documents, and decision-makers, emphasize the importance of partnership, but what does this study mean by partnership? This study defines a partnership broadly as a relationship with mutually agreed upon cooperation and joint interest between organizations. This study looks specifically at partnerships between lethal security forces (military, police, national guard, etc.) of different nations. This definition incorporates partnerships of a wide range, but primarily, it looks at relationships that the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) would call security cooperation. DOD defines security

³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 8, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 9.

⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 8–11.

cooperation as “all Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”⁶ Joint Publication (JP) 1 states, “Security cooperation encompasses all DOD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”⁷ When this study uses the word partnership, it means security cooperation that is executed by both DOD and non-DOD lethal entities (military, intelligence agencies, law enforcement entities), while omitting non-lethal entities that conduct security cooperation (cyber, economic, humanitarian entities).

The term great power competition (GPC) is just as important to describe for this study as the term partnership because U.S. strategic documents only offer a broad definition.⁸ A simple definition of a “great power” is a nation-state that can exert influence in international affairs on a global scale. One of the primary “great powers” that the United States is concerned with is China, defined by the 2017 NSS as a revisionist state.⁹ GPC is essentially, “long-term strategic competition” that incorporates all elements of national power but is below the threshold of direct conventional military conflict.¹⁰

GPC can be described by many terms: phase zero competition, hybrid-warfare, gray zone conflict, ambiguous warfare tactics, salami-slicing, political warfare, military

⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. JP 1-02, DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), 257, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf.

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. JP 1 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2013), I–11, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf.

⁸ Alexander Boroff, “What Is Great-Power Competition, Anyway?,” *Modern War Institute*, April 17, 2020, sec. Commentary & Analysis, <https://mwi.usma.edu/great-power-competition-anyway/>.

⁹ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 2.

¹⁰ Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, 2.

operations other than war (MOOTW), and competition short of armed conflict.¹¹ All of these terms are difficult to define and differentiate because they all essentially describe similar challenges, long-term strategic competition between great powers before direct conventional military conflict.¹² One U.S. Army War College study said it best when it stated, “The gray zone is admittedly a broad carrier concept for a collection of sometimes dissimilar defense-relevant challenges. In this regard, statically defining the gray zone may be far less useful to the defense strategy and policy community than simply describing it as it is now and as it likely will be for some time.”¹³ In general, this GPC environment, the so-called gray zone or hybrid warfare, can be described by three broad characteristics: the blending of war and peace, the threat to the conventional U.S. military way of war due to whole-of-government strategies, and the high risk for both action and inaction.¹⁴ The GPC environment involves a wide range of military and non-military strategies in order to obtain policy goals that are gradual and moderately revisionist.¹⁵

Practitioners should not be overwhelmed by the vast number of terms used to describe GPC because, while new terms have emerged, the meanings have not. The definitions of the terms have remained fairly consistent by emphasizing whole-of-government means to achieve political goals without conventional military conflict. Phase Zero is a doctrinal military term that describes the initial phase of combat operations, called “shaping.”¹⁶ The U.S. military initially started using this term in 2006, when it began to renew focus on operations to prevent conflict in Africa, but this phase also remains focused

¹¹ O’Rourke, *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, 10.

¹² For a visual model of the spectrum of GPC terms direct conventional conflict, see: Frank G. Hoffman, “The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War,” *The Heritage Foundation*, 2016, 29.

¹³ Nathan Freier et al., “Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone” (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2016), 4.

¹⁴ Freier et al., “Outplayed,” 4.

¹⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, Advancing Strategic Thought Series (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2015), 4.

¹⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. JP 3, Joint Operations (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), V–9, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910.

on preparing for potential conventional operations.¹⁷ MOOTW was also a U.S. military doctrinal term that scholars and practitioners occasionally use, though it is not in current joint publications because it was replaced by the term “the range of military operations (ROMO).”¹⁸ Gray zone operations and hybrid warfare are relatively new terms that scholars and military practitioners use to describe environments before conventional conflict.¹⁹ The term gray zone was first formally adopted with a U.S. SOCOM white paper in 2015, which defined the term as “competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality.”²⁰ Hybrid warfare is used almost interchangeably with gray zone, but scholars, especially Frank Hoffman, often specifically use it to describe Russian tactics.²¹ The term ambiguous warfare has been around since the 1980s and, while lacking a formal definition, is described as “situations in which a state or non-state belligerent actor deploys troops and proxies in a deceptive and confusing manner—with the intent of achieving political and military effects while obscuring the belligerent’s direct participation.”²² The term political warfare, defined as “the use of political means to compel an opponent to do one’s will,” can consist of propaganda, paramilitaries, and subversion, and has been around for even longer than ambiguous warfare but also describes GPC before conventional military conflict.²³

¹⁷ David Broyles and Brody Blackenship, *The Role of Special Operations Forces in Global Competition* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, April 1, 2016), 7, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1033598>.

¹⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. JP 3, Joint Operations, V–4.

¹⁹ Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*; Antulio J Echevarria II, *Operating in the Gray Zone: Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Military Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2016), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1318>; Van Jackson, “Tactics of Strategic Competition: Gray Zones, Redlines, and Conflicts Before War,” *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 3 (2017): 39–61.

²⁰ Philip Kapusta, “The Gray Zone,” *Special Warfare; Fort Bragg* 28, no. 4 (December 2015): 7.

²¹ Frank G. Hoffman, “Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges,” *Prism : A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 7, no. 4 (2018): 30–47; Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007); Timothy Thomas, “The Evolution of Russian Military Thought: Integrating Hybrid, New-Generation, and New-Type Thinking,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 2016): 554–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2016.1232541>.

²² Broyles and Blackenship, *The Role of Special Operations Forces in Global Competition*, 9.

²³ Paul A. Smith Jr, *On Political War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1989), 3.

The age of many of the terms to describe GPC, combined with the similarities and consistencies of historical examples of GPC, should show the reader that confusion over specific terms, and their evolution, may inhibit real understanding of an old problem. In 1989 in his book *On Political War*, Paul Smith, a scholar at the National Defense University, used the examples of Aristotle and Alexander the Great to aid understanding of unconventional Soviet challenges.²⁴ In addition to his parallels to the distant past, Smith also made clear that “political warfare” was likely not going away when he said, “Whether any government in Moscow will ever completely abandon political warfare is, in my view, doubtful indeed. Nor, to be fair, will any other modern nation.”²⁵ John Arquilla agrees that the consistencies of irregular challenges in GPC, or political warfare, throughout history should provide a basis for which to understand current tension and that the new term of “gray zone” could cloud that understanding.²⁶ Hal Brands has also said, “The basic approach of using tactics that fall just below traditional definitions of war is as old as war itself” and that “exaggerating the newness of the [gray zone challenges] phenomenon risks muddling rather than sharpening our comprehension.”²⁷ Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, two Naval War College professors, also reject the use of terms like gray zone and hybrid warfare because they are poorly defined and unhelpful.²⁸ So, while the gray zone may be a relatively new term, the phenomenon is not, and practitioners should not allow the sea of terms to obscure the problem.

While this study does not require a deep dive into any of these specific terms that describe GPC, a brief discussion is essential in order to both outline the scope of the study and help understand the environment the study is analyzing. GPC involves a wide array of tactics and strategies from all components of governments, including covert action,

²⁴ Smith Jr, *On Political War*, xv.

²⁵ Smith Jr, xiv.

²⁶ John Arquilla, “Perils of the Gray Zone,” *Prism* 7, no. 3 (2018): 121.

²⁷ Hal Brands, “Paradoxes of the Gray Zone,” E-Paper (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 1, 2016), 4–5, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2737593>.

²⁸ Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (January 24, 2020): 3, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/4>.

propaganda, cyber attacks, and economic coercion to name a few. Nevertheless, developing partners is a critical component of U.S. strategy in this environment. A Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) report called *The Role of Special Operations in Global Competition* describes building partnerships as a “traditional” military approach to the GPC environment that requires support from all of the elements of national power, and perhaps more aggressive military action.²⁹ This study agrees that GPC requires a whole-of-government approach, as well as other escalatory and de-escalatory military options below conventional conflict, but it proposes that the U.S. military can improve when engaging in the “traditional” approach of using partnerships.³⁰ Security cooperation partnerships in GPC cannot be a successful approach by themselves, but this approach is essential nonetheless. Some have smartly pointed out that alliances and aid are what helped the United States overcome rivals in past GPC environments.³¹ If the United States can improve efficiency in selecting and executing security cooperation with foreign partners, more resources can be used for all the other essential aspects of the U.S. military and the U.S. whole-of-government approach to GPC.

In sum, this study explores how to improve partnerships with foreign security forces in the context of GPC. The importance of this topic is clearly stated within the U.S. strategy documents. Failure to advance partnerships effectively and efficiently could have long-term consequences for the United States in the global competition against China. The scope of this study focuses on security cooperation partnerships between lethal security forces while acknowledging that these partnerships must be carried out alongside other critical government and military strategies. Without a doubt, security cooperation partnerships will fail if conducted by themselves. Improving security cooperation partnerships, though, may enable the United States to produce a sustainable answer to challenges without resorting to

²⁹ Broyles and Blackenship, *The Role of Special Operations Forces in Global Competition*, iv.

³⁰ For an overview of the whole of government approach see John G. Griffiths, “Whole of Government Approach Through Interagency Partner Development: National Security Professional Development” (master’s thesis, Army Command and General Staff College, June 13, 2014), 1, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA611024>.

³¹ Benn Steil, “How to Win a Great-Power Competition: Alliances, Aid, and Diplomacy in the Last Struggle for Global Influence,” *Foreign Affairs*, 2018.

conventional war. In today's world, where nuclear weapons are prevalent among multiple adversaries, nothing seems to be more important than finding a way to stop enemy aggression without traditional war.

B. METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study is to guide decision making and further discussion on security cooperation partnerships in GPC. It does this by developing a qualitative, three-component model or mental framework—called *the partnership framework*. This model is referred to as a “framework” rather than a “theory” because, as one scholar also noted when using the term “framework,” it “is not a system of statements of cause and effect.”³² Instead, the framework is a guide to describe a complex problem set. The partnership framework is analytical but not precise, meaning that it attempts to identify the necessary variables but does not attempt to place specific values on them. After development from existing literature, the partnership framework is then illustrated through three historical cases of partnerships in GPC. The framework is not *tested* or *proven*, for it does not attempt to analyze the data needed, nor is the framework as described truly provable. The case illustrations are intended to be examples of how to apply logic and thought from the partnership framework to future partnerships. Finally, this study identifies insight for U.S. decision-makers in a contemporary vignette of China in the South China Sea.

The partnership framework has three components—*willingness*, *capability*, and *effects on the enemy*—which draw from several bodies of knowledge. The *willingness* component draws on principal-agent theory by looking for incentives needed to make partnerships successful. The *capabilities* component draws from business literature on partnerships and existing research on military building partner capacity in order to identify structures of interorganizational ties needed to fill a partner's capability gaps. It also informs best practices on reducing friction between new capabilities and partnerships. Finally, deterrence theory informs the *effects on the enemy*. This three-component framework is developed and further justified in Chapter II.

³² Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 55.

The qualitative model of partnerships—the *partnership framework*—is then illustrated in three relevant historical cases. The three cases are the Vietnam War (1954—1964), Laos War (1959—1973), and unconventional partnerships under the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO) (1942—1945). These specific cases are relevant for the study because the United States was a principal partner in each, all involve a form of competition between great powers, all are located in a region or country that is significant concerning current challenges in the South China Sea, and all built different capabilities. The variety of the three cases represents differences in agents chosen for partnership, the nature of the conflict, and the means utilized to implement the partnership. By using cases that are regionally relevant as well as which involve the United States and China as opposing primary principals, this thesis explores lessons that potentially apply to today’s problem sets.

The early portion of the Vietnam War, specifically from the years 1954—1964, fits the criteria for this study. This timeframe was before the United States’ deployment of conventional combat units to the region. U.S. military partnerships and security cooperation with South Vietnam were extensive in the region following the French defeat.³³ Prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the United States was putting most of its effort into partnering and advising the South Vietnam military forces instead of relying primarily on U.S. combat units.³⁴ While there is ample material for looking at the United States’ partnership, China’s support to North Vietnam was also significant. Vietnam’s interests in the South China Sea today make the conflict even more relevant to the study.

The war in Laos between 1959 and 1973 also provides a relevant conflict to study and analyze partnerships because it can be compared and contrasted with the U.S. effort in Vietnam. While facing a similar threat, the United States restricted most overt military measures, thereby changing the nature of the war. Laos was a declared neutral state, so the United States was officially unable to implement military advisors. The United States did

³³ Thomas E. Clinton, “Lessons Learned from Advising and Training the Republic of South Vietnam’s Armed Forces” (master’s thesis, Fort Leavenworth, KS, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2007), 11, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA471218>.

³⁴ James Lawton Collins, *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 8.

have, however, several hundred advisors under a Department of State (DOS) group and was also paying a large portion of the Royal Laos military budget.³⁵ This conflict also involved China directly and indirectly through North Vietnamese forces.³⁶ This case's similarities to Vietnam with respect to the threat faced should provide a useful contrast when looking at how the nature of the partnerships themselves differed.

The two cases above provide useful cases for studying partnering with an established government or armed forces, referred to as Foreign Internal Defense (FID) or Security Force Assistance (SFA).³⁷ It is also useful to study partnering in denied areas, referred to as Unconventional Warfare (UW).³⁸ FID, SFA, and UW all fall in the broad category of security cooperation. The U.S. Navy participated in UW in China during World War II (WWII) through the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO) from 1942 to 1945. Although SACO primarily was intended to compete against the occupying Japanese Empire, this case also involves competition against Chinese communist forces, since the United State was focused on supporting Chinese nationalists. This case is unique because it involves UW with mostly conventional U.S. Sailors and Marines. The success of this partnership is worth investigating because the nature of the conflict and the means to carry out the partnership are different from the previous two FID cases. Vietnam and Laos both examine partnerships with established governments prior to a war, but this case provides an analysis of a partnership that is in a declared war, but not in the priority theater where significant American armed forces are operating unilaterally. The fact that it is a U.S. experience with security cooperation within mainland China also makes it relevant to today.

With many cases of successful and unsuccessful partnerships throughout history and specifically within the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Area of Responsibility

³⁵ Timothy N. Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: U.S. Military Aid to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 18.

³⁶ Roland A. Paul, "Laos: Anatomy of an American Involvement," *Foreign Affairs* 49 (1971): 535.

³⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Services of The United States*. JP 3-22 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), I-2.

³⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Services of The United States*. JP 3-05 Special Operations (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), xii.

(AOR), the three cases mentioned above provide a balance to looking at previous U.S. experience through varying the nature of the conflicts and the way that the partnerships were implemented. By looking at two U.S. FID cases, Vietnam and Laos, along with one UW case, SACO, this study will search for useful insights to apply in the current era of GPC and will illustrate the utility of the partnership framework.

C. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This chapter introduced the topic of study by presenting the primary research question, outlining the topic's importance, defining the scope of the study by defining terms in the research questions, and justifying the methodology. The study's topic focuses on security cooperation partnerships in GPC, which has been relevant in the past and will likely continue to be relevant in the future. Overall, this study focuses on the small military component of the whole-of-government challenge of GPC, which this study refers to as security cooperation partnerships.

Chapter II develops the partnership framework with three primary components: willingness, capability, and effects. The first component—willingness—draws from principal-agent theory and frames the relationship in partnerships as motivated by initial interests and incentives. The second component—capability—draws from business integration literature and existing literature on building partner capacity. This component helps identify potential partners' initial capabilities and weaknesses, as well as the structure of ties that the United States can use to overcome capability gaps. The final component—effects on the enemy—draws from deterrence theory in order to consider the impact of partnerships on rivals' decision making. The result is the partnership framework, or a model, to aid in the understanding of the role of partnerships in GPC.

Chapters III–V explore three relevant case studies, which illustrate and provide examples of how decision-makers can use the partnership framework. Each case represents a struggle between great powers using partnerships. Chapter III considers the Vietnam War from 1954–1964. This case outlines the U.S. actions, strengths and weaknesses of South Vietnam, and China's decision making before the large-scale intervention by U.S. conventional combat forces. Chapter IV considers the conflict in Laos from 1959–1973.

This case is a unique contrast to the Vietnam War because of the different U.S. actions in the face of a similar communist threat. Chapter V considers the partnerships under the Sino-American Cooperation Agreement (SACO) from 1942–1945. This case is relevant because the United States carried out extensive efforts in the China theater of WWII through partners and without direct U.S. troops.

Chapter VI identifies implications from the study. The first section of this chapter offers eleven total *observations* from the cases on identifying partners, improving U.S. efforts, and considering China's responses. The second section offers a critique of the framework by challenging the partnership framework's completeness. The critique of the framework offers several additional factors that can contribute to successful security cooperation partnerships in GPC and relates each additional factor to cases from the study. The third section is an application of the framework on a contemporary vignette. This section considers the tensions in the South China Sea by looking at China's interests in the region, and possible opportunities and considerations for the United States. This section proposes that China has strong interests in the South China Sea, and that the United States may benefit from developing the surrounding nations' paranaval security forces. The following chapter outlines the relevant literature and the proposed partnership framework.

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II. BUILDING A FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS PARTNERSHIPS: THE THEORY AND APPLICABILITY

This study proposes that willingness, capability, and effects are the most critical components to consider when evaluating partnerships with foreign security forces. This chapter outlines a framework for evaluating partnerships with foreign security forces in GPC by using theory and existing literature to develop three primary components: *willingness, capability, and effect on the rival*. This chapter will explain each of the principal components by first outlining the foundational theory or literature and then deriving the relevant evaluation criteria for assessing partnerships. The evaluation criteria for each component relates the foundational theories to the framework and is what the study will use for illustration in the cases.

The first component of the framework, the willingness of the partner, draws on principal-agent theory in order to guide the initial assessment and shaping of the interests of partners. The first component proposes four evaluation criteria that are relevant to partnerships: *initial overlap of interests, incentives, uncertainty, and information asymmetry*. The second component of the framework, capability, draws on business integration theory and existing literature on building partner capacity. The second component derives four evaluation criteria from the literature that are relevant to partnerships: *the strategy, initial capabilities, structure of the interorganizational ties, and the principal's techniques*. Finally, the third component of the framework, the effects on the rival, draws from deterrence theory to analyze enemy responses to U.S. partnerships. The third component proposes three evaluation criteria: *type of cost, means of communication, and the impact on the cost-benefit analysis*.

A. FIRST COMPONENT: WILLINGNESS

Principal-agent theory, or simply agency theory, explores the problems that originate from relationships when one organization or actor (the principal) contracts work

to another organization or actor (the agent).³⁹ When a global power executes a partnership with a smaller power's security forces, the partnership can be thought of as a contract of work, where the global power is the principal and the smaller power is the agent. Agency theory has been applied outside of business and economics in a similar context successfully. One study by Major Tyler Van Horn found value in the use of principal-agent theory in explaining the continuation of partnerships in unconventional warfare through a lens of looking at the overall positive expected value.⁴⁰ Foreign Internal Defense (FID) partnerships can also be analyzed with this method, as the success of partnerships is often affected by how willing the agent is to execute the principal's desires. Principal-agent theory can provide a framework to analyze differing interests between the United States and its partners, the problems that arise when interests differ, and methods to reduce this friction. The goal of this approach is to guide thought, not to utilize this theory as a precise and mathematical approach because modeling incentives of parties "is not precise, and cannot be made so."⁴¹ Despite the lack of a precise method, agency theory can provide a useful tool to analyze the interests of the agents that the United States employs.

1. Principal-Agent Theory

A principal-agent relationship occurs when "one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent), who performs that work."⁴² This theory originated as an economic model to explore how individuals or groups with different perceptions of risk, goals, and division of labor can share risk.⁴³ The foundation of this theory is rooted in the problems that arise from the delegation of work with the presence of differing incentives.⁴⁴

³⁹ Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," *The Academy of Management Review: AMR* 14, no. 1 (1989): 58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258191>.

⁴⁰ Tyler G. Van Horn, "The Utility of Freedom: A Principal-Agent Model for Unconventional Warfare" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2011), 57.

⁴¹ Van Horn, "The Utility of Freedom, 15.

⁴² Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," 58; Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 55.

⁴³ Eisenhardt, 58; Kenneth Joseph Arrow, *The Economics of Agency* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences, October 1984).

⁴⁴ Leo J. Blanken, Hy S. Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore, eds., *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 4.

The theory states that friction occurs because of differing ideas between the principal and the agent on risk, outcome uncertainty, incentives, and information.⁴⁵ The basis of the theory rests in microeconomics, often business scenarios, where the principal seeks to maximize the monetary gain of a relationship while the agent seeks to minimize his cost, or effort, in completing the task.⁴⁶ Essentially, we assume that the principal and the agent are self-interested and will seek to maximize the benefits while minimizing the costs. This assumption of self interest is the primary source of tension between the principal and the agent and leaves the principal with the decision of whether to allow the agent freedom to act in his own interests, or to accept a cost for either incentivizing or supervising the agent.

Incentives in principal-agent relationships have two aspects: initial incentives and incentives provided by the principal to the agent. The agency problem is when the initial desire or interest of the agent may overlap but not perfectly align with that of the principal.⁴⁷ The agent may have different initial motivations than the principal, which inherently incentivizes the agent to act outside the principal's interest. Additionally, the incentives that the principal provides the agent can directly impact the success of the relationship. There are two different types of incentives outlined in this theory: behavior-based and outcome-based.⁴⁸ Positivist agency theory proposes that "when the contract between the principal and the agent is outcome-based, the agent is more likely to behave in the interests of the principal."⁴⁹ Outcome-based incentives reduce the self-interest of the agent by rewarding the desired action or outcome as opposed to behavior-based incentives, which grant the agent more leeway to act in his own interests. A simple example of outcome versus behavior-based incentives is a predetermined payment for the completion of a task verse an hourly wage. There is a trade-off between these two systems because while an outcome-based incentive aligns interests between the principal and the agent, they

⁴⁵ Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," 58.

⁴⁶ David M. Kreps, *A Course in Microeconomic Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 580.

⁴⁷ Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," 58.

⁴⁸ Eisenhardt, 59.

⁴⁹ Eisenhardt, 60.

do not mitigate the risk of achieving the goal, instead, outcome-based incentives merely transfer the risk to the agent.⁵⁰

The incentive system affects the risk of the principal and the agent, but initial risk preferences can also impact the relationship. Differing risk preferences between the principal and the agent can create friction because it can result in a preference toward different actions.⁵¹ When the agent is risk averse, it can be “expensive to pass risk to the agent.”⁵² Risk adverse agents may demand more compensation for an outcome-based incentive but will often seek behavior-based incentives such as wages for hours of work. When the principal is initially risk averse, it will seek to transfer risk to the agent by offering outcome-based incentives.⁵³ Initial risk preferences of the principal and the agent are often affected not only by the incentive systems but also by the outcome uncertainty of the task.

Outcome uncertainty becomes an issue in principal-agent relationships because it impacts the ability of the principal to transfer risk to the agent. Outcome uncertainty in the completion of the task raises the risk for the agent when engaging in outcome-based incentives.⁵⁴ When the uncertainty is significant, the agent will seek behavior-based incentives or ample compensation for outcome-based incentives, which increases the cost to the principal. Essentially, if the principal is contracting an agent to conduct a task in which either the possibility of completion or cost of completion are unknown, the principal will have an increased cost to shift the risk to the agent. While outcome uncertainty can impact the risk preferences and costs, information asymmetry also has a critical role in principal-agent relationships.

Information asymmetry is a problem in the principal-agent relationship because the agent has an information advantage and it can be costly or not feasible for the principal to

⁵⁰ Eisenhardt, 61.

⁵¹ Eisenhardt, 58.

⁵² Eisenhardt, 62.

⁵³ Eisenhardt, 62.

⁵⁴ Eisenhardt, 61.

verify what is actually being done by the agent. Economics professor George Akerlof's famous article "A Market for Lemons" outlines the importance of information asymmetry when representing, or misrepresenting, quality of goods or services.⁵⁵ This idea relates to principal-agent relationships by assuming that agents who have private information will use it to their advantage to receive better rates from principals.

Several elements can affect information asymmetry. One is the length of the partnership. Long-term partnerships, or multiperiod relationships, tend to have less information asymmetry because the principal is able to learn about the agent and typical behavior patterns.⁵⁶ Information systems also play a critical role in reducing risk to the principal through the ability to monitor the agent. Information systems can be a variety of things, such as reporting procedures, boards of directors, or even technical surveillance.⁵⁷ Information systems are a cost to the principal in order to reduce the risk. Task programmability and outcome measurability also impact the information asymmetry.⁵⁸ Task programmability is the amount of specificity that can initially be outlined in advance in the contract. For example, a factory worker's task can be entirely programmed into the contract in a step-by-step procedure, whereas someone hired to be an innovator or manager may not have as easily identifiable and measurable tasks. If the task programmability is high, the information asymmetry and risk to principal decreases. Additionally, if the outcome is measurable, meaning that the end state is easily identified, the risk to the principal decreases.⁵⁹

Moral hazards and adverse selection are two potential problems arising from incentives in principal-agent relationships. When one party makes the decision to accept the risk, but the cost of the risk is incurred by the other, this is referred to as a moral

⁵⁵ George A. Akerlof, "The Market for" Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84, no. 3 (1970): 490.

⁵⁶ Richard A. Lambert, "Long-Term Contracts and Moral Hazard," *The Bell Journal of Economics* 14, no. 2 (1983): 441, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3003645>; Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," 62.

⁵⁷ Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," 61.

⁵⁸ Eisenhardt, 62.

⁵⁹ Eisenhardt, 62.

hazard.⁶⁰ Moral hazard can be a problem for either the principal or the agent. If the agent is making the risk decisions for the success of a task while the principal bears the cost, this can encourage the agent to take unnecessary risks. The same is true of the opposite scenario. If the principal is making risk decisions for the agent while the agent has outcome-based incentive structures, the principal will be encouraged to take a large amount of risk. Adverse selection, or what economist Kenneth Arrow refers to as hidden information, can cause sub-optimal agents to be attracted to and obtain contracts with principals because of information asymmetry.⁶¹ Principals should be aware of these potential problems when engaging in principal-agent relationships.

In summary, principal-agent theory helps to explain a contractual relationship for the completion of a task between two entities who have different goals and motivations. The principal elements that impact this relationship are incentives, risk preferences, outcome uncertainty, and information asymmetry. Scholar Kathleen Eisenhardt notes that the heart of principal-agent theory is “the trade-off between (a) the cost of measuring behavior and (b) the cost of measuring outcomes and transferring risk to the agent.”⁶² Despite the theory’s origin in economics, principal-agent theory can be used in a variety of settings. For example, Dr. Leo Blanken used the theory as a means to explain the problems of assessing war by looking at how incentives, information asymmetry, and operational benchmarks can cause friction when measuring the success of campaigns.⁶³ Author Peter Feaver also uses agency theory to describe issues with civil-military relations in the United States.⁶⁴ Although both of these examples use the theory to explore problems with internal U.S. relationships, similar concepts can be used for the military’s relationships with external partners.

⁶⁰ Arrow, *The Economics of Agency*, 3; Bengt Holmstrom, “Moral Hazard and Observability,” *Bell Journal of Economics* 10, no. 1 (1979): 74; Stephen A. Ross, “The Economic Theory of Agency: The Principal’s Problem,” *The American Economic Review* 63, no. 2 (1973): 134.

⁶¹ Arrow, *The Economics of Agency*, 6.

⁶² Eisenhardt, “Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review,” 61.

⁶³ Blanken, Rothstein, and Lepore, *Assessing War*, 4.

⁶⁴ Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 55.

2. Applying the Theory to Military Partnerships Framework

This theory's primary applicability to assessing military partnerships lies in the *overlap of initial interests* between principal and agent, the *incentives* used by the principal, the *uncertainty* of the outcome, and the *information asymmetry*. These four elements of principal-agent relationships, or evaluation criteria, can help highlight strengths and weaknesses in a partner's willingness to act in line with the principal's desire. Military partnerships often work in conjunction with political partnerships, so partners should be assessed at multiple levels. Even if a foreign military unit that is partnered with the United States military has incentives built into the partnership to produce the desired behavior, a significant overlap of interests, and minimal information asymmetry, the partnership may still be unsuccessful if the agent's political structure and leadership do not employ the unit as intended.

In addition to considering the relationship at the military level, military partnership principal-agent relationships can be examined at the government level by looking at the principal's relationship with the agent's political leaders. The goal of incorporating this is to bring the military partnership into the broader context of the complicated relationship which often exists between the United States and its partners. The importance of civil-military relations to the success of military operations is agreed upon by most scholars, even while they disagree on how civil-military relationships should be executed. Sam Huntington's theory of civil-military relations provides an argument for objective control and the sharp division of civilian and military roles.⁶⁵ Eliot Cohen, on the other hand, offers a new theory which proposes that successful civilian leadership should be intrusive because all military operations are political in nature.⁶⁶ Both, though, agree that political leadership is a critical aspect of war and would agree that it is a critical aspect of military partnerships.

⁶⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 83.

⁶⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2002), 225–48.

Principal-agent relationships can be examined at the military level by looking at the relationship with the military leadership or a specific unit that is partnered with the principal. Principal-agent relationships that look at an agent population are less useful than relationships at the military or political level because a population is generally not under a contract or understanding with the principal. The influence of the population is essential though, and can be accounted for when looking at the *overlap of initial interests* between the principal and the agent, particularly where the population's impact on the political leadership is concerned. The argument to analyze partnerships at the military and political level is supported by U.S. military officer, Anthony Heisler, who noted that "the lower the level of political cooperation, the lower the potential for military cooperation."⁶⁷ Essentially, this study must consider the relationship with two different entities, the government, and the military, while incorporating the importance of the population by looking at the impact on the political level.

When looking at *overlap of interests*, the likely domestic and foreign policy objectives of the agent should be taken into account as well as the interests of key individuals when applicable. Principal-agent theory assumes that each entity is self-interested and will have some conflicts with the other due to differing goals. Although cooperation is not dependent on complete overlap of interests, the level at which the initial interests of the principal and the agent overlap should be a careful point of consideration for all military partnerships. The main reason for this is simple: the initial interest overlap of the two entities has a direct impact on the cost for the principal. For example, if the United States and a potential partner have vastly different initial interests, the United States would have to accept high costs or a large amount of risk that the task will not be completed. Although initial preferences cannot be measured precisely, the consensus of the goals of each player is sufficient for the broad analysis. Therefore, this study will look at the initial preferences or goals of each partner at the governmental and military levels.

⁶⁷ Anthony F. Heisler, "By, With, and Through: The Theory and Practice of Special Operations Capacity-Building" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 146.

Following this analysis of initial preferences, this study will then look at the *incentives* that the principal implements to align the agent's preferences with their own. When looking at *incentives* for the agent and their effect on the military relationship, the resources and threats utilized by the principal to influence the agent should be analyzed. Principal-agent theory utilizes outcome and behavior-based incentives to describe how the principal incentivizes the agent but, in reality, incentives are almost always a blend of the two with a combination of positive and negative incentives.⁶⁸ The United States often utilizes funding and economic support as a positive influence and sanctions as a negative incentive. With respect to military partnerships, this could take place in the form of loans, military equipment, or even trade deals and even international recognition. This study will look at incentives directed to the security force partner as well as to the political entity which controls it. The incentives implemented in the context of the task will offer insight into the risks and costs on the United States to execute the partnership.

When looking at outcome *uncertainty*, the strategic situation will be analyzed by considering the task that is being pursued by both the principal and the agent as well as what the assessed probability of task completion is. Is the task assigned to the partner or agent clearly identified and communicated, and is that task outcome uncertain? This question is crucial because it impacts the interests and motivations of the agent to carry out the principal's desire. If the outcome *uncertainty* is high, the agent will be more likely to act in the protection of its own interests. For example, if a principal asks an agent to develop a new capability or technology that has not been proven or established, the outcome uncertainty, and therefore the risk, are both high. Imagine NASA's task to land a human on the moon. No one knew if this was possible or how long it would take to complete, so for NASA to accept risk in the form of outcome-based incentives would be very challenging. Warfare has varying degrees of uncertainty that are worth considering. Even

⁶⁸ Han Dorussen, "Mixing Carrots with Sticks: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Positive Incentives," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038002009>.

Clausewitz, the prominent military theorist, observed that war is very uncertain, yet some military tasks are more unknown than others.⁶⁹

In addition to *uncertainty*, the *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent should be considered when engaging in military partnerships. The level of integration in the partnership and oversight of training and operations will affect the level of *information asymmetry*. The measurability of the outcome and the programmability of the task should also be considered. Military strategies can be broad and lack specificity, which directly reduces the measurability and programmability of objectives. When partnering in combat at the tactical level, tasks can often be specific and direct, but such clarity becomes more difficult before direct armed conflict. The information systems which were used to monitor the agent will also be considered. These information systems often can come in the form of placing advisors in critical areas or accompanying the agent during training and operations. Allowing the agent to produce its own assessments without oversight of the principal would create the most substantial *information asymmetry* while accompanying the agent on training and operations would create the smallest *information asymmetry*. Agency theory suggests that overseeing all aspects of the agent's behavior is often not practical, but overseeing the most critical aspects is essential. Finally, the longevity of the relationship, the level of knowledge, and the degree of trust will be considered as they relate to *information asymmetry* and the costs it imposes on the principal.

In sum, when utilizing principal-agent theory to assess the willingness of a military partner, this study will consider four evaluation criteria: *overlap of initial preferences*, *incentives*, *uncertainty*, and *information asymmetry*. Primary documents and official correspondence will be used to create a consensus on initial preferences. The incentives utilized by the principal to influence the agent's behavior will be looked at from both a cost and risk perspective. Uncertainty will be considered by looking at the agent's perspective of the achievability of the task. Finally, the information asymmetry between the two

⁶⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret, First paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 102.

entities, and the cost and methods the principal uses to monitor the agent will be considered. By looking at these four criteria, a hypothesis of whether the willingness of the partner is sufficient for a successful partnership can be tested.

B. SECOND COMPONENT: CAPABILITY

The capability of the partner, or agent, is a critical component of analysis for successful military partnerships. When engaging in any partnership, a principal should assess the initial capability of the agent and build or expand capabilities as they relate to the desired objective. Is the agent able to affect the environment with current capabilities? What are the capability gaps? Does the agent have sufficient quality of capabilities, but lack in quantity, requiring expansion of existing programs? In order to consider how new resources and capabilities integrate, this study will rely on business integration literature and existing military studies on building partner capacity. The goal of this section is to build the second component of the framework for assessing partnerships by analyzing how best to determine agent, or partner, capability.

1. Integration in the Business World

The business community has substantial existing literature that describes integrating companies and capabilities through interorganizational ties. These interorganizational ties are meant to improve collective efficiencies, defined by professors Luiz Mesquita and Sergio Lazzarini as “efficiencies that are unavailable to firms operating alone.”⁷⁰ Gaining advantages through collective efficiencies is not a foregone conclusion and cannot be done without continued effort. Authors Yves Doz and Gary Hamel wrote extensively on strategic alliances in the business world and noted that “alliances cannot be crafted and set on autopilot. They require ongoing management of the relationship within a clear strategic framework.”⁷¹ The value and logic of partnerships in the business world

⁷⁰ Luiz F. Mesquita and Sergio G. Lazzarini, “Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in Developing Economies: Implications for SMEs’ Access to Global Markets,” *Academy of Management Journal* 51, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 360, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2008.31767280>.

⁷¹ Yves L Doz and Gary Hamel, *Alliance Advantage: The Art of Creating Value Through Partnering* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), 32, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/8458457>.

is clear and is generally pursued through three different avenues. First, partnerships can add value through gaining “critical mass globally or in a specific new market.”⁷² Second, partnerships can add value through knowledge gained in specific markets in order to become an insider.⁷³ Finally, partnerships can allow access to critical or unique skills.⁷⁴ These three motives for partnerships encourage businesses to create interorganizational ties in a variety of different structures, including working with a competitor company that produces similar products.

The three motives for partnerships create the need to develop interorganizational ties. There are two different types of interorganizational ties, vertical and horizontal. Horizontal integration involves ties between groups in the same industry, while vertical integration involves ties between groups in different but supporting industries.⁷⁵ Both of these types of interorganizational ties have challenges, benefits, and friction points.

Companies use vertical integration when they are not in direct competition, such as a shipping company partnering with a manufacturing company. Although there may not be direct competition, the partnership may still have difficulties due to transaction costs. Professor Jeffery Dyer argues that vertical integration in the automotive industry, when large auto manufacturing companies integrate with supply chains, can reduce transaction costs through investing in long term relationships.⁷⁶ Japanese auto companies in this study had more efficient vertical relationships with their suppliers because of a high level of trust, information sharing, self-enforcing standards, and expectation of an enduring relationship. The challenges of vertical integration most often come from transaction costs while the benefits most often come from speed and increased specialization and expertise.

⁷² Doz and Hamel, *Alliance Advantage*, 35.

⁷³ Doz and Hamel, 35.

⁷⁴ Doz and Hamel, 35.

⁷⁵ Mesquita and Lazzarini, “Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in Developing Economies,” 362.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey H. Dyer, “Effective Interim Collaboration: How Firms Minimize Transaction Costs and Maximize Transaction Value,” *Strategic Management Journal* 18, no. 7 (1997): 549, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<535::AID-SMJ885>3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7<535::AID-SMJ885>3.0.CO;2-Z).

Manufacturing productivity increases in vertical relationships despite the presence of “moral hazards” such as free riding, late or low-quality efforts.⁷⁷

Horizontal integration benefits are often more challenging to justify at first glance because of the potential for direct competition between partners. Mesquita and Lazzarini argue that horizontal ties positively impact creation of collective resources and innovation.⁷⁸ Doz and Hamel contribute to developing this idea through their notions of “co-option,”⁷⁹ “co-specialization,”⁸⁰ and “co-practice.”⁸¹ Co-option is described as a way to reach critical mass for competition against other competitors. For example, telecommunication companies may benefit from an alliance in the face of a growing threat from a rival alliance. It is the old notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Co-specialization is a relationship that relies on either unique skills or unique regional access. External automakers have often developed a co-specialization relationship with Chinese companies in order to gain local access, become an insider, and beat Chinese government restrictions and regulations.⁸² Co-practice relationships rely on a knowledge or skill transfer between companies. Knowledge and skill transfers would take place when a technology transfer is not simple, or the time to develop the skill or knowledge alone would be lengthy and costly.⁸³ While horizontal integration offers benefits through co-option, co-specialization, or co-practice, horizontal integration challenges often stem from the thought of future competition for markets.

The purpose of integration, both vertical and horizontal, is to create collective efficiencies for both parties. In business literature, there are three primary collective efficiencies that integration or partnerships aim to achieve. First is the building of collective

⁷⁷ Mesquita and Lazzarini, “Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in Developing Economies,” 363.

⁷⁸ Mesquita and Lazzarini, 363–64.

⁷⁹ Doz and Hamel, *Alliance Advantage*, 39.

⁸⁰ Doz and Hamel, 37.

⁸¹ Doz and Hamel, 37.

⁸² Doz and Hamel, 46.

⁸³ Doz and Hamel, 38.

resources or activities in a “pooled” way.⁸⁴ Pooled resources often are reflected in infrastructure that both parties can freely utilize. These pooled resources can be thought of as a public good and are referred to by Wharton School professor, Bruce Kogut, as a joint venture.⁸⁵ Collective resources through pooled goods are often in the form of export infrastructure, such as a port, but could take the form of government support that would benefit both parties.⁸⁶ Pooled resources could be a source of motivation for horizontal relationships or vertical partnerships to form. The second way companies achieve collective efficiencies is when activities or resources are related in a sequential way where “one’s input is another’s output.”⁸⁷ An example of this in the business world would be the relationship between production and assembly of an item or the relationship between companies in a supply chain. This collective efficiency is clearly seen in vertical integration because the relationship involves different industries. The final way companies achieve collective efficiencies is when activities or resources are related to each other in a reciprocal way where “each agent’s input is dependent on the others’ output and vice versa.”⁸⁸ This approach could be carried out through the co-specialization of knowledge or resources.

In summary, existing integration literature in the business world identifies two broad categories of interorganizational ties, vertical and horizontal, each classified by the relationship between the capabilities and markets of the two parties. The existing literature identifies three primary ways to achieve collective efficiencies through interorganizational ties: to pool resources against a common threat, to gain unique on-the-ground knowledge of regions or markets, and to gain access to a critical skillset. How organizations are tied and the means utilized to achieve collective efficiencies are the two primary categories through which to assess collaboration and partnerships in businesses.

⁸⁴ Mesquita and Lazzarini, “Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in Developing Economies,” 360.

⁸⁵ Bruce Kogut, “Joint Ventures: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives,” *Strategic Management Journal* 9, no. 4 (1988): 319, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250090403>.

⁸⁶ Mesquita and Lazzarini, “Horizontal and Vertical Relationships in Developing Economies,” 361.

⁸⁷ Mesquita and Lazzarini, 361.

⁸⁸ Mesquita and Lazzarini, 361.

2. Existing Building Partner Capacity Best Practices

While businesses across the world have experience identifying and carrying out partnerships in a variety of settings, armed forces also have been partnering to carry out their needs throughout history. It is not only essential to consider how new capabilities were integrated, but also the techniques utilized to introduce the new capability. Substantial literature from U.S. military sponsored studies exist concerning the successful execution of building partner capacity and the methods and best practices that should be considered. U.S. doctrine outlines best practices for security force assistance and partnering with foreign security forces. Additionally, many academics and military officers have conducted studies on this topic. Military officers recognize that partnerships with foreign armed forces are often carried out in dynamic and unpredictable environments. Anthony Heisler stated succinctly in his NPS thesis that “partnerships are tricky. They are intangible, constantly evolving, and dangerously susceptible to any number of internal and external factors.”⁸⁹ Despite this recognized challenge, studies suggest that there are best practices that raise the probability of success. Of the many conclusions that these studies draw, several commonalities stand out as they relate to the proper execution of building partner capacity.

First, partnerships benefit from being implemented at multiple levels. Heisler identified that building partner capacity is “not a single act, but rather a series of tactical, operational, and strategic engagements carried out over an extended period of time in a dynamic and unpredictable partnership environment.” A RAND study in 2013 recommended that in addition to building a specific capacity with a security force that the U.S. should also build sustainment capabilities and ministerial capacity or “the capability of a partner’s ministry of defense or ministry of interior to plan for and manage the partner’s military and security forces.”⁹⁰ Major Stephan Bolton concluded that in addition to building capacity at the tactical level, capacities must be built “at the operational command

⁸⁹ Heisler, “By, with, and Through,” 14.

⁹⁰ Christopher Paul et al., “Conclusions and Recommendations,” in *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?* (RAND Corporation, 2013), 91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt5hhdsn.15>.

and ministerial levels to ensure best employment.”⁹¹ Although support through multiple agencies to a partner is often necessary for success, the complexity of a sponsor’s support can also hinder the overall effort if not executed and appropriately presented. NPS graduate students and military officers, Hoover, Self, and Yu stated, “sponsors should strive to shield their clients from the tactical disorganization that is inherent in coalition warfare, which will hamper unity of command, effort and mission, likely hindering BPC [building partner capacity] success.”⁹² It is a common theme that complex internal structures within the principal can often confuse an agent by sending mixed signals. The summary of these comments and studies is apparent: a principal partner must build partner capacity at multiple levels to ensure success. Building one capability within a single unit generally will not successfully accomplish the principal’s end state unless the agent’s command structure and sustainment capabilities are also present.

Second, partnerships benefit from personal and enduring relationships. Heisler identified that although building partner capacity is “rife with frustration,”⁹³ it can be mitigated through transparency and “open and frank lines of communication.”⁹⁴ Hoover, Self, and Yu stated, “sponsors should deliberately manage personal relationships to overcome cultural and national wealth disparities.”⁹⁵ Colonel Brian Petit argued, through a lens of operational art, that small footprint, long-term engagements are the key to executing a successful partnership.⁹⁶ Another 2013 RAND study identified that a lack of multi-year authorities to work with partners affects efficient execution adversely.⁹⁷ Major

⁹¹ Stephan R. Bolton, *Partners of Choice and Necessity: Special Operations Forces and the National Security Imperatives of Building Partner Capacity* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army School for Advanced Military Studies, 2015), 66.

⁹² Zachary T. Hoover, James L. Self, and David S. Yu, “Building Partner Capacity: The Science Behind the Art” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 100.

⁹³ Heisler, “By, with, and Through,” 142.

⁹⁴ Heisler, 143.

⁹⁵ Hoover, Self, and Yu, “Building Partner Capacity,” 97.

⁹⁶ Brian S Petit, *Going Big by Getting Small: The Application of Operational Art by Special Operations in Phase Zero*. (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2015).

⁹⁷ Jennifer D. P. Moroney, David E. Thaler, and Joe Hogler, “Key Findings and Recommendations,” in *Review of Security Cooperation Mechanisms Combatant Commands Utilize to Build Partner Capacity* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt5vjw7s.12>.

Bolton agreed, stating that terminating a building partner capacity campaign should not mean ending the partnership because a principal must “maintain relationships and ensure continuity of partner capability.”⁹⁸

Third, introducing new technology to partners without adequate support hurts building partner capacity efforts in the long term. Odom stated that “technology imposes heavy demands upon partners. Equipping unproven fighters with complex armaments requiring layers of additional support, e.g., mechanics, armorers, engineers, and other skilled talent, will need external support to survive.”⁹⁹ The problem of burdening partners with expensive technology or equipment can be mitigated by a best practice of including a sustainment package with new equipment, but this also increases the cost and degrades long term sustainability.¹⁰⁰

In sum, existing literature on building partner capacity indicates the common themes and best practices of partnering at multiple levels, establishing enduring relationships, and introducing the adequate level of equipment and technology. These best practices are agreed upon by studies from military officers and academics alike and can be used to guide analysis of past and present partnerships. The studies on building partner capacity and the proposed best practices are vast. Still, common themes aid a broader study such as this because they provide a basis under which successful partnerships have been conducted.

3. Applying the Existing Literature to the Military Partnerships Framework

This existing literature on business integration and building partner capacity can be useful for a framework for assessments on partnerships. Four evaluation criteria that the framework derives are the *strategy*, the *initial capability* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties*, and the *principal’s techniques* to build capacity. The reader must

⁹⁸ Bolton, *Partners of Choice and Necessity*, 66.

⁹⁹ Christopher B. Odom, “Broken Mirrors: Tracing Issues in Building Partner Capacity” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Paul et al., “Conclusions and Recommendations,” 88.

understand the principal's strategy in order to put partnership efforts into a broader perspective. *Initial capabilities* and limitations in the agent are essential in order to identify what will benefit the agent the most. The *structure of the interorganizational ties* and how a new capability is connected into the existing agent framework can be examined using the literature from the business community. Finally, the *principal's techniques* to introduce a new capability can be checked against best practices that have been identified through the variety of military studies.

In order to understand the gaps that arise from a look at the agent's initial capabilities, the principal must understand the strategy in the conflict. Aligning the right capabilities to carry out the stated strategy should be taken into effect when looking at the capability of partners. This study will outline the stated strategy using the ends, ways, and means approach from the U.S. Army War College and then will identify current capabilities and capability gaps in the agent.¹⁰¹ Identifying this first in the framework provides context to the capabilities being introduced. Following an outline of the *strategy* and *initial capabilities* of the agent, this study will consider the following items for analysis. First, the *structure of the interorganizational tie* (vertical or horizontal) will be analyzed. Within the structure of interorganizational ties, the means with which collective efficiencies were obtained (pooled resources, knowledge transfer, or skills transfer) will be considered. Finally, this study considers the *principal's techniques* of introducing the new capability based on best practices (engagement at multiple levels, enduring relationships, and appropriate level of technology and equipment that is sustainable).

The two different *structures of interorganizational ties* to consider in partnerships and collaboration are vertical and horizontal. In the context of partnering with a foreign security force, a vertical integration relationship would consist of introducing an entirely new capability to the agent that can tie in with existing capabilities. An example of this would be the introduction of an air component that was previously not present. It could also consist of connecting multiple pre-existing components of the agent's armed forces

¹⁰¹ H. Richard Yarger, "Towards a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model," *US Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, 2006, 6–7.

that would not collaborate without the insistence of the principal. A horizontal integration relationship would be the expansion of an existing capability with either additional resources or manpower. This study will look at the structure of the interorganizational ties to determine whether it has an impact on the success of the military partnerships as it does in business partnerships.

The *structure of interorganizational ties* is also affected by how collective efficiencies are achieved. Pooled resources occur when the principal and the agent have access to military units and resources. Collective efficiencies can also be exchanged through a knowledge transfer. This is often the case where mutually beneficial intelligence is shared between the partners when the agent often has superior access to local knowledge and the principal has access to intelligence globally. Skills transfer can come in the form of new tactics or knowledge about operating in specific environments.

The final aspect of the capability framework will consider the *principal's techniques* at introducing increased capabilities by comparing them to existing best practices. The substantial amount of literature on how to execute building partner capacity leads to three primary items: engagement at multiple levels, enduring relationships, and appropriate level of technology. A partnership conducted at limited levels of an agent's government is negatively related to partnership success. Short term or episodic relationships increase the chance that the partnership will not produce the desired effects. Finally, introducing unsustainable technology is negatively related to long-term partnership success.

In summary, when considering the capability of the partner this study will consider the *strategy*, the *initial capabilities* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties* (vertical, horizontal, the means with which collective efficiencies were achieved), and the *principal's techniques* to increase the agent's capabilities.

C. **THIRD COMPONENT: EFFECTS ON THE ENEMY AND COERCION**

As the often-repeated military saying goes, the enemy always gets a vote.¹⁰² So when using partnerships as a tool in GPC, a principal should consider the effects on the enemy. What will the reaction of the rival be? Considering that GPC and deterrence strategies have gone hand in hand since the conclusion of World War II, deterrence may be a useful body of knowledge to determine enemy decision-making. Deterrence literature could be helpful in explaining and predicting the reactions of rivals, including great power rivals and their sponsored proxies. U.S. doctrine in JP1 identifies the closeness of partnerships and deterrence stating, “Security cooperation and deterrence should be complementary.”¹⁰³ If the principal’s effort into the partnership does not change the rival’s behavior, is the partnership worthwhile? This section outlines the existing literature and then derives evaluation criteria for the effects component of the framework.

1. **Coercion, Deterrence, and Compellence**

The Unitary Rational Actor Model (URAM) is an integral part of understanding this body of knowledge because it establishes the foundation cost-benefit analysis through a bargaining range and provides reasons why rational states go to war. The URAM holds several assumptions that narrow the problem set of explaining inter-state interactions. The first assumption is that states act as a unitary actor. Unitary actors are referred to as “billiard ball” states that omit internal politics and internal players with different interests.¹⁰⁴ It allows leaders to focus on the international system and omit internal tensions. This model does not view nations’ leadership as representing the population; it instead assumes that leadership is entirely secure in their position and ability to make decisions for the nation. The second assumption is that states are “rational.” Rational means that states will go

¹⁰² One recent example of the saying is from former Secretary of Defense, James Mattis. Quoted in Phil McCausland and Ben Kamisar, “Mattis Warns ISIS Could Resurge: ‘Enemy Gets the Vote’ after Trump’s Announced Troop Pullout,” NBC News, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/mattis-warns-isis-could-resurge-enemy-gets-vote-after-trump-n1065431>.

¹⁰³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*. JP 1, I–11.

¹⁰⁴ Frank C. Zagare, “Rationality and Deterrence,” *World Politics* 42, no. 2 (January 1990): 240, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010465>.

through all possible options and choose what is best based on calculated measures. Rationality omits any emotional components and non-state interests (individual, organizational, political) that could influence decision-makers, including irrational decision making or biases. This assumption suggests that all rational states, given the same information, should come to the same conclusion. Essentially, different conclusions should only occur if nations possess different information.¹⁰⁵

A claim, which is based on the assumptions above, is that all war has costs *ex-post* and, therefore, a bargaining range always exists between two rational nations. This claim is central to James Fearon's arguments in his famous article, "Rationalist Explanations for War." Fearon's discussion of a constant bargaining range also shows that situations of "deadlock" do not exist.¹⁰⁶ The situation of deadlock is when no mutually preferable bargain exists between two rationalist states. The notion that deadlock is a myth is only valid if the previous assumptions are correct. Irrational states and risk-acceptant states may have deadlock situations, but those scenarios are outside of this model. Additionally, states must be engaged in a conflict in which a continual range of peaceful settlements exists.¹⁰⁷ Essentially, items in dispute must be divisible in some form.

There are two main reasons why unitary rational states can go to war. The first reason is rational miscalculations. Rational actors can reach different conclusions about their own nation's or enemy's will and power due to "private information" and the "incentives to misrepresent information" in the bargaining stage.¹⁰⁸ This private information can lead nations to rationally misjudge their situation. There are many examples of miscalculation of an opponent's willingness to fight, including nations in both world wars. Leaders' private information and incentive to misrepresent are the root cause of disagreements on relative power and uncertainty about an opponent's willingness to fight. Rational nations have incentives to misrepresent information about their power or

¹⁰⁵ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 392.

¹⁰⁶ Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," 409.

¹⁰⁷ Fearon, 389.

¹⁰⁸ Fearon, 381.

willingness to fight because they have incentives to obtain the best bargain within the bargaining range. Nations' desire to get the best deal reduces the potential positive impact of information sharing because leaders may not believe the shared information even if it is clearly communicated. Leaders are hesitant to believe even clear communication because they cannot be sure if the country is being truthful or if they are trying to gain the best deal by over-representing their power and will.

The second primary reason rationalist states can go to war is due to commitment problems, which stem from international anarchy.¹⁰⁹ Even when there is no private information and adversaries correctly understand each other's motivations, two major types of conflict can result from commitment problems. The first type of conflict resulting from a commitment problem is preemptive war. Offensive advantages can affect the bargaining range due to the odds of winning militarily with a first strike or if the cost of defending is much higher than the cost of attacking. The second type of conflict that results from commitment issues is preventative war. Preventative wars occur when leaders assess interstate interaction throughout multiple periods and can result in the inability of states to trust each other to keep bargains due to a poor track record. A preventative war may occur if the bargaining item in question can have an effect on the relative power of each nation in the future.

State versus state deterrence literature is vast and it has contributed significantly to United States foreign policy. Scholar Jeffery Knopf defines deterrence as "a form of preventive influence that rests primarily on negative incentives."¹¹⁰ Fundamentally, deterrence aims to *prevent* an action of a nation by threatening to implement costs if the nation takes the undesired action. Professor and strategist Thomas Schelling describes these negative incentives as "pain and shock, loss and grief, privation and horror."¹¹¹ Deterrence differs from utilizing brute force to achieve an objective because it holds power

¹⁰⁹ Fearon, 381.

¹¹⁰ Emanuel Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetrical Warfare Era," in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, ed. T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 37, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226650043.001.0001>.

¹¹¹ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 2.

to hurt in reserve. Schelling said, “it is the *threat* of damage, or more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply.”¹¹²

States can traditionally accomplish deterrence by two paths: punishment and denial.¹¹³ Punishment is the “stick,” or threat of retaliation. Denial is posturing, or the ability to resist an undesired action, which would create costs on an enemy that are greater than the potential reward. Denial is where Schelling described that sometimes defense and deterrence merge.¹¹⁴ Schelling states that the goal of denial is to convince the rival that “the conquest would be costly, even if successful, too costly to be worthwhile.”¹¹⁵ This calculation assumes that nations are rational actors and deliberately make decisions to achieve goals. Fearon also describes the cost-benefit utility calculation for rational actors and the description of costs *ex-post* for conflict with his idea of a bargaining range.¹¹⁶ In his bargaining range, Fearon mathematically describes costs and benefits for taking action, which directly apply to deterrence thought.

Signaling intent is a critical component of deterrence and is also one of the most considerable difficulties. Communication, either direct or indirect, is required for deterrence. The communication of the threat must be credible, meaning that a state should have both the capability and the resolve to carry out the threat. Direct communication can be accomplished by outwardly stating intent. Outwardly stating intent may not always work because nations are often bluffing and overstating their willingness to accept costs in order to achieve a better deal in the bargaining range.¹¹⁷ Fearon described this phenomenon as “incentives to misrepresent their positions.”¹¹⁸ Here, outwardly communicating will not work if the target nation does not believe the threat.

¹¹² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3.

¹¹³ Adler, “Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetrical Warfare Era,” 38.

¹¹⁴ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 78.

¹¹⁵ Schelling, 78.

¹¹⁶ Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 387.

¹¹⁷ Fearon, 391; Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 391.

Indirectly communicating intent can be more convincing, but indirect actions can also be misunderstood or misread. Paradoxically, this can cause a nation to impose costs on itself in order to signal resolve. Schelling outlines the ways to self-impose costs, or potential costs, by utilizing the concepts of “trip-wires,”¹¹⁹ “burning bridges,”¹²⁰ and “audience costs.”¹²¹ Trip-wires put something of enough value in place to ensure the undesired action would escalate into an undesired war. Burning bridges is the act of establishing a position from which a nation cannot yield or retreat, and will, therefore, fight over an undesired action. Audience costs involve a statement or commitment which, if not kept, would result in significant loss of prestige and reputation, either domestically or internationally. States can use any or all of these self-imposing cost techniques to signal resolve.

When implementing self-imposing costs, a nation does not benefit by acting rationally or cool-headed.¹²² A nation should appear more willing to accept risk than its opponent. This apparent benefit of acting irrationally correlates with Schelling’s description of brinkmanship, which is “manipulating the shared risk of war.”¹²³ Schelling compared brinkmanship to playing a game of “chicken.”¹²⁴ In order to win a game of chicken, an actor must convince the opponent that he is more willing to accept the risk. An analogy for signaling this willingness is to dance close to the edge of a cliff in front of an opponent, thereby demonstrating a willingness to take things to the edge. Although the rationality assumption is critical in deterrence theory, the apparent irrational actor may deter an opponent because of his success in this game of brinkmanship.

Non-state actors prove a different problem set when concerned with deterrence. Non-state actors are utilized by our nation-state rivals to inflict costs. Simply put, our rival nations often employ their own agents which can be difficult to deter because of difficulties

¹¹⁹ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 101.

¹²⁰ Schelling, 44.

¹²¹ Schelling, 50.

¹²² Schelling, 37.

¹²³ Schelling, 99.

¹²⁴ Schelling, 116.

communicating, difficulties implementing costs, and deterrence traps. Non-state actors can conduct a provocative action that puts strong states in a lose-lose situation of either responding or not responding. This lose-lose scenario is referred to as a deterrence trap by Emanuel Adler.¹²⁵ Not responding to provocative action by non-state actors results in losing face and diminished future deterrence capabilities relative to social and international norms.¹²⁶ However, responding to the provocative action of a non-state actor with force can result in actually strengthening the group's credibility with local populations.¹²⁷

In summary, deterrence is a form of influence that attempts to alter behavior due to the threat of negative impacts. Deterrence theory is rooted in the rational actor model, which argues that states go to war because of rational miscalculations and commitment problems. States can accomplish deterrence by communicating the intent to punish or deny undesired behavior. Communication can be accomplished directly but will have the drawback of credibility because of the known incentives to misrepresent one's position. Communication can also happen indirectly through signaling capability or intent to do something. In the end, deterrence theory suggests that states rationally calculate perceived costs and benefits of particular actions.

2. Applying Deterrence Theory to Military Partnerships

Deterrence is vital as a form of influence when developing a framework for evaluating partnerships because security forces inherently are focused on adverse effects on the enemy, either punishment or denial. So partnerships described in this study go hand-in-hand with deterrence. The intent of security cooperation partnerships is always to either posture by demonstrating a capable and united front with friends, or to use partners to punish rivals when it is too expensive or not feasible for the principal to take action directly against the rival. The focus on deterrence does not reduce the importance of using positive incentives for influencing rival great powers. Without a doubt, the principal partner nation must incorporate deterrence efforts into a broader strategy involving positive incentives for

¹²⁵ Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetrical Warfare Era," 87.

¹²⁶ Adler, 86.

¹²⁷ Adler, 87.

the enemy for desired behavior in order to be successful. However, a principal partner nation always strives for adverse incentives on rival nations within the scope of security cooperation.

Despite the need for nations to incorporate other forms of influence, deterrence theory may be useful to assess effects on the great power rival and its proxies when applicable. Indeed, partnerships could produce a deterrent effect on state sponsored non-state actors and state sponsors alike. Jeffery Record smartly expanded on Andrew Mack's and Ivan Arreguin-Toft's ideas concerning asymmetric warfare when he noted that significant outside support might be required for the victory of a small power.¹²⁸ In GPC, states use proxies to obtain influence, and proxies seem to rely on support from great powers for success. This framework will look at how the presence of a military partnership impacts great powers rivals' decisions, including the decision to support irregular warfare campaigns. The United States heavily relied on conventional and nuclear deterrence throughout the Cold War, yet Record noted that U.S. conventional superiority "yielded conventional deterrence, however, it has pushed America's enemies into greater reliance on irregular warfare responses that expose the limits of conventional primacy."¹²⁹ Milton Miles, the leader of the U.S. SACO partnership discussed in Chapter V, also noted this, stating, "so long as we have [atomic weapons], the odds are that we will not have to use them."¹³⁰ In fact, social scientist Kenneth Waltz famously predicted this in the early years of the Cold War when he stated, "mutual fear of big weapons may produce, instead of peace, a spate of smaller wars."¹³¹ The rivals of the United States are and have been relying

¹²⁸ Jeffrey Record, "Why the Strong Lose," *Parameters* 35, no. 4 (2005): 22; Jeffrey Record, "External Assistance: Enabler of Insurgent Success" *Parameters* 36, no. 3 (2006) <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA630945>; Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212868>; Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175–200.

¹²⁹ Record, "Why the Strong Lose," 29.

¹³⁰ Milton E. Miles, *A Different Kind of War: The Little-Known Story of the Combined Guerrilla Forces Created in China by the U.S. Navy and the Chinese During World War II* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 586.

¹³¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 236.

on irregular warfare. This prospect indicates the need to assess deterrent effects at the irregular warfare level to deter support to a weak foe.

There are three primary concerns with utilizing deterrence theory to assess the success of military partnerships: communication, non-attribution, and non-state actors. First, the difficulty of communicating a clear capability or threat is often a problem. Communication can be a problem, especially in unconventional warfare and GPC, because the participation of the principal is often concealed by design. Second, the rival can often respond in ways that are non-attributable. For example, rivals often use the non-attribution in the cyber domain in order to beat traditional deterrence measures.¹³² Russia and China purposefully act below the threshold of traditional deterrence or escalate in a non-attributable manner that cannot elicit a massive response.¹³³ Third, the use of non-state actors in the great power arena makes deterrence difficult. The challenges of deterring non-state actors do not make it impossible, but the United States should broaden the scope to both influence and deterrence, as argued by Paul Davis in his 2002 RAND study on counterterrorism.¹³⁴ Where deterrence is likely to fail, influencing the severity of a rival's action will have to be considered.

Despite these concerns, this theory is useful in providing a foundation to consider the effect on the rival because it provides a cost and benefit decision-making framework. This study proposes the following three criteria for analysis in the third component of the partnership framework. First, it will consider the *type of cost* used for influence (punishment or denial) and whether this has an impact on success. Second, it will consider the *means of communication* (direct or indirect signaling). Finally, it will consider the *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals, including the great power and the proxy. The intent of the three criteria, and this component of the framework, is to provide a means to explain and predict enemy actions.

¹³² Brandon Valeriano, Benjamin M. Jensen, and Ryan C. Maness, *Cyber Coercion: The Evolving Character of Cyber Power and Strategy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹³³ Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, 79.

¹³⁴ Paul K. Davis, *Deterrence & Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on Al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), 5.

D. SUMMARY OF THE FRAMEWORK

This study's framework for evaluating the potential for a successful partnership with foreign security forces in GPC draws from multiple areas of study in order to consider the proposed three primary components of *willingness, capability, and effects*. Each of the primary components draw from existing theories or literature and together are refined for the application of assessing partnerships with foreign security forces in the context of GPC. From the existing theories and literature, this study derived evaluation criteria that may help explain and predict the potential success or failure of a partnership.

The first component—willingness—draws from principal-agent theory to evaluate the willingness of a potential partner. The literature offers a foundation to develop four evaluation criteria to consider: the *initial overlap of interests*, the *incentives* used by the principal to influence the desired behavior, the *uncertainty* of the success of the task, and the *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent.

The second component—capability—draws from literature on business integration as well as existing studies on building partner capacity to evaluate the capability of a potential partner. The literature offers several evaluation criteria to consider: the *strategy*, the *initial capabilities* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties* (vertical, horizontal, the means with which collective efficiencies were achieved), and the *principal's techniques* to increase the agent's capabilities.

The third component—effects—draws from deterrence theory to evaluate the potential effects on the rival. The literature offers a foundation for the following evaluation criteria: the *type of cost* used for influence (punishment or denial), the *means of communication* (direct or indirect signaling), and the *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals, including the great power and the proxy.

In sum, this study proposes a three-component framework, called the partnership framework, for evaluating partnerships in GPC. The partnership framework is illustrated by three historical cases in Chapters III, IV, and V. In Chapter VI, the lessons from the framework and the cases are applied to a current strategic problem relating to China. In addition to the three primary components of the framework (willingness, capability,

effects), this study explores other potentially relevant factors when applicable. The following three chapters illustrate the proposed framework.

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III. PRE-QUAGMIRE: THE EARLY VIETNAM WAR (1954–1964)

The early U.S. participation in Vietnam (1954–1964) is essential for this study's analysis of military partnerships in GPC, and specifically against China, for several reasons. First, the Vietnam War had a powerful impact on United States foreign policy and strategic thinking well beyond the conclusion of the conflict.¹³⁵ Second, it is a complicated case with significant U.S. involvement through support to an agent, South Vietnam. Third, many often overlook the early years of the conflict, before significant U.S. conventional forces arrived, despite containing important lessons and implications for U.S. military strategy.¹³⁶ Many tend to focus on the failure of the large-scale intervention that brought unsuccessful search and destroy operations after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and not on how or why the earlier partnership failed to stop China's and North Vietnam's escalation. Finally, evidence of significant and impactful support from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to North Vietnam allows for a look at how the PRC conducted operations in the past and how these observations may be relevant to the United States' competition with the PRC today.¹³⁷

The U.S. participation in Vietnam leaves many to question why and where it went wrong. Strategist Eliot Cohen noted, "Decades after the Vietnam debacle, professional soldiers were still debating whether the United States could have won the war and what the proper strategy would have been."¹³⁸ George Allen, a senior American intelligence officer in Vietnam, said, "One of the great mysteries of the American involvement in the Indochina Wars is why the Vietnamese army failed to develop into a first-rate military force."¹³⁹ This

¹³⁵ See Cohen's discussion of the war's impacts on the view of civilian control and on shaping Secretary of Defense Weinberger's Doctrine in 1984. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2002), 184–87.

¹³⁶ This argument is embedded throughout the Moyar's book. Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³⁷ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, The New Cold War History (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹³⁸ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 2002, 180.

¹³⁹ George W. Allen, *None so Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 99.

chapter will apply the partnership framework to the early years of U.S. partnership with the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) and the Government of Vietnam (GVN), which failed to shape the environment to prevent the later large scale intervention in 1964, described by historian Andrew Krepinevich as a “quagmire.”¹⁴⁰ This chapter will outline the early involvement in Vietnam by using the three components of the partnership framework—willingness, capability, and effects. The intent is to illustrate the utility of the partnership framework and to identify specific Chinese methods and responses to the U.S. partnership.

A. BACKGROUND

The U.S. participation in the Vietnam War from 1954—1964 was a part of a more extensive series of struggles in Indochina. The period from 1954 until 1964 is when the United States began to play a large role as a partner with the GVN but before the large-scale intervention by conventional units. 1954 is a significant turning point in the U.S. involvement because, following the Geneva Accords, the United States replaced France as the primary supporting ally in Vietnam. The focus of this study will end at the year 1964 when the United States passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which represented the failure of the GVN to support itself without significant U.S. conventional forces.

In order to understand the United States’ involvement, it is crucial to understand a brief background of Vietnam in the years leading up to 1954. Prior to WWII, France controlled all of Indochina as a colony. Japan and indigenous groups challenged France during and after WWII. During WWII, Indochina was under the control of the Vichy French government and Japan, but the allied powers supported resistance movements against them. One of the leaders that the United States supported was Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet Minh and the future communist leader of North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh had hoped for U.S. support for independence following WWII, but support never came because of various political pressures from France.¹⁴¹ An Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officer who worked with Ho during WWII said that many in the OSS admired the Viet Minh and

¹⁴⁰ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 56.

¹⁴¹ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 17.

supported siding with them for independence.¹⁴² France forcefully communicated its desires to retain control of Indochina to the United States, despite only liberating Paris shortly before. In a message to Washington, Paris said, “If the public here comes to realize that you are against us in Indochina, there will be terrific disappointment, and nobody knows to what that will lead. We do not want to become Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit; but I hope that you do not push us into it.”¹⁴³ In the end, the United States reluctantly supported France, and the French supported the Vietnamese Emperor, Bao Dai.

France’s attempt to reassert control after WWII spiraled into a conflict with the various Vietnamese nationalist and communist groups, known as the First Indochina War. France’s defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu by the Viet Minh led to French capitulations outlined in the Geneva Accords.¹⁴⁴ The Geneva Accords of 1954 had several applications that are relevant to the Vietnam War: it split Vietnam into two separate countries at the seventeenth parallel, restricted the two Vietnams from obtaining foreign military assistance, and stipulated a date for unification elections in 1956.¹⁴⁵ North Vietnam would be under the control of Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, while South Vietnam would be under the control of Emperor Bao Dai. Neither Bao Dai’s representatives nor the United States signed the Geneva Accords, and neither felt obliged to follow it.

Emperor Bao Dai quickly conceded control of South Vietnam to Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese nationalist who fought against Japanese and French control. Ngo Dinh Diem was a complicated figure representing the political interests of the GVN. Diem maintained political control of GVN from 1955 when he won a referendum to become head of state, until his assassination in 1963.¹⁴⁶ Diem’s control spans the majority of the period of study

¹⁴² Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam?: Prelude to America’s Albatross* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 17.

¹⁴³ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ Moyar, 29.

¹⁴⁵ Moyar, 30.

¹⁴⁶ William Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam: Insurgency, Subversion and Public Order* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 145, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203029664>.

and is, therefore, a critical aspect of understanding GVN's political interests. Bao Dai specifically asked Diem to become premier and consented to his "total control over all civilian and military matters."¹⁴⁷ Many, including the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, criticize Diem for being self-interested and corrupt, but many others admired Diem. Historian Mark Moyar generally aligns his thoughts on Diem with that of then-U.S. military advisor in Vietnam and U.S. military icon of the Philippine partnership effort, Edward Lansdale, believing that Diem was a misunderstood but a good man. Moyar cites Lansdale who said of the misunderstanding of Diem,

When someone describes him as an aloof mandarin, I recall how he cried on my shoulder when our close friend, Trinh Minh The, was killed, his anguish over the loss of Phat Diem province in the North to the Communists, and the agony he went through in his final break with Chief of State Bao Dai. He simply doesn't parade his feelings for everyone to see, particularly when things are going wrong.¹⁴⁸

Moyar argues that Diem was in an impossible position. He states,

No ideology that Diem could have chosen would have both satisfied the intellectuals and permitted his anti-Communist government to survive, for the liberal methods that appealed to the Westernized intelligentsia were the opposite of the authoritarian methods needed to control the masses and shield them from subversives.¹⁴⁹

Diem may have been in a difficult position; however, his political methods of control were sometimes morally questionable. Diem was torn between protecting his own power and defending against the communist threat. He certainly wanted to defend against communism, but he also wanted to retain Vietnam's sovereignty and run the country in his own way. Diem's desire to run Vietnam in his own way did not appeal to the United States, which often tried to project an image of itself onto Vietnam, an image that did not fit correctly.¹⁵⁰ Diem's power over South Vietnam was always tenuous. From the very

¹⁴⁷ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 33.

¹⁴⁸ Moyar, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Moyar, 37.

¹⁵⁰ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 60; Odom, "Broken Mirrors," 17.

beginning of Diem's reign, rumors of coups and plots against him were everywhere.¹⁵¹ Diem often promoted his political supporters within the ARVN and the GVN because of this and placed his brothers and in-laws, the Nhu's, in the highest positions of government.¹⁵² In 1956, Diem ended the "ancient Vietnamese tradition that permitted the peasantry to elect village officials" and required those positions to be personally appointed by him.¹⁵³ Diem's actions often went against the United States' desires but may have been necessary for Diem to defend against opposing factions within South Vietnam.

Despite the use of harsh measures, Diem's rise to power was impressive when considering all of the obstacles he contended with from the very beginning. When Diem came to power in 1954 South Vietnam was stripped of the numerous catholic districts in the north that would have been a basis of Diem's support, Viet Minh supporters were spread across the countryside, two dominant French-supported armed politico-religious groups (Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao) opposed him, and a powerful gangster organization called the Binh Xuyen controlled much of the capital of Saigon.¹⁵⁴ The ARVN was almost entirely incapable of combat operations and was now in a nation with four other competing armies: the French Expeditionary Corps, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, and the Binh Xuyen.¹⁵⁵ It seemed that everyone that had any power in South Vietnam was opposed to Diem; in 1955, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, and the Binh Xuyen joined forces, likely with encouragement from the French, in order to oppose Diem's government.¹⁵⁶ It is reasonable to assume that the French opposed Diem as a way to maintain the ability to manipulate the GVN due to Diem's consistent opposition to French since the end of WWII. Diem secured the support of the United States and quickly defeated the immediate non-communist threats to his power, but the threats posed by non-communist factions influenced Diem's regime throughout his time in power.

¹⁵¹ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 41.

¹⁵² Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 26.

¹⁵³ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 48.

¹⁵⁴ Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support*, 225.

¹⁵⁵ Spector, 225–26.

¹⁵⁶ Spector, 247.

Diem contended with several coup attempts throughout his reign. By 1963, support for Diem, both within South Vietnam and the United States, began to deteriorate because of perceived authoritarianism and inadequacy at addressing the communist insurgency. As support for Diem began to deteriorate, a highly publicized confrontation with Buddhist protesters in 1963 had significant negative consequences by degrading public support for Diem in the United States.¹⁵⁷ Shortly after the protests, a South Vietnamese general assassinated Diem in a coup that took control of the government. Diem's assassination marked a turning point in the GVN.

Following Diem's assassination in 1963, the GVN became very unstable and endured several more coups. Vietnam historian Guenter Lewy stated,

as it turned out, we did not win with Diem's successors, who shared most of Diem's shortcomings, while in addition they lacked his prestige as a nationalist and mandarin-father figure, and therefore never enjoyed the respect and support of either the country's educated elite or the common people.¹⁵⁸

The power of the GVN to govern diminished following Diem and contributed to the need for the United States to escalate the conflict and introduce large numbers of ground combat troops to assist, as opposed to remaining in an advisor and supplier role.

The United States government, rightly or wrongly, placed an enormous strategic value on Vietnam and Indochina because of what is known as the domino theory. George Kennan's "Mr. X" paper in 1947 is what sparked and mobilized the idea of containment of communism by arguing that communism would fail on its own if not allowed to expand.¹⁵⁹ Several of Kennan's ideas were incorporated into National Security Council (NSC) policy paper "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," better known as NSC 68.¹⁶⁰ President Eisenhower aligned his thoughts and actions to the domino theory

¹⁵⁷ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Lewy, 28.

¹⁵⁹ George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct.," *Foreign Affairs*; *New York* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 581.

¹⁶⁰ Ken Young, "Revisiting NSC 68," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 12–13, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00306.

and NSC 68. He argued for the importance of Vietnam and Indochina in 1954 by referencing the effect that Indochina's fall to communism would have on the rest of the region.¹⁶¹

While the United States may have overstated the importance of Vietnam, many of the surrounding nations were, in fact, nervously monitoring the U.S. defense of capitalist nations for fear of their own security. Almost all the surrounding capitalist nations were facing threats from communist guerrilla movements, including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines.¹⁶² Even more powerful independent nations in the region, such as India and Japan, were watching the region closely due to potential economic impacts. Whether the fall of Vietnam would have led to the eventual fall of all the others is irrelevant because the U.S. leaders at the time believed that they would. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson were believers in the domino theory and the strategic importance of Vietnam.

While Diem was attempting to consolidate his political control and defend against the Communists, the United States cycled through different strategies on how to approach the GVN politically. The partnership between the GVN and the United States from 1954—1964 spanned three U.S. presidents, who each had varying approaches to achieve political interests with the GVN. Each president during this period increased the amount of aid and support to the GVN. Each increase in aid came with a different structure of interorganizational ties, which changed the nature of the partnership with GVN.

President Eisenhower thought that “Indochina was worth saving if the United States could save it by sending additional military aid or employing more of its airpower, but it was not valuable enough to warrant sending American combat troops.”¹⁶³ Following the Geneva Accords, Eisenhower helped organize and create a regional defense strategy that relied on deterrence, the threat of massive retaliation, and supporting indigenous leaders.

¹⁶¹ Jason Dittmer and Jo Sharp, *Geopolitics: An Introductory Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), chap. 14.

¹⁶² Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 139–41.

¹⁶³ Moyar, 27.

In 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was signed by Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States with Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam listed as protected nations instead of signatories due to restrictions from the Geneva Accords.¹⁶⁴ This alliance was essentially Asia's version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). SEATO, along with the threat of nuclear weapons, air, and naval power, was meant to deter any large-scale war and eliminate the need for U.S. ground troops. Eisenhower wanted to conserve resources for the long fight against communism. William Rosenau, a researcher, stated, "Conserving American resources for this long period of competitive co-existence was central to Eisenhower's national security strategy."¹⁶⁵ Eisenhower had to balance participation and support to Vietnam with global security interests, making complete devotion almost impossible.

President Kennedy's strategic thought on how to support South Vietnam diverged from President Eisenhower's, but he too believed in the importance of defending the nation from communism. Kennedy was less reliant on conventional deterrent measures such as Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy. When Kennedy assumed the presidency in 1961, the United States had only 685 advisors under the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Vietnam.¹⁶⁶ Kennedy immediately increased the number of advisors and increased the number of U.S. Special Forces to conduct training on counter-insurgency tactics. In 1962, Kennedy stepped-up U.S. involvement again, replacing the MAAG with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MAC-V), increasing advisors and material support, and approving the use of defoliants to burn the jungle used by guerrillas as cover.¹⁶⁷ By the end of 1963, the year that both Kennedy and Diem were assassinated, the United States had 16,263 military personnel in Vietnam.¹⁶⁸ The beginning of Kennedy's

¹⁶⁴ Moyar, 32.

¹⁶⁵ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 112.

¹⁶⁷ Zhai, 114.

¹⁶⁸ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 24.

presidency marked a turning point in the partnership; it increased training and support while focusing more efforts toward counterinsurgency.

President Johnson also placed a high priority on defending South Vietnam from communism, especially as the threat from the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Vietnamese Communists (VC) heightened. Johnson's presidency also marks a turning point that transformed the partnership into a massive U.S. intervention. The change to a massive U.S. intervention shows that the United States viewed the previous partnership as a failure because the GVN could not stand on its own. So, the priority of this analysis will focus on the years before Johnson's increase in support, but briefly acknowledging the events in the post-Kennedy years is useful.

Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, the U.S. Congress granted President Johnson the authority to use military force against North Vietnam.¹⁶⁹ This led to a massive conventional buildup of U.S. forces to protect the GVN. The U.S. buildup continued until the Tet Offensive in 1968 when the Vietnam War as a whole came into question.¹⁷⁰ After the Tet offensive, the U.S. and President Nixon eventually sought peace with honor.¹⁷¹ The United States, under President Nixon, eventually signed the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, which allowed for peace and the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops. Two years after the Paris Peace Accords, North Vietnam broke the treaty and achieved a decisive victory over the GVN with a conventional military invasion. Ultimately, all the money and effort the United States exerted to support the GVN was wasted. Although the efforts, especially at the security force level, were eventually for nothing, it is crucial to outline what the military and security efforts were from 1954—1964 in order to explore why the early failed partnership led to escalation.

¹⁶⁹ Richard J. Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution: America's Confrontation with Insurgent Movements Around the World.*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: World Pub. Co, 1968), 217; Richard A. Cherwitz, "Lyndon Johnson and the 'Crisis' of Tonkin Gulf: A President's Justification of War," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 42, no. 2 (August 1, 1978): 93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570317809373928>.

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Walton, "The Tet Offensive: The Turning Point of the Vietnam War," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2004): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/18.5.45>.

¹⁷¹ Andrew Z. Katz, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Nixon Administration and the Pursuit of Peace with Honor in Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1997): 507.

At the security force level, U.S. support came in a variety of means to police, paramilitary, and the military. In addition to training the ARVN for external threats, the United States focused considerably on developing internal security in the GVN through partnerships with several primary units: Self-Defense Corps (SDC), the Civil Guard (CG), and a paramilitary unit called Sûreté (later named Vietnam Bureau of Investigation (VBI)).¹⁷² These units were “generally poorly equipped, ill-trained, and poorly disciplined” with “ammunition that was limited and so old that only about one round in seven was likely actually to fire.”¹⁷³ The United States focused on making the ARVN capable of defending against a conventional military invasion from the North, attempting to separate the military from internal security. This separation would prove to become a problem when the Viet Cong increased guerrilla attacks. Some noted that “while the Viet Cong appeared able to hit Civil Guard Posts and grab off officials with apparent ease, they usually give the Army and Marines a wide berth.”¹⁷⁴

Beginning in 1955, the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) provided police and public administration specialists to advise Vietnam on police, paramilitary assistance, and internal security forces through training and advice on organization and modernization.¹⁷⁵ The group set up a six-week basic training course for the CG and advised the GVN to utilize them as a strictly civilian police force. The strict civil police role was the opposite of what Diem and the MAAG wanted. Diem wanted the use the CG as a loyal army that he could use against disloyal factions, while General Williams viewed the MSUG as “police types who don’t see the big picture.”¹⁷⁶

The internal U.S. debate over the role of the CG continued throughout the early partnership with GVN, with the MAAG only gaining control over the unit’s training in late 1960.¹⁷⁷ MSUG attempts to improve the CG failed because of two primary factors that are

¹⁷² Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 47.

¹⁷³ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 321.

¹⁷⁴ Spector, 340.

¹⁷⁵ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 51.

¹⁷⁶ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 322.

¹⁷⁷ Spector, 368.

relevant to this study. First, the MSUG advisors had limited operational control over the CG.¹⁷⁸ Second, the MSUG refused to create the capabilities that the CG needed in order to be successful against insurgents because of a desire to build a police force off of the U.S. model.¹⁷⁹ After the MAAG took control of the CG from MSUG, the CG became militarized but “solved none of Vietnam’s military or internal security problems.”¹⁸⁰

MSUG’s problems with the CG carried over to its efforts with other GVN security forces. MSUG served as a mediator between the Vietnamese police clients and the aid bureaucracy, and would help supply \$10 million in resources, which included communications equipment, small arms, ammunition, fingerprinting equipment, and motor vehicles to various units.¹⁸¹ Sûreté and other GVN police forces were “tainted by corruption, incompetence, and an unpalatable French colonial legacy.”¹⁸² The corruption caused much of the population to lose confidence in the GVN. MSUG recognized other problems with Sûreté, including inept leadership, technical and organizational problems, inefficient decentralization, and nepotism. Diem resisted some of MSUG’s proposals to address these issues because he feared the centralization of the internal security apparatus as a threat to his regime.¹⁸³ Sûreté had a long history of partisanship and of being used as a political instrument to retain power, which is why MSUG likely encouraged them to change the name to the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation (VBI).¹⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, Washington became concerned about “the ability of university professors to advise and train Vietnam’s counter-subversive police.”¹⁸⁵ To address this concern, Eisenhower began

¹⁷⁸ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 64.

¹⁷⁹ Rosenau, 64–65.

¹⁸⁰ Rosenau, 75.

¹⁸¹ Rosenau, 51.

¹⁸² Rosenau, 52.

¹⁸³ Rosenau, 53.

¹⁸⁴ Rosenau, 54.

¹⁸⁵ Rosenau, 55.

using agents from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to work under the auspices of MSUG to improve and oversee training efforts.¹⁸⁶

The MAAG took on the responsibility of training and advising the ARVN. In 1954, the MAAG was a small organization, “woefully inadequate to assume the entire burden of training [the ARVN],” but steadily grew in personnel, responsibility, and scope of engagement.¹⁸⁷ General O’Daniel, the MAAG commander in 1955, consistently recommended to the ARVN and the GVN to concentrate all of the dispersed units into larger divisions so that they could defend against a potential conventional invasion from North Vietnam from a few strategic locations.¹⁸⁸ This was a consistent flaw in the thinking at that time, because it overlooked the need of the ARVN to provide internal security functions for GVN supporters against hostile sects and the Viet Cong. The MAAG generally did not want to get in the business of internal security, which it viewed as a role for police forces. Many would accuse the MAAG, and other U.S. agencies that were supporting the GVN, of protecting its own organizational interests instead of U.S. national interest.¹⁸⁹ The replacement for General O’Daniel, General Williams, also focused on preparing for defense against a conventional invasion, viewing guerrillas and insurgencies as a diversion.¹⁹⁰

The unimpressive performance of the Self-Defense Corps (SDC), a “rural militia established by the Vietnamese president,” was a source of contention between Diem and officials like U.S. Ambassador Dubrow.¹⁹¹ The MAAG, however, had high hopes for the SDC, envisioning success as a static force to defend the countryside. Although the SDC had problems with communist infiltration into its units, competency, and corruption

¹⁸⁶ Rosenau, 56.

¹⁸⁷ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 256.

¹⁸⁸ Spector, 265.

¹⁸⁹ R. W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict*, Westview Special Studies in National Security and Defense Policy (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986); Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1972), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R967.html>.

¹⁹⁰ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 273.

¹⁹¹ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 57.

concerns, the MAAG supported militarizing it in order to allow the ARVN to concentrate on conventional war preparation with North Vietnam.¹⁹²

In 1960, Diem established new elite ranger companies from volunteers from the ARVN and CG, and he requested U.S. Special Forces (SF) from the MAAG to assist with the commando training.¹⁹³ Diem's proposal met resistance from General Williams and the MAAG, despite support from DOD's Advanced Research Project Agency.¹⁹⁴ William's concerns about additional SF personnel breaking Geneva Accords restrictions on increasing manpower to train the commando units were bypassed by only assigning them on temporary duty.¹⁹⁵ In August 1960, General Williams was succeeded by General McGarr, a commander much more friendly to the development of the ranger units.¹⁹⁶ The training of the GVN ranger units as mobile strike forces was different from other SF efforts made in pacification and counter-insurgency.

SF units supported the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) until the whole operation was turned over to SF beginning in 1962.¹⁹⁷ The CIDG program transferred to the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV) under the name Operation SWITCHBACK. This program focused on pacifying villages and tribes that were not under substantial GVN control. SF personnel, along with the CIA, trained villagers to fortify their towns and developed local strike forces that could respond with small arms if anyone in the village came under communist attack. SF and CIA focused on ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands area, especially the Montagnard tribes. The CIDG focus on pacification was, by many accounts, very successful. Krepinevich reports that the CIA "considered the program a rousing success, and for good reason: by the end of 1962 the CIDG political action program had recovered and secured several hundred villages, some three hundred thousand civilians,

¹⁹² Rosenau, 59.

¹⁹³ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 349–50.

¹⁹⁴ Spector, 351–350.

¹⁹⁵ Spector, 354.

¹⁹⁶ Spector, 365.

¹⁹⁷ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1988, 71.

and several hundred square miles of territory from the [Viet Cong].”¹⁹⁸ The local pacification effort had a very high success rate against Viet Cong attacks and villages were voluntarily opting into the program.¹⁹⁹ Despite the success at local pacification, MACV quickly changed the nature of CIDG once it assumed control from the CIA in 1963. Operation SWITCHBACK would eventually shift the local tribes’ focus from mutually supportive village defenses to offensive operations and border surveillance operations.²⁰⁰ By late 1963, CIDG forces would be incorporated into the broader military pacification effort, the strategic hamlet program.²⁰¹

The strategic hamlet program showed initial signs of success at protecting government-controlled villages. As opposed to CIDG, strategic hamlets were focused on areas where the local population was in theory under the control of GVN. The program officially began in February 1962 and attempted to consolidate the rural population into areas that the ARVN protected, but earlier strategic hamlet efforts with similar intent were initiated in response to Viet Cong escalation in 1959.²⁰² By mid-1962, GVN reported over 3,000 strategic hamlets. These hamlets were meant to isolate the population from the Viet Cong and to protect against communist attacks. The United States’ plan for the strategic hamlets was to use the VBI to gather intelligence on the Viet Cong, the CG to patrol and secure areas between the hamlets, the SDC to provide security within the hamlets, and the ARVN to keep the Viet Cong off balance by using small unit patrols.²⁰³ Although not necessarily a weak operational plan, the failure in the years before to address the ineffectiveness of the VBI, CG, SDC, and the ARVN all contributed to the failure of the strategic hamlets. Rosenau stated, “Ultimately, however, the strategic hamlets never

¹⁹⁸ Krepinevich, 71.

¹⁹⁹ Francis John Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1973), 20–28, <https://history.army.mil/html/books/090/90-23-1/index.html>; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1988, 70.

²⁰⁰ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1988, 73.

²⁰¹ Krepinevich, 74.

²⁰² Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 25; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 332–33.

²⁰³ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 114.

proved to be a significant obstacle to the insurgents, who by infiltration and destruction managed to ‘liberate’ three-quarters of them.”²⁰⁴

While the United States implemented partnerships and support programs to aid the GVN, the PRC developed plans for the subversion of South Vietnam. Qiang Zhai, the author of *China & The Vietnam Wars, 1950—1975*, stated that Mao’s interest in supporting North Vietnam was “motivated by a complex blend of geopolitical, ideological, and historical factors.”²⁰⁵ Geopolitically, Mao wanted a security bubble from capitalist nations. Mao viewed Vietnam, similar to Korea and Taiwan, as an area from where the United States, or even remnant Chinese nationalist forces, could launch invasions.²⁰⁶ Ideologically, Mao was aligned with the international spread of communism and he maintained his revolutionary mindset even after the PRC came into power.²⁰⁷ Mao believed that he personally had a “special role to play in reshaping of a future revolutionary order in the world.”²⁰⁸ Finally, from a historical sense, Mao viewed North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh as tied to China through recent and distant history. Indochina had been “within the tributary system” of China for over 1,000 years, and previous Chinese emperors intervened on several occasions to defeat both domestic uprisings and foreign invasions.²⁰⁹ Before French influence in the region in the 1800s, all influential Vietnamese “learned the Chinese language and the cultural and ethical principles embedded in it.”²¹⁰ Mao not only looked back on the long history of China’s cultural and political domination of Vietnam, but he also remembered Ho Chi Minh’s and the Viet Minh’s “timely and crucial assistance that Ho had provided for their forces in southern China in 1946 when they faced annihilation by the KMT [Chinese nationalist] troops.”²¹¹ While the PRC under Mao had

²⁰⁴ Rosenau, 116.

²⁰⁵ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 20.

²⁰⁶ Zhai, 20.

²⁰⁷ Zhai, 21.

²⁰⁸ Zhai, 21.

²⁰⁹ Zhai, 24.

²¹⁰ Zhai, 24.

²¹¹ Zhai, 23.

extensive perceived benefits to supporting North Vietnam, the actual support ebbed and flowed under domestic and international pressures.

Before the Geneva Conference in 1954, Mao provided aggressive support to North Vietnam to use against the French. Mao influenced Ho Chi Minh to pursue an aggressive Dien Bien Phu campaign in order to enable the communists to negotiate from a position of strength.²¹² After the Geneva Conference, Mao and the PRC temporarily lessened support and encouraged North Vietnam to pursue non-violent means to achieve unification. Mao wanted to “reduce tensions in Asia and to concentrate on the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan [domestic reform plans] at home.”²¹³ Mao’s thoughts immediately following the Geneva Conference were in line with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai’s Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which supported a moderate policy in Vietnam.²¹⁴ Essentially, the PRC “played an important role in the Viet Minh victory over the French” between 1950 and 1954 but began to support a more diplomatic and non-violent approach to Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva Accords.²¹⁵ Chinese leaders “advised caution and patience, urging the Vietnamese to make preparations and wait for opportunities” when it came to unifying the North and South.²¹⁶

Despite evidence that domestic concerns drove the PRC’s moderation after the Geneva Accords, the United States also influenced the PRC by instilling fear of a sizeable Korea-like war. Mao had, on several occasions, showed fear of retaliation by the United States and the SEATO alliance. For example, during the second Strait of Taiwan crisis in 1958, Mao “strictly forbade his generals to engage American warships.”²¹⁷ This restriction is an example of Mao’s desire to limit direct military engagement with the United States, conceivably because of the high costs that a conflict presented. Unfortunately, Mao’s initial

²¹² Zhai, 50.

²¹³ Zhai, 50.

²¹⁴ Zhai, 54.

²¹⁵ Zhai, 63.

²¹⁶ Zhai, 69.

²¹⁷ Zhai, 82.

risk-averse thought process encouraged North Vietnam to build up support for an insurgency and refrain from direct military invasion.

As President Kennedy increased U.S. intervention in South Vietnam, the PRC responded with an increase in support to North Vietnam. Policy debate within the PRC in 1962 resulted from Kennedy's increased support. While some notable PRC leaders still advised international moderation and domestic focus, many within the PRC began to see moderation as failing. Most importantly, Mao began to view peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries as unrealistic, leading to his decision to support national liberation movements with more vigor.²¹⁸ Mao even had the Korean War as a template to use Chinese troops as 'volunteers' in the case of a U.S. invasion into the North. In June of 1964, Mao told North Vietnamese Army officials that "if the United States invaded North Vietnam, China would send troops to the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam or North Vietnam] in the form of volunteers."²¹⁹

China and North Vietnam's interests and support for operations against South Vietnam had more success than the United States' support for the GVN. Despite all the initiatives and support that the United States provided to the GVN at the military level, the armed forces of the GVN were not adequate and the U.S. effort did not have the desired effect on the communist rivals. Vietnam scholar, Andrew Krepinevich, wrote it best when he stated, "From 1954 to 1965 the Army failed to generate forces in the [GVN Armed Forces] capable of efficiently combating insurgencies."²²⁰ Moreover, the ARVN was also not capable of combatting conventional attacks, for even the larger ARVN units did not have a high success rate against DRV forces, often throwing away their weapons when attacked. The Battle of Ap Bac in 1963 is a classic example of the failures of the ARVN in conventional battle, where "vastly superior Vietnamese Army forces [ARVN] supported by helicopters and armored personnel carriers were defeated by a battalion of Viet

²¹⁸ Zhai, 114.

²¹⁹ Zhai, 131.

²²⁰ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1988, 131.

Cong.”²²¹ The following sections will apply the U.S. and GVN partnership to the framework to explore why U.S. efforts did not create a capable force nor achieve the desired effect on China. This application of the framework provides an example of how the framework can be used, tests the framework for usefulness, and explores Chinese reactions to military partnerships in the past. The first component of the framework—willingness—will provide the first look at problems with the partnership.

B. WILLINGNESS

There are several criteria to consider when evaluating a potential partner in GPC: the *initial overlap of interests*, the *incentives* used by the principal to influence the desired behavior, the *uncertainty* of the success of the task, and the *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent. Overall, the willingness of the GVN left much to be desired. The gaps in willingness, as exposed by the partnership framework, seem to stem from an overestimation of initial overlap of interests on both sides, weaknesses in incentive structures, and substantial information asymmetry. The United States and the GVN did have a significant initial overlap of interests, but the overlap led the GVN to believe that it had significantly more control over the United States than in reality. The incentive structures were loose and behavior-based, which shifted risk to the United States. The uncertainty in the ability to obtain the objectives was high and the information asymmetry was substantial.

The United States and the Government of Vietnam (GVN) had a significant *initial overlap of interests* at the political level, but there were also noteworthy gaps. Each wanted to prevent South Vietnam from falling into the control of the communists. Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson all placed considerable strategic importance on defending Vietnam because of the potential domino effect. However, the overlap of interests and the United States’ constant shows of resolve to the communist countries allowed Diem and the GVN to believe that the United States would never leave. Lewy stated that “while these shows of resolve had little if any effect on the Communists, they did indicate to Diem that there

²²¹ Ronald H. Spector, “US Army Strategy in the Vietnam War,” *International Security* 11, no. 4 (1987): 134.

was no danger of the U.S. suddenly abandoning South Vietnam.”²²² Diem’s belief that the United States’ interests were, perhaps, more overlapped with his own than in reality encouraged him to pursue his domestic interests against American advice. Diem primarily wanted to retain and consolidate his own domestic power, therefore, he often supported unqualified leadership within the government and the armed forces due to their political support. The United States, on the other hand, was focused toward balancing global security commitments against communism. Many viewed the defense of Europe as more significant than that of Asia. This disagreement allowed for the United States to break from the GVN and pursue its political interests in other areas, as evidenced by the withdrawal years leading up to 1973.

At the security force level, the *initial overlap of interests* was often lacking for two primary reasons: the U.S. military and other U.S. advisors often had their own organizational interests, and the ARVN and GVN security forces were rampant with corruption. The MAAG and MAC-V tended to focus on what they knew best, conventional warfare. The MSUG focused on what it knew best, civil policing actions. The partnerships at the security force level from the American perspective tried to turn the South Vietnamese partners into American institutions. The MAAG, MAC-V, and MSUG all focused on initiatives that would benefit their own organization and which were in line with their view of the conflict. From the South Vietnamese side, some security force partners were devoted and successful, but many were corrupt and ineffective. The organizational interests of U.S. advisors, combined with the corruption of the GVN units, made the relationships between security forces tenuous.

The *incentives* used by the United States to influence Vietnam’s behavior were ineffective in producing the desired effects despite the considerable power it gave to the United States. The incentives consisted of an enormous amount of support through military advisors, equipment, loans, and the use of international power to shape the political environment. In the later years of the war, the United States provided so much support to Vietnam that it became counterproductive. Robert Komer, known as “Blowtorch Bob”

²²² Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 20.

during Vietnam for his familiarity with counterinsurgency, said, “The very massiveness of our intervention actually reduced our leverage. So long as we were willing to use U.S. resources and manpower as a substitute for Vietnamese, their incentive for doing more was compromised.”²²³ In a typical year, the United States would pay for over 80% of all GVN military expenditures and almost 50% of all GVN non-military expenditures through some form of aid.²²⁴ To say that the GVN was reliant on these incentives would be an understatement; the GVN would almost certainly have collapsed without the aid. GVN’s significant reliance on the United States, unfortunately, had limited effects on controlling Diem and the ARVN because of the minor stipulations attached to the aid. The incentives that the United States used were behavior-based instead of outcome-based, resulting in enough flexibility for the GVN to maintain the status quo in South Vietnam. For example, the United States provided military equipment and aid to the GVN up front, with the expectation that the GVN would continue resisting communist advances. Weak incentive structures did not cause the unwillingness of the GVN alone. Uncertainty in the conflict and information asymmetry both contributed to the lack of willingness.

The *uncertainty* within partnerships, with respect to the ability to complete and monitor objectives, directly impacts the portion of risk sharing between the principal and the agent. In the case of Vietnam, both completing and monitoring the objectives were very uncertain. The United States’ objectives were to secure the GVN and the population from Viet Cong attacks, as well as deter and, if necessary, repel a conventional invasion by a Chinese-supported North Vietnam. When considering the vast diversity of ethnic groups, the rivalry between South Vietnam’s national factions, and the overall lack of enthusiasm for the Diem regime, the uncertainty in repelling Viet Cong attacks was high. All of these internal rivalries within the GVN provided opportunities for the Viet Cong to infiltrate and conduct operations throughout the country.

The ability of the GVN to deter or repel a conventional North Vietnamese attack was also very uncertain because of the operational sanctuaries outside the borders of South

²²³ Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 34; Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 2002, 182.

²²⁴ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 306.

Vietnam and the significant foreign support. The North Vietnamese had extensive military support from China and had sanctuary in the countries of Laos, Cambodia, and China. This sanctuary gave North Vietnam the initiative and ability to attack when and where it suited them. When considering that the United States exercised restraint against North Vietnam and other border countries during this period, it adds additional uncertainty to an already complicated scenario. In addition to difficulties and uncertainties achieving objectives, monitoring objectives was also a problem for the United States because of a variety of factors that led to information asymmetry.

The *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent, in this case, was considerable for several reasons. First, the cultural differences created problems in understanding and encouraged the GVN to mislead the United States. Second, the ARVN conducted operations across the entire countryside and it was impossible for the United States to monitor everything. Examples of the significant information asymmetry are numerous. For example, concerning the reported success of the strategic hamlets, the United States eventually found out that the GVN reports were wildly exaggerated and that most of the reported hamlets were only on paper.²²⁵ Additionally, the CIA realized in 1960 that Vietnamese reports from provinces were “routinely doctored to make it appear that they were continually conducting successful anti-communist operations.”²²⁶ Army historian Ronald Spector noted that “the deliberate falsification of operational reports plus the lack of any reliable and precise method for advisers to assess the effectiveness of their units may account for the failure of Americans in the advisory group.”²²⁷ The GVN and the ARVN consistently misled or lied to the United States to benefit their own interests. The vastness of the countryside and the dispersed operations of the Viet Cong made monitoring actions of the GVN expensive and challenging. The United States was required to take the GVN at their word far too often within the established incentive structures.

²²⁵ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 25.

²²⁶ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 343.

²²⁷ Spector, 343.

In summary, this framework exposes the deficiencies in GVN's willingness. The United States and the GVN undoubtedly had sufficient *initial overlap of interests*, but it was an overestimation of the overlap by both sides that led to problems. The United States implemented loosely controlled, behavior-based *incentive* structures, which created significant risk. The uncertainty in the ability to obtain the objectives was high and the information asymmetry was substantial. Robert Komer stated, "we did not use vigorously the leverage over the Vietnamese leaders that our contributions gave us. We became their prisoners rather than they ours; the GVN used its weakness far more effectively as leverage on us than we used our strength to lever it."²²⁸ Komer's quote is an accurate summary of the problem with the willingness of the GVN. Unfortunately, the low willingness of the GVN and the ARVN is only the beginning of the problems with partnership in South Vietnam. The GVN and the ARVN also had weaknesses in capability that the second component of the framework exposes.

C. CAPABILITY

There are several evaluation criteria to consider when evaluating the capability of a partner: the *strategy*, the *initial capabilities* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties* (vertical, horizontal, the means with which collective efficiencies were achieved), and the *principal's techniques* of increasing the agent's capabilities. Despite the substantial interorganizational ties, the United States failed to bring the low initial capability of the armed forces of GVN to an acceptable level. This is due to a combination of several factors, including low initial capabilities, lack of coordination between many interorganizational ties, and a failure to use best practices in building partner capacity.

The successes and failures of the *strategy* in Vietnam are debated, even today. Colonel Summers, the author of *On Strategy*, said in 1982 that "it is indicative of our strategic failure in Vietnam that almost a decade after our involvement the true nature of

²²⁸ Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, vi.

the Vietnam war is still in question.”²²⁹ Summers argues that the failure in Vietnam was ultimately due to inadequate conventional forces. Conversely, scholars such as Andrew Krepinevich argue the opposite, that our defeat was due to our over-reliance on conventional methods and failure to prioritize counterinsurgency.²³⁰ Despite disagreements about the strategy in the later years of involvement under Johnson and Nixon, the broad strategy in the early years followed a reasonable path. Even Summers said that “from the French withdrawal in 1954 until President Diem’s assassination in 1963, the American response was essentially correct. The task at hand was one of assisting South Vietnam to become a viable nation state, and the U.S. military advisors contributed to that end.”²³¹ Partnership with the GVN was the bedrock of the strategy in Vietnam, at least until the escalation years in 1964—1965.

Immediately following the 1954 Geneva Accords, President Eisenhower developed a Southeast Asia strategy that “in order to guard the line, against both conventional invasion and covert subversion, the United States would give aid to allies and participate in a collective defense organization in the region [SEATO].”²³² The aid and the deterrent support of SEATO were the means. Utilizing training and various interorganizational ties with GVN were the ways. The ends were a free South Vietnam and the containment of communism. The risk in this strategy was that the U.S. would place too much effort on a nation with a weak foundation. This risk is now painfully obvious when considering the eventual downfall of the GVN.

The *initial capabilities* of the GVN armed forces were meager at the beginning of the U.S. partnership in 1954. On almost all fronts, the GVN and the ARVN had extreme deficiencies. The nation itself was in ruins. Diem took control of a South Vietnam that “showed all the symptoms of a country despoiled by prolonged warfare.”²³³ This ruin

²²⁹ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 1995), 83.

²³⁰ Spector, “US Army Strategy in the Vietnam War,” 131; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 1988.

²³¹ Summers, *On Strategy*, 86.

²³² Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 32.

²³³ Moyar, 33.

included blown up bridges, destroyed infrastructure, displaced peasants, overburdened public facilities, an exodus of French business and investment, and a deficiency in military machinery. Additionally, the political power of the Diem regime was always under pressure from internal competition.

From a military standpoint, GVN's initial capabilities were equally low. One report stated, "The Vietnamese National Army lacks everything which makes a modern army: leadership, morale, training, and combat experience."²³⁴ The ARVN had previously relied heavily on the French for external security and therefore lacked the structure of a large army. Nepotism and corruption also contributed to the weakness of the leadership within the ARVN.

In addition to weakness in the ARVN, the internal security forces also lacked capability. The internal security forces were so weak that "the paramilitary forces could not even protect themselves."²³⁵ The CG was equipped with obsolete French firearms and equipment. Rosenau said of the CG, "Discipline was poor, many guardsmen were illiterate, and morale was low. The force lacked experienced officers and instructors, its training facilities were non-existent, and its communication network was antiquated."²³⁶ VBI and the CG remained corrupt and brutal in the field while lacking the proper equipment and procedures necessary for investigative or paramilitary work. To balance out the weak initial capabilities of the GVN security forces, the United States created extensive interorganizational ties to provide equipment, training, and advice.

The *structure of the interorganizational ties* between the United States and the GVN was an extensive array of vertical and horizontal ties. The massive effort by the United States spread across a variety of GVN security forces and used a variety of U.S. personnel. Vertically, the United States did build and create brand new units and capabilities that did not exist before. Additionally, the United States provided its own

²³⁴ Moyar, 34.

²³⁵ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 117.

²³⁶ Rosenau, 61.

unilateral capabilities for specific missions and deterrent effects. Horizontally, the United States trained already existing GVN security forces.

The CIDG is an example of a vertical interorganizational tie between the GVN and the United States. The United States, through the CIA and U.S. Special Forces, created an entirely new capability within the central highland tribes to defend themselves and eventually conduct offensive operations and reconnaissance missions. The partnership with the central highland tribes was one of the few successful partnerships within Vietnam. The tribes, although many fought against the French and the Viet Minh previously, benefited greatly from the American equipment and training from U.S. Special Forces.

Additional vertical interorganizational ties existed at higher levels with the United States' use of unilateral forces in several ways. The United States utilized its own forces to conduct deterrence shows of force and airstrikes against the enemy. The U.S. Navy was positioned in the South China Sea to restrict blatant North Vietnam shipments of war material to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Additionally, President Kennedy began to use the U.S. Air Force in offensive sorties. Finally, the United States' push for SEATO provided the political leverage needed to support South Vietnam with a vertical relationship.

Horizontal relationships were the most extensive. The United States built upon already existing programs and units to improve manning, training, and equipping. The CG and the VBI were already existing, albeit weak, security forces. Much of the U.S. effort went to building these existing units and their capabilities. The MSUG played a critical role in partnering with the CG and the VBI in the late 1950s by providing material and training. MSUG created basic training courses and eventually trained more than 14,000 guardsmen.²³⁷ When the MAAG took over responsibility for the CG, training and assistance was much more generous, providing for 68,000 guardsmen.²³⁸

The MAAG was also conducting horizontal relationships with the ARVN. The ARVN, like the CG and the VBI, already existed before the partnership with the United

²³⁷ Rosenau, 63.

²³⁸ Rosenau, 74.

States. The beginning of this horizontal relationship with the ARVN was primarily responsible for providing and managing equipment given to the GVN. The ARVN had a significant lack of proper equipment. After the French withdrawal, they “had quickly shipped out the best U.S. equipment, leaving what they did not want in unprotected dumps of in open fields, where it was corroded by heat and rain until the South Vietnamese army scrounged it up.”²³⁹ The primarily equipping relationship eventually evolved into one with more training, advising, and even accompanying ARVN units.

The United States fell short on some, but not all, previously identified *principal’s techniques* of increasing the agent’s capabilities. The United States did not adequately partner with South Vietnam for the long term, which hurt the relationship and the success of the partnership. The advisory group relied on “one year, unaccompanied tours without family members.”²⁴⁰ This frequent rotation and lack of consistent personnel did not align with best practices and did not encourage long term realistic assessments of the ARVN capabilities. Additionally, there was a massive language barrier that the U.S. failed to address in the advisory effort. Between 1956—1959, the U.S. advisors only had an average of twelve personnel with Vietnamese language training.²⁴¹

Not only did the U.S. advisors often fail to create enduring relationships because of short tours and language barriers, they often refrained from establishing close relationships with Vietnamese counterparts. Some believed that they needed close personal relationships to be useful. Still, others believed in keeping some “maneuver distance” from their counterpart in order to ensure that they could have leverage when needed, shield themselves from perceived corruption or unethical actions of the counterparts, and limit the risk of losing respect of the South Vietnamese by being overly friendly.²⁴²

Despite failing to create enduring relationships, the United States did engage at multiple levels within the GVN. The amount of support provided, and the extent of the

²³⁹ Rosenau, 68–69.

²⁴⁰ Odom, “Broken Mirrors,” 24.

²⁴¹ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 286.

²⁴² Spector, 293.

partnership, was conducted through many different U.S. agencies and departments and provided a wide variety of capabilities in the GVN. One could say that it was not the amount of engagement that was the problem in Vietnam but the lack of coordination between the U.S. engagements. Different U.S. organizations consistently fought over the roles of the various GVN security forces, including the CG, SDC, and VBI. The internal squabbling caused a lack of clear direction for some of the units, such as the CG, which spent years receiving training as a police force only to be militarized later on.

Although the United States did not adequately coordinate the extensive engagements or shield Diem from bureaucratic infighting, it did introduce the appropriate level of technology in most cases. For the most part, the United States provided necessary military equipment to the ARVN and GVN internal security forces. However, the level of technology that the U.S. provided was not always perfect. The MSUG tended to provide material that would not meet the insurgent threat, only routine police work. The MAAG provided equipment that was best suited to fight large North Vietnam divisions, not armed guerrillas fighting among the populace. For example, the MSUG advocated for providing internal security forces with only pistols, which were often inadequate to address insurgent attacks.²⁴³ Conversely, the MAAG advocated for providing armored vehicles and tanks which were not useful against guerrilla tactics.

In sum, the initial capabilities of the GVN were meager politically, economically, and militarily. The ARVN and other internal security forces had limited equipment and experience. The United States implemented extensive vertical and horizontal interorganizational ties to overcome initial weakness. Despite the substantial interorganizational ties, the United States failed to bring the low initial capability of the armed forces of GVN to an acceptable level. This failure is due to a combination of several factors, including low initial capabilities, lack of coordination between many interorganizational ties, and a failure to use best practices in building partner capacity. In addition to producing limited willingness and capability within the GVN, the partnership with South Vietnam also did not have the desired effect on the enemies of the PRC, North

²⁴³ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*.

Vietnam, or the Viet Cong, who were able to continue to attack South Vietnam. The third and final component of the framework—effect on the enemy—identifies the impact on enemy decision making.

D. EFFECT ON THE ENEMY

In general, the United States' partnership with the GVN did not produce the desired effects on the PRC, North Vietnam, or the National Liberation Front (NLF or Viet Cong).²⁴⁴ An Assistant Secretary of State in 1964 correctly predicted the coming failure of deterrent efforts against the communists when he said, "In my judgment, significant action against North Vietnam that is taken before we demonstrate success in our counter-insurgency program will be interpreted by the Communists as an act of desperation, and will, therefore, not be effective in persuading the North Vietnamese to cease and desist."²⁴⁵ The primary reason for the PRC, North Vietnam, and the NLF's reaction is because each placed a high value on pressuring the United States. Additional factors include a common desire to spread communism and unify Vietnam. Despite evidence that the United States deterred an all-out invasion of the GVN, the PRC, North Vietnam, and NLF all viewed the potential costs of subversive actions against the GVN as well worth the benefits. Also, cultural differences between the PRC/North Vietnam and the United States resulted in each misreading of the other's signaling and communication. The partnership framework offers the following evaluation criteria for considering effects on the enemy: the *type of cost* used for influence (punishment or denial), the *means of communication* (direct or indirect signaling), and the *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals, including the great power and the proxy.

The *type of cost* that the United States used for influence against the communist organizations of the PRC, North Vietnam, and the NLF was a combination of punishment

²⁴⁴ Although North Vietnam also received support from the Soviet Union, it was generally "leaning toward China in the Sino-Soviet rift." This section will focus on China as the great power supporter instead of the Soviet Union because of North Vietnam's preference. See Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 122.

²⁴⁵ Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy*, 1st ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 536; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 30.

and denial. Much of the early efforts of the United States were denial forms of cost. Efforts to build competent security forces, secure the borders of the GVN, and to secure the population through the strategic hamlet initiatives and predecessor initiatives all fall in the denial category. The United States wanted to make the GVN a hard target by increasing the capability of security forces, both internal and external. Efforts to secure the border came along the 17th parallel border with North Vietnam, along the coast with the U.S. Navy, and eventually along the borders of Laos and Cambodia with border surveillance missions. The denial forms of cost to make the population a hard target came in the form of strategic hamlet initiatives, which, as described earlier, utilized various security forces to protect consolidated communities in the countryside.

In addition to the substantial denial costs implemented, the United States and the GVN eventually started to incorporate more and more punishment costs. The punishment costs include direct costs on the Viet Cong through identifying and targeting of supporters and sympathizers. The United States also punished North Vietnam through eventual cross border operations that ran under Operation SWITCHBACK and the CIDG program. These programs developed local strike forces that conducted operations inside South Vietnam and eventually inside Laos and Cambodia to attack North Vietnamese regulars and identify targets for airstrikes. The United States also began implementing offensive air sorties into North Vietnam under President Kennedy, as a means to apply direct costs on North Vietnam.

The *means of communication* that the United States used to deter and coerce the communist block was a combination of direct and indirect. The United States directly communicated through statements and international media. President Eisenhower and President Kennedy made statements to the American people throughout their terms that stated their seriousness in protecting the GVN and promoting SEATO as a deterrent organization. The presidents' speeches provided the bulk of the early direct communication to the PRC, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong because the United States did not openly negotiate until the later years of the war.

Indirectly, the United States communicated through escalatory actions and by using intermediate countries to pass messages. Escalatory actions, or indirect communication,

include providing additional military equipment, training, and U.S. personnel in South Vietnam. Other indirect communication through escalation includes using the U.S. Navy in the South China Sea to signal resolve. The United States used allied nations to communicate because it did not recognize North Vietnam or the PRC from 1954—1964. For example, in 1964, the United States utilized Canada to convey a message to North Vietnam that “the U.S. would initiate air and naval actions against North Vietnam unless the Communists stopped their escalatory course.”²⁴⁶ This indirect communication was necessary until direct negotiations took place under Presidents Johnson and Nixon.

Cultural differences inhibited much of the direct and indirect communication between the United States and China. Scholar Richard Betts outlines cultural differences as a significant problem in signaling and communicating with rivals. Betts argued that “cultural blinders prevent the common frames of reference necessary to ensure that the receiver hears the message that the signaler intends to send.”²⁴⁷ In reference to U.S./PRC relations, Betts said, “American and Chinese statesmen utterly misread each others’ aims, calculations, and tactics in Cold War confrontations because of societal differences in values and axioms.”²⁴⁸ A scholar with a background in both Chinese and American culture, Shu Guang Zhang, agrees. In his book, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949—1958*, Zhang argues that China and the United States did not understand each other’s coercive signaling and did not view indicators such as casualties and military killing capacity in the same light.²⁴⁹

The *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals, including the great power and the proxy, is the most important criteria to consider because it analyzes the actual output of the U.S. efforts. The U.S. activities throughout the early involvement did impact the PRC, North Vietnam, and elements of the Viet Cong, though not always in the desired way.

²⁴⁶ Neil Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Racehorse Publishing, 2017), III:292; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 31.

²⁴⁷ Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (October 1, 2000): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560444>.

²⁴⁸ Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 28.

²⁴⁹ Shu Guang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 279–82; Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 29.

Although each was affected by projected costs imposed by the United States, each entity had a strong perceived desire to continue the resistance against the United States and the GVN.

The PRC perceived substantial benefits from supporting North Vietnam, believing that the stability of communist North Vietnam was a vital interest even during the French years of influence. For instance, Mao Zedong committed early material support to Ho Chi Minh shortly after defeating the Chinese nationalists in 1949, a time when his own stability was not totally achieved. In 1950, the PRC provided 14,000 rifles, 1,700 machine guns, 60 artillery pieces, 300 bazookas, 281 Chinese military advisors, and “a variety of other military equipment” to combat the French.²⁵⁰ This level of support is particularly impressive considering that the PRC had just won a brutal civil war with the Chinese nationalists and was, at the same time, concerned with U.S. participation on the Korean peninsula. Mao was motivated to support North Vietnam by geopolitical, ideological, and historical factors.²⁵¹ Mao wanted a security bubble from capitalist nations, the spread of Chinese communist influenced governments, and the survival of past supporters of his revolution. Domestic and international pressures or costs also influenced the PRC’s perceived benefits of supporting North Vietnam.

After the Geneva Conference in 1954, Mao temporarily reduced support while encouraging North Vietnam to pursue non-violent means to achieve unification. The PRC’s temporary reduction in support for North Vietnam could have been a deterrent effect from the United States’ initial partnership with South Vietnam, but it seems just as likely that the PRC’s domestic concerns drove the decision. Mao’s focus on the First Five-Year Plan, along with Zhou Enlai’s Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, both offer evidence of considerable domestic pressures.²⁵²

While domestic pressures were undoubtedly present, perceived international costs also influenced the PRC’s desire for moderation after the Geneva Accords. The United

²⁵⁰ Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 22.

²⁵¹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 20.

²⁵² Zhai, 54.

States shaped the PRC by instilling fear of a large Korea-like war. Mao revealed this fear of retaliation by the United States and SEATO during the second Strait of Taiwan crisis in 1958 when he forbade engaging American flagged ships.²⁵³ The perceived high costs of direct military engagement with the United States caused Mao to simply encourage North Vietnam to build up support for an insurgency. Chinese leaders advised North Vietnam that “it is inappropriate for [North Vietnam] to wage large-unit operations” and that “[North Vietnam] should carry out protracted guerrilla warfare to expand their forces” for several years.²⁵⁴

The PRC’s eventual increase in support for North Vietnam partly aligns with President Kennedy’s increased U.S. intervention in South Vietnam. Mao began to reject the idea of peaceful coexistence and start supporting national liberation movements with more vigor.²⁵⁵ Mao’s sentiment of willingness to escalate efforts in the face of increased U.S. pressure was echoed by PRC premier, Zhou Enlai, in 1964 when he said, “Our principle for the struggle should be to do everything we can to limit the war to the current scale while preparing for the second possibility [American intervention]. Should that second possibility occur, China would match American actions: if the United States sent troops, China would do likewise.”²⁵⁶

Just like the PRC, North Vietnam also perceived substantial benefits to continuing the fight against the United States. Ho Chi Minh and North Vietnam placed a high priority on reuniting North and South Vietnam under communist rule and eliminating foreign influence. After the Geneva Conference, Ho Chi Minh wanted to reconstruct the North, whose economy and country laid in ruin, and reunite the South.²⁵⁷ Ho looked to China for assistance in both matters, and due to China’s initial insistence on moderation toward the South, he focused on rebuilding his own country and put subversion of the South on the backburner. Much of China’s assistance to North Vietnam immediately following the

²⁵³ Zhai, 82.

²⁵⁴ Zhai, 113.

²⁵⁵ Zhai, 114.

²⁵⁶ Zhai, 132.

²⁵⁷ Zhai, 69.

Geneva Conference was in the form of domestic support: funds equivalent to \$200 million in U.S. dollars for various industry projects, as well as shipments of Chinese rice to help overcome food shortages.²⁵⁸

Ho Chi Minh temporarily focused on domestic reconstruction and limited subversion in South Vietnam because of the insistence from China and the Soviets; however, he never lost sight of his desire to reunify Vietnam under communism. Following President Kennedy's increase in support to the south, Ho and Mao both came to "reject moderation."²⁵⁹ Ho and Mao's rejection of moderation suggests that the United States' increase in partnership with South Vietnam did not deter China or North Vietnam, but actually had the opposite effect of inciting increased vigor in violent unification efforts. Even during the Johnson administration, direct threats of heavy military pressure on North Vietnam resulted in the North's refusal to yield and to claim that it would not stop supporting the liberation of South Vietnam.²⁶⁰ The decision-making of the NLF does not dictate consideration on its own because it closely follows that of North Vietnam. This closeness is due to North Vietnam's role in the foundation of the group, as well as the oversight and direction that North Vietnam provided.²⁶¹

In sum, the United States' partnership with GVN and ARVN did not produce the desired effects on the rivals (PRC, North Vietnam, NLF). The United States used a combination of punishment and denial as forms of cost while primarily communicating intent indirectly, except for public statements made by U.S. presidents. Cultural blinders inhibited much of the communication, especially between the United States and China. The United States/GVN partnership's impact on the cost-benefit analysis of the communist rivals did not produce desired results because of two primary reasons: the rivals' high perceived benefits of subversive and violent actions, as well as cultural misunderstandings and misreading of communication. Although it seems that the United States' efforts

²⁵⁸ Zhai, 71.

²⁵⁹ Zhai, 129.

²⁶⁰ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (New York, NY: Wiley, 1979), 131-33; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 130.

²⁶¹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 83.

deterred an open invasion of South Vietnam, it did not stop China or North Vietnam from pursuing revolutionary and subversive actions increasing in intensity.

E. CONCLUSION/LESSONS

The United States' partnership with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) from 1954–1964 is an example of a failure to choose and develop a viable partner and to understand the potential effects on the rivals. The military and security cooperation did not produce a GVN that could stand on its own and that failure eventually led to the need for a significant number of U.S. combat troops. The U.S. partnership did deter an open conventional invasion but also had the detrimental effect of encouraging China and North Vietnam to approach the problem by supporting the revolutionary movement.

Overall, this case indicates that the partnership framework is useful at explaining the failures of the U.S./GVN partnership. The willingness of the GVN was low because of conflicting initial interests and because of weak incentive structures provided by the United States. Although Diem and the United States both desired to combat communism, Diem's opposition within South Vietnam and his need to consolidate internal political control led to disagreements. When combining these disagreements with the loose behavior-based incentives provided by the United States, Diem often decided to forge his own path. The willingness component of the partnership framework illuminates this as a problem. The capability of the GVN was initially deficient in 1954 and, despite some improvements, did not improve at an acceptable rate. The partnership framework identifies the initial deficiencies of GVN capability as well as the structure and execution of interorganizational ties as problems. Finally, the United States' partnership with the GVN did not produce the desired effects on China or North Vietnam. China and North Vietnam's high perceived benefit of supporting the insurgency in South Vietnam seemed to outweigh the costs that the United States imposed.

This case shows how the partnership framework explains the failure of the United States in Vietnam, but it also provides a unique historical reference point for the PRC's decision making in response to U.S. actions and partnerships. The United States failed to fully understand China's willingness to challenge the U.S. influence in the region. China's

perceived vital interest to support North Vietnam, along with its relatively non-attributable method of support, made deterring China seemingly impossible. However, China's support for North Vietnam *did* ebb and flow. Proving direct causation for China's fluctuating support is difficult, but it is reasonable to suggest that China's domestic considerations had a significant impact alongside pressures from the United States. Vietnam shows that merely providing more support to a failing partner does not necessarily result in demonstrating resolve to China. Instead of backing down, China chose to challenge the United States' escalation in Vietnam.

This case is useful when considering today's tensions with the PRC in the South China Sea because the government currently in power in Vietnam is the North Vietnamese government that the United States challenged during the war. Much has changed since this conflict, however. Now the current government of Vietnam does have good relations with the United States and is one of the major stakeholders in the territorial disputes with China. Today, the United States could potentially partner with its former enemy, Vietnam, as a viable means to pressure the PRC. Whether it is a feasible means to pressure the PRC or not is undetermined; but, understanding the failure of this partnership is essential when considering U.S. opportunities in the region today.

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IV. THE CORK IN THE BOTTLE: THE “SECRET” WAR IN LAOS

While many see Laos and Vietnam as tangled up in the same conflict within the Second Indochina War, both the form of U.S. support and the eventual nature of each war ended up being very different. Thomas Ahern, a former CIA officer, Laos veteran, and author of a partially declassified study, *Undercover Armies*, contrasted Vietnam and Laos when he said, “In South Vietnam, mobile Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units bedeviled Saigon’s road-bound heavy infantry, while in Laos, Hmong irregulars flitted over mountain trails or moved by air to occupy key high ground and to harass Hanoi’s tanks and artillery.”²⁶² In the face of similar communist threats, the United States employed more limited means in the Laos partnership, which contrasts with the more extensive conventional means in Vietnam. These similarities and differences in Laos and Vietnam provide a useful contrast when comparing the nature of the partnerships.

Laos’s neutral status caused the United States to create self-imposed restrictions on overt military involvement throughout the conflict. The self-imposed restrictions caused the United States to find and employ unique means that contrast with the conventional means used in Vietnam. The United States carried out the partnership with Laos using offices with retired or “sheep-dipped” military personnel under non-DOD authorities, significant reliance on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and by routing assistance through the intermediary nation of Thailand.²⁶³ While U.S. operations in southern Laos often focused on stopping the flow of military equipment into South Vietnam, operations in northern Laos had a different purpose. This chapter focuses on U.S. partnership efforts with the Royal Laos Government (RLG) and the Hmong guerillas to combat the China and North Vietnam backed Pathet Lao in northern Laos. While the operations that the United States conducted against the Ho Chi Minh trail in southern Laos blend into the Laos

²⁶² Thomas L. Ahern, *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos, 1961-1973*, Vietnam Histories (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence. Central Intelligence Agency, 2006), xv.

²⁶³ Paul, “Laos,” 537; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 18.

conflict, they will be outside the scope of this chapter because they are more closely related to the stability of the Vietnam government.²⁶⁴

Although the conflict in Laos does not receive as much attention today as other U.S. conflicts like Vietnam, it is relevant for this study because both Chinese and U.S. policy makers viewed Laos as strategically important at the time. China's interests in Laos provides insights into the direct and indirect involvement of China through North Vietnamese forces. In addition to providing support to North Vietnam, a significant supporter of the Pathet Lao, China directly participated within Laos, constructing roads and providing security throughout the conflict.²⁶⁵ Moreover, North Vietnam, which was supported by China, invaded Laos multiple times during this period. China and North Vietnam both viewed Laos as a critical national interest. Additionally, the importance of Laos, often overlooked in the United States today, was appreciated by U.S. leaders at the time. President Eisenhower famously described Laos as the "cork in the bottle" that was needed to contain communism in Asia.²⁶⁶

A. BACKGROUND

The conflict in Laos between 1959 and 1973 involved several different interested parties that applied military pressure to influence the Royal Laos Government (RLG) through several changes in political power. Each interested party in this conflict had vastly different perspectives as to the crux of the conflict. One could consider the Laos conflict a proxy war for the United States, a civil war for the RLG, a revolution for the Pathet Lao, a fight for survival for the Hmong, and an opportunity and threat for the communist nations of China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam. The RLG was very unstable because of both the influence of outside countries and the internal divisions within Laos. The instability of the RLG produced governments in Vientiane that changed control numerous times, and that never completely controlled the entire territory. This chapter will consider

²⁶⁴ For an account of SOG cross-border operations see John L. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Onyx Book, 1998).

²⁶⁵ Paul, "Laos," 535.

²⁶⁶ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, xiii.

the Laos conflict from 1959, when General Phoumi came to power, until 1973 when the United States ended military support with the Vientiane agreement.

From a United States perspective, one of the unique things about Laos is that the U.S. Ambassadors ran the war.²⁶⁷ This sharply contrasts with how the United States conducted the war in Vietnam. Colonel (ret) Joseph Celeski, a U.S. Special Forces veteran and author of *The Green Berets in the Land of a Million Elephants*, said of the Laos operations, “These operations differed from the war next door in South Vietnam in that the authority to conduct the war and the exercise of command and control over various U.S. organizations was vested in the ambassadors assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos.”²⁶⁸ In addition to the command and control differences, the partnerships in Laos also took a different form than the partnerships discussed in Vietnam in terms of size, scope, and structure. International and self-imposed constraints forced the United States to have a smaller military footprint in Laos than in Vietnam. While the Vietnam and Laos conflicts sometimes overlap, Guenter Lewy, a scholar on Vietnam, noted, “The complex story of the growing involvement of Laos and Cambodia in the Indochina conflict requires a separate, detailed account” from studies on Vietnam.²⁶⁹

Before the United States’ role in Laos began to increase, the French ruled Laos, like Vietnam, as a part of its Indochina territory. The Viet Minh’s victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, and the following Geneva Accords of 1954, mark the end of France’s rule. The accords produced a similar fate to both Vietnam and Laos, calling for “a cessation of hostilities and the removal of foreign military forces from Laotian territory.”²⁷⁰ The Geneva Accords of 1954 marks the real beginning of U.S. presence and partnership with the RLG because of the U.S. desire to limit communist expansion on the newly independent nation. The French influence remained after 1954, but slowly the United States would take

²⁶⁷ Joseph D Celeski, *The Green Berets in the Land of a Million Elephants: U.S. Army Special Warfare and the Secret War in Laos 1959-74* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2019), ix.

²⁶⁸ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, vii.

²⁶⁹ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, vi.

²⁷⁰ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 117.

over the responsibility for partnering with Laos. By 1959, when a staunch anti-communist came to power, the United States had almost entirely replaced the French.

Along with the history of French influence, geography and social history played essential roles in the Laos conflict. Laos was a remote, landlocked country with a variety of different ethnic groups. Laos was a “sparsely populated, mostly mountainous” country that was surrounded by the much more powerful nations of North and South Vietnam, the PRC, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.²⁷¹ The Plain of Jars was the prominent geographical feature in northern Laos throughout the conflict due to its strategic location and its relatively forgiving terrain when compared to the rest of the country.²⁷² Most of the nation was covered by dense tropical rain forests, with monsoons turning all the footpaths into “soggy, muddy rivulets” for almost six months out of the year.²⁷³ Since footpaths were the primary means of travel through the country, the monsoon seasons limited operations on all sides. During the conflict, Laos was divided somewhat from east to west, with the communists controlling the eastern territory along the border with Vietnam and the RLG controlling the western region. Celeski said, “A commander could simply draw a crude line bisecting Laos from its north to its south and place government forces to the west of the line and Pathet Lao and NVA forces to the East.”²⁷⁴

Four relevant ethnic groups resided in Laos: the Lao Lum, Lao Tai, Lao Theung, and Lao Sung.²⁷⁵ All of these ethnic groups were categorized by where they lived in the nation. This geographical, ethnic separation contributed to an inherent lack of political stability. In the south, the Lao Lum, or valley people, were of Thai heritage and represented the ruling elite and the royal family. Lao Lum made up the majority of the RLG armed forces.²⁷⁶ The Lao Tai, or higher valley people, were sometimes called “tribal Tai” and

²⁷¹ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 3.

²⁷² Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1964), 2.

²⁷³ Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 2.

²⁷⁴ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 27.

²⁷⁵ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 5.

²⁷⁶ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 29.

generally practiced agriculture and avoided cities.²⁷⁷ The Lao Tai “worked both for the Pathet Lao and for the Royal Government, mostly as village militia and Auto-Defense companies.”²⁷⁸ The Lao Theung, or the mountainside Lao, were considered the original inhabitants and were referred to as “Kha,” or slave tribes.²⁷⁹ The Lao Theung remained mostly neutral in the conflict but would support the Royal Government if incentivized with money, weapons, or food.²⁸⁰ The Lao Sung, or the mountaintop Lao, were a category that incorporated many sub-ethnic tribes. One of the Lao Sung tribes was the Hmong ethnic tribe, which created a significant partnership with the United States at the outset of the conflict.²⁸¹

The Hmong were a warlike people that occupied the higher elevations within Laos in the mid-nineteenth century in order to avoid pressures from the Han Chinese in the North and the Lao Lum in the South. The Hmong had spiritual beliefs that impacted daily activities. The Hmong believed in spirits, called “Tlan” or “phi,” and were considered animists.²⁸² Many of the Hmong’s beliefs created unusual obstacles for American advisors. The Hmong believed that evil spirits lived in certain rivers and mountains and would, therefore, refuse to cross them even in the face of certain death.²⁸³ Celeski said, “If ranges and landing zones needed creating, it was important to consult the locals and conduct a ceremony to please the phi of chopped down trees and cleared rocks and bushes.”²⁸⁴ On at least one occasion, the Hmong’s belief in spirits caused a delay in operations because of the refusal to remove a “spirit tree” from the airfield.²⁸⁵ The Hmong

²⁷⁷ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 5.

²⁷⁸ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 29.

²⁷⁹ Dommen, *Conflict in Laos*, 3; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 5.

²⁸⁰ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 29.

²⁸¹ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 5.

²⁸² Castle, 6.

²⁸³ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 33.

²⁸⁴ Celeski, 33.

²⁸⁵ Celeski, 33.

also believed that they must postpone operations if the feet of their standard meal, a boiled chicken, curled in a specific direction while cooking, signifying a bad omen.²⁸⁶

Just as the Hmong beliefs impacted operations, so did the culture and religion of the Lao Lum or Royal Lao troops. Aside from the Hmong, “the Laotians were not a warlike people; when they fought, it often bore more resemblance to a shoving match between preening teenaged boys than a clash between armies.”²⁸⁷ The Lao Lum were Buddhists, their beliefs often causing them to reject self-determination and to believe that their fate was in the hands of Buddha. The Lao Lum’s reliance on Buddha and fate often resulted in poor military leadership traits and an army that was discouraged from using violence. Celeski described the Buddhist Laotian troops as “serene, lazy and non-caring, and often relying on fate to determine the outcome of things rather than take matters into their own hands.”²⁸⁸ Additionally, Celeski said that Buddhist Lao commanders “often lacked concern for the future welfare of their troops, preferring to live in the ‘now.’”²⁸⁹ Buddhist beliefs also made Laotian soldiers extremely reluctant to kill or go on the offensive. For example, the Lao troops would often refuse to fire their rifles but did not have a problem firing mortar rounds because of the belief that “we only put the round in the mortar, but where it goes and what it does after that is not us, it is in the hands of Buddha.”²⁹⁰ The Laotians’ refusal to fire their weapons and their lack of self-determination inherently clashed with military needs.

On top of the various ethnic groups, Laos also had three primary politico-military Laotian groups vying for power: the rightists, the neutralists, and the leftists. General Phoumi Nosovan led the U.S. backed rightists.²⁹¹ Souvanna Phouma led the neutralist group within Laos while Souvanna’s half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, led the leftists,

²⁸⁶ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 180.

²⁸⁷ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 118.

²⁸⁸ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 32.

²⁸⁹ Celeski, 32.

²⁹⁰ Celeski, 32.

²⁹¹ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 117.

also known as the Pathet Lao.²⁹² These three groups fought for control within Laos and fought for support from external allies. The three groups occasionally shifted foreign, domestic, and political allegiances. The control over the RLG shifted between these three groups, causing enormous instability.

Throughout the conflict, power within the RLG frequently changed hands and was very unstable. In 1959, the U.S.-backed General Phoumi was in control of a rightist-dominated government in Laos. However, in August 1960, frustrations with General Phoumi's recently established government led to a coup by a junior RLG officer, Captain Kong Le.²⁹³ Captain Kong Le took his U.S. SF trained paratroop battalion and quickly seized control of the Laotian capital of Vientiane while General Phoumi and most of the rightist leaders were in northern Laos for a conference with the Laotian king.²⁹⁴ Kong Le allied with Souvanna Phouma's neutralists after taking power in an attempt to justify his coup and legitimize his newly established government. President Eisenhower chose to maintain support for General Phoumi, causing Souvanna to look to the Communists for help instead of the United States. China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam all rushed to support Souvanna's neutralist government with equipment, but the support came too late to repulse General Phoumi's counter-coup to take back Vientiane.²⁹⁵ After General Phoumi and the rightist government reestablished control, North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao continued to conduct assaults on regions surrounding Vientiane, sparking the prolonged conflict in Laos. The United States supported Phoumi throughout Souvanna's control with airdrops of material, planning advice, and the supplementation of additional Lao troops recently trained by the United States in Thailand.²⁹⁶ The United States' effort was carried out by the Programs and Evaluation Office (PEO), nominally a U.S. State Department office that used retired military personnel to conduct military support to the RLG, and Air America, a CIA-supported air program.

²⁹² Moyar, 117.

²⁹³ Moyar, 117.

²⁹⁴ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 20.

²⁹⁵ Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 118.

²⁹⁶ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 23.

General Phoumi's reestablishment of rightist control over the Vientiane government in late 1960 did not stabilize the tensions in Laos for long. The Pathet Lao and the neutralist armies under Kong Le and Phouma continued to receive aid and support from the Soviets, Chinese, and North Vietnamese. Phoumi's rightist government also continued to receive U.S. aid while expanding confrontations with the Pathet Lao and the neutralists. In 1962, Phoumi began to position his forces to provoke an attack by the Pathet Lao, apparently with the hopes that a rightist military loss would spark direct U.S. military intervention.²⁹⁷ Unfortunately for Phoumi, a small force of Pathet Lao did indeed attack and defeat his larger army. Phoumi's loss was an embarrassment for the RLG because the small Pathet Lao force was viewed as causing "five thousand of Phoumi's best troops to stream in panic across the Mekong into Thailand."²⁹⁸ The United States did not directly intervene following the loss and the poor performance of Phoumi's army, which caused Phoumi to reluctantly consent to the creation of a coalition government involving the rightist, neutralist, and leftists. The new coalition government placed Souvanna as prime minister with Phoumi and Souphanouvong as deputies. Souvanna eventually drifted away from allegiance with the communist powers and agreed to receive support from the United States. In July of 1962, shortly after the creation of the coalition government, another agreement was signed in Geneva that declared neutrality in Laos, directed international support of the new coalition government, and again dictated the removal of foreign military presence.²⁹⁹ The United States agreed to the new Geneva Accords of 1962 by removing military personnel with hopes that peace would come to Laos.

The high hopes for peace after the 1962 Geneva Accords did not last long. William Colby, then chief of CIA operations in the region, noted that North Vietnam continued to maintain large numbers of troops within Laos.³⁰⁰ The CIA estimated that over 7,000 North Vietnamese troops remained in Laos after the accord. Colby said, "[the North Vietnamese

²⁹⁷ Hugh Toye, *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground*, 1st ed. (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 182–83; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 45.

²⁹⁸ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 45.

²⁹⁹ Castle, 46.

³⁰⁰ William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 192.

troops] had never been acknowledged as being there, they could hardly in theory be officially counted out, but our intelligence showed that they were there nonetheless.”³⁰¹ While the 1962 Geneva Accords again caused the United States to remove overt military personnel, North Vietnam continued to conduct extensive military operations in Laotian territory.

The leftists’ participation in the coalition government officially ended in 1964 when the Pathet Lao declared that it no longer recognized Phouma as prime minister. This declaration also marked a turning point in the conflict. The United States responded to the communists’ dismissal of the coalition government with Operation TRIANGLE, an offensive operation with RLG forces, Hmong troops, and U.S. airpower. Operation TRIANGLE, in July 1964, marked the end of the United States’ temporary accommodation of the 1962 Geneva Accords. It also marked a turning point in the air war in Laos. Operation TRIANGLE was the beginning of the reliance on U.S. military aircraft for direct support of ground forces to “counterbalance the superior discipline and skill of the North Vietnamese infantry.”³⁰² The years following 1964 brought a long and brutal stalemate within Laos.

Throughout the stalemate, the RLG forces held a numerical advantage over the communist troops and had U.S. military air support for operations, but they still were unable to push the communists out of northern Laos. In 1964, the RLG had 50,000 regulars and 23,000 CIA/SF supported irregulars up against an estimated 11,000 North Vietnamese regulars and 20,000 Pathet Lao.³⁰³ Unfortunately, North Vietnam’s superior quality of troops and its ability to deploy large numbers of reinforcements when needed allowed it to stay in the fight. The RLG’s low performance during the stalemate caused the United States to rely more on the Hmong and U.S. airpower to combat the Pathet Lao. Despite the U.S.’s efforts to improve it, the RLG army “remained incapable or unwilling to fight the North

³⁰¹ Colby and Forbath, *Honorable Men*, 183.

³⁰² Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 192.

³⁰³ Ahern, 211.

Vietnamese.”³⁰⁴ The reliance on the Hmong forces to conduct most of the operations through this stalemate eventually caused them to deteriorate as a fighting force and as a population. In 1970, the Hmong were “no longer a functioning army, the Hmong soldiers of northeastern Laos had become merely a dispirited throng of war-weary people urgently seeking safety for their families.”³⁰⁵ The stalemate and constant conflict caused considerable devastation to the limited Hmong population.

The stalemate ended in 1973, shortly after the Paris Peace accords, with the signing of the Vientiane Agreement.³⁰⁶ The Vientiane Agreement dictated the formation of a provisional government, implementation of national elections, and the removal of North Vietnamese, U.S., and Thai troops. Just like in South Vietnam, the United States secured what appeared on the surface to be a victory. The United States removed military support, but eventually, the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese moved against rightist military positions and took complete control of the government. In December of 1975, the Pathet Lao “declared an end to the Lao monarchy and the establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.”³⁰⁷ The Pathet Lao declaration marked the end of the struggle for Laos and the defeat of the Hmong and the U.S. supported rightists.

Vang Pao was the prominent Hmong figure who represented the interests of the Hmong at the military level. The Hmong could be aggressive fighters but often lacked interest in fighting for anything outside of their own mountaintop or village. Vang Pao helped change that by uniting them and instilling the importance of this conflict for their way of life. He was one of the few Hmong officers in the RLG forces and he directly influenced the Hmong to organize and fight together throughout the conflict.³⁰⁸ Vang Pao was a charismatic leader who was passionate about protecting the Hmong people and was

³⁰⁴ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 111.

³⁰⁵ Castle, 111.

³⁰⁶ Castle, 116–18.

³⁰⁷ Castle, 127.

³⁰⁸ Castle, 39.

ruthless toward enemies.³⁰⁹ Vang Pao had a “seemingly indomitable spirit and boundless energy” and a “seemingly omniscient understanding of his enemy.”³¹⁰ These characteristics made him the ideal figure to help organize a Hmong resistance. One CIA officer declared to his superiors after initial contact with Vang Pao that, “This is the man we’ve been looking for.”³¹¹ This CIA officer immediately saw Vang Pao’s strengths, his influential position, and his intrinsic desire to fight the communists.

Vang Pao and the Hmong viewed the Chinese and the Vietnamese as traditional enemies. Vang Pao and the Hmong “feared the elimination of the local population [by the communists], a military tactic often used in the area.”³¹² In a speech to the mountain tribesmen, Vang Pao recalled Vietnamese abuses of the Hmong people and framed the struggle against the Pathet Lao as an “imperative for the Hmong people to preserve their way of life against the predatory Vietnamese.”³¹³ The Hmong viewed the conflict as a struggle for survival against the North Vietnamese, which made them an ideal surrogate force.

The area with the most significant fighting for Vang Pao was the Plain of Jars. The Plain of Jars was located geographically in what was known as Military Region II on the border with North Vietnam. Vang Pao was not only the leader of the Hmong resistance but also an RLG general and the commander of Military Region II. Vang Pao had approximately 15,000 fighters, including RLG Army troops and Hmong irregulars.³¹⁴ Vang Pao’s leadership held the mountain tribes together in order to fight the Pathet Lao through the prolonged stalemate. Vang Pao’s personal leadership was so important to keep the Hmong together that some advisors highlighted his potential loss as a weakness in the program. In addition to the detrimental impacts that the loss of Vang Pao would have, one

³⁰⁹ Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of a People* (Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 1988), 170–72; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 156.

³¹⁰ Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942–1992* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 97–98.

³¹¹ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 31.

³¹² Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 83.

³¹³ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 31.

³¹⁴ Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 137.

advisor saw Vang Pao's "one-man-band style of leadership as hopelessly inadequate, involving an impossibly broad span of control."³¹⁵ Nevertheless, Vang Pao remained steadfast in fighting the Pathet Lao until the very end.

The August 1960 coup marked a significant spike in U.S. policy level interest in Laos because of the threat that Laos falling to communism posed to surrounding nations. In 1960, Laos was an even more significant concern than South Vietnam. President Eisenhower said, "We cannot let Laos fall to the Communists, even if we have to fight—with our allies or without them."³¹⁶ Eisenhower chose not to take military action because he was so close to turning over control of the White House to John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy was also concerned about the communist advances in Laos and what that would mean to the surrounding nations that relied on SEATO for protection. In a turnover meeting between the outgoing Eisenhower administration and the incoming Kennedy administration, Eisenhower and Secretary of State Christian Herter expressed their concern that SEATO would appear to allies and foes as a "paper tiger."³¹⁷ France and Britain, two critical members of SEATO, were unwilling to take military action in Laos, threatening the integrity of the SEATO organization.³¹⁸ The lack of interest from France and Britain to participate in an intervention caused President Kennedy to refrain from a unilateral intervention and to pursue an approach that did not utilize large U.S. ground forces.

The United States' activities in Laos preceded the 1960 coup, however. The United States had been supporting France in Laos since the end of WWII. By 1952, the United States was subsidizing over one-third of France's war costs.³¹⁹ The CIA's Civil Air Transport (CAT), later known as "Air America," also supported French forces in Laos with paratroops throughout 1953.³²⁰ The United States continued to support the French in Laos

³¹⁵ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 59.

³¹⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961: The White House Years*, First Trade ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 610; Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 119.

³¹⁷ Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 125.

³¹⁸ Moyer, 126.

³¹⁹ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 23.

³²⁰ Celeski, 24.

through the Programs and Evaluation Office (PEO) in the U.S. embassy. The PEO was run in contrast to Vietnam's much larger Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) due to the 1954 Geneva Accord restrictions. The PEO and the United States Operations Mission (USOM) began providing financial and military support directly to the RLG in 1955 when Laotian security forces "were found to be lacking in will, equipment, and tactics to thwart communist forces."³²¹ Many retired military personnel worked for the PEO in Laos to get around the accords restrictions while still providing military advice.³²² For example, the Chief of the PEO was a member of the Country Team and reported directly to the Ambassador as a civilian position; yet in 1957, he was a retired army general who had "previously held senior MAAG positions in South Vietnam and Pakistan."³²³ This example shows that the PEO had a civilian facade, but it retained a strong military influence.

The PEO had three primary missions. First, the PEO was to "advise the U.S. Ambassador and USOM on the military needs of the RLG and assist in preparing the requests for Military Assistance Program (MAP) funds."³²⁴ Second, the PEO was to observe and monitor the large amount of military equipment that already existed in Laos through previous U.S. support to the French. Finally, the PEO began implementing training plans and programs, primarily through the remnant French Military Mission. Like Vietnam, conducting training and advice through the French was unsatisfactory and did not last long.³²⁵ The PEO first expanded its influence over the French in 1959 through an understanding that allowed U.S. "civilians" to serve as "deputies to French supervisors in the four Lao military regions."³²⁶ These deputies effectively allowed the United States to put a U.S. stamp on the French-led training. The 1959 understanding with the French also

³²¹ Celeski, 2.

³²² Celeski, 25.

³²³ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 16.

³²⁴ Castle, 16.

³²⁵ Castle, 17.

³²⁶ Castle, 18.

expanded the total number of PEO personnel to 514, as well as introduced almost 150 U.S. SF personnel on temporary rotational duty.³²⁷

In 1961, the PEO was briefly escalated to a full MAAG, like in Vietnam, in response to the 1960 coup. However, like the 1954 agreement, the 1962 agreement placed restrictions on overt military assistance. This agreement caused the United States to remove the PEO's short-lived descendent, the MAAG, from Laos.³²⁸ The official departure of the MAAG led the United States to run overt military assistance within Laos through a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) "Requirements Office," while continuing to expand military support through Thailand.³²⁹ Interestingly, the commander that decommissioned the MAAG in Laos almost immediately took command of the Joint United States Military Assistance Advisory Group, Thailand, only one day after.³³⁰ The USAID Requirements Office would act as the eyes and ears within Laos, while forces in Thailand would provide the logistical structure for military support. This overt support continued while the U.S. SF and CIA support for guerillas increased.

U.S. SF personnel began supporting the CIA under Operation HOTFOOT in 1959, but by 1961 it had evolved into the more extensive Operation WHITE STAR.³³¹ Operation WHITE STAR was a U.S. response to the 1960 coup. Both of these operations focused on training the Hmong and other highland tribes because RLG forces had a "consistently poor combat record and showed few signs of impending meaningful improvement."³³² The SEATO alliance's reluctance to intervene, combined with the RLG forces' poor performance, left the United States with the need to find surrogates to take up the fight. By October of 1961, President Kennedy's direction had increased the U.S. SF personnel in

³²⁷ Castle, 18.

³²⁸ Castle, 52.

³²⁹ Castle, 53.

³³⁰ Castle, 53.

³³¹ Castle, 32.

³³² Castle, 39.

Laos to over 300 men.³³³ Scholar Timothy Castle said, “The U.S. would continue to train General Phoumi’s lowland troops, but Vang Pao’s Hmong army was becoming the most important indigenous fighting force in Laos.”³³⁴ By early 1962, the United States would have forty-eight U.S. SF combat advisory teams operating in Laos under Operation WHITE STAR.³³⁵ The U.S. SF teams briefly departed Laos following the 1962 Geneva Accords but returned one year later with U.S. Air Force Air Commandos amid the rising tensions in 1964. The SF teams returned to continue to support both the Hmong guerrillas and the RLG forces. Additionally, SF teams supported the oversight of the MAP equipment, intelligence collection operations, and the identification of targets for airstrikes under “Project 404.”³³⁶

The combined U.S. SF and CIA teams’ partnership with the Hmong mountain tribe was an impressive accomplishment. U.S. SF trained the mountain tribes on small unit tactics, patrolling, and ambushing. The initial engagements focused on teaching the Hmong irregulars to conduct fire team size operations with three to four men.³³⁷ The Hmong irregulars “immediately grasped the principle of fire-and-maneuver,” enabling them to begin conducting operations within one week of the first weapons delivery.³³⁸ Eventually, U.S. advisors began training the Hmong as Special Guerrilla Units (SGU). The Hmong SGU’s would operate in larger elements. By 1965, the SGU’s were prepared and were operating as battalion-sized elements with up to 350 men.³³⁹

Before the United States provided weapons, most Hmong had never seen anything more modern than a flintlock rifle. Initial shipments to the Hmong consisted of M-1 rifles

³³³ Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia, 1956-1975*, 1st Ballantine Books ed (New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1999), 41.

³³⁴ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 43.

³³⁵ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 15.

³³⁶ Celeski, 247–49.

³³⁷ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 44.

³³⁸ Ahern, 44.

³³⁹ Ahern, 101.

and lightweight carbines.³⁴⁰ Later, the United States provided 81mm and 4.2-inch mortars, which the Hmong would use from high ground to pin down Pathet Lao forces on the Plain of Jars.³⁴¹ U.S. and CIA paramilitary teams not only provided the mountain tribes and the Hmong guerillas with weapons and ammunition but also with food and money. In order to ensure Hmong fighters would leave their families to conduct operations, the U.S. advisors had to take responsibility for caring for all the Hmong families. U.S. advisors relied on Air America to fly in most equipment and material to the Hmong partners.

By 1964, the U.S. Air Force established training and advising programs for the RLG Air Force and began conducting unilateral operations in support of the RLG and the Hmong over the Plain of Jars. A declassified U.S. Air Force official history of the participation, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in Northern Laos, 1954–1973*, describes the vital role of the U.S. Air Force operations and partnerships that directly supported the RLG.³⁴² By the summer of 1964, the U.S. Air Force had trained and supported thirty-five RLG Air Force pilots with T-28 aircraft.³⁴³ This training and military assistance continued until the end of the conflict under the name “Project Water Pump.”³⁴⁴ While much of the air operations in Southern Laos focused on supporting the war in Vietnam by attacking North Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh trail, Project Water Pump and operations conducted in northern Laos directly supported the RLG government and Hmong forces.

The Hmong also received pilot training from the U.S. Air Force. By early 1968, the U.S. Air Force provided T-28 aircraft and commissioned the first two Hmong pilots.³⁴⁵ The Hmong pilot program expanded to a “handful” of Hmong pilots. The program was a

³⁴⁰ Ahern, 44.

³⁴¹ Ahern, 52.

³⁴² Victor B. Anthony and Richard R. Sexton, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in Northern Laos, 1954–1973*, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), iii, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB248/war_in_northern_laos.pdf.

³⁴³ Anthony and Sexton, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia*, 121.

³⁴⁴ Joseph D. Celeski, *Special Air Warfare and the Secret War in Laos: Air Commandos, 1964–1975* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2019), 79.

³⁴⁵ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 298.

success despite difficulties with illiterate Hmong trainees. One Hmong pilot flew several thousand sorties against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese, and had “routinely flown in one week the 100 combat missions required of an American pilot over the course of a one-year tour of duty.”³⁴⁶ The Hmong pilot program had a minimal impact on the air effort as a whole, but it demonstrates that the role of the Hmong began to grow from the original scale of small guerrilla operations in 1959.

Militarily, Thailand played a significant role in supporting the U.S. effort in Laos. First, Thailand provided a critical basing and staging area to move MAP equipment and personnel into Laos. Second, Thailand advised the RLG Army in Laos using U.S. trained military advisors who acted as “volunteers,” as well as trained a significant amount of Lao soldiers within Thailand using U.S. financial support.³⁴⁷ Third, Thailand provided critical interpreters that the U.S. advisors needed to carry out the mission.³⁴⁸ The vital role that Thailand played did not come at a low cost. The United States subsidized over 50 percent of Thailand’s defense budget, with over two billion U.S. dollars in assistance provided from 1965–1975 alone.³⁴⁹

The United States used various locations within Thailand as a staging area to carry out support to Laos. Thailand and the United States set up secret camps in Northeastern Thailand to support operations focused on Laos, including Thai-led surveillance operations within Laos.³⁵⁰ Kennedy expanded facilities at Udorn, Thailand, for helicopter repair and maintenance and, eventually, to serve as the Air America headquarters. Timothy Castle said that Kennedy’s orders to expand Udorn “inaugurated a policy that would characterize American military activity in Laos for more than a dozen years: extensive CIA paramilitary operations supported by Thailand-based, covert U.S. military agencies.”³⁵¹ By the mid-

³⁴⁶ Ahern, 299.

³⁴⁷ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 36–37.

³⁴⁸ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 30.

³⁴⁹ Arne Kislenko, “A Not so Silent Partner: Thailand’s Role in Covert Operations, Counter-Insurgency, and the Wars in Indochina,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 24, no. 1 (2004): 65.

³⁵⁰ Kislenko, *A Not so Silent Partner*, 69.

³⁵¹ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 30.

1960s, “80 percent of all American bombing missions flown against North Vietnam and Laos were launched from air bases in Thailand.”³⁵²

Thai executed U.S.-funded training for a significant number of Lao soldiers. The Thai/U.S. training, which began in 1957, had trained “five Lao infantry battalions, two artillery batteries, one hundred officer candidates, over two hundred recruits, and more than a dozen pilots” by 1961.³⁵³ The early effort through 1961 was only the beginning. The 46th U.S. Special Forces Company deployed out of Thailand in order to assist the CIA and the Royal Thai Special Forces in training elite Laotian forces, including a significant number of Hmong.³⁵⁴ Within Laos, Thailand is estimated to have provided as many as 21,400 Thai “volunteers” to advise the RLG forces and conduct combat operations.³⁵⁵ Thailand also had a U.S. trained and supported unit that played a role in Laos, the Thailand Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU). The PARU provided CIA trained personnel in guerilla warfare to the Hmong forces. The PARU would combine efforts with U.S. SF White Star teams and CIA paramilitary teams, and later conduct special operations throughout Laos.³⁵⁶ Thailand’s role was the result of the complex political nature of the Laos conflict that makes the partnership worth considering in this study. While Thailand was an influential nation in the Laos conflict, China and North Vietnam were also two other powerful countries were supporting forces opposed to the United States.

China’s interests in Laos had always stemmed primarily from Laos’s geographical position. China was always sensitive to potentially hostile regimes on its border, and U.S. activity in Laos provided a perceived threat. For its own security, China wanted nations on its border to prohibit basing to the U.S. military. In the view of Chinese leaders, Laos, like Vietnam, Taiwan, and Korea, could be used by the United States to launch an invasion. In fact, there were remnant nationalist Chinese units that were still operating in the border area with Laos and Burma, and they “occasionally conducted operations against China in

³⁵² Kislenko, “A Not so Silent Partner,” 65.

³⁵³ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 37.

³⁵⁴ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 292–93.

³⁵⁵ Kislenko, “A Not so Silent Partner,” 78.

³⁵⁶ Kislenko, 78.

collaboration with Taiwanese and American intelligence agencies.”³⁵⁷ China’s desire to remove U.S. influence in Laos outweighed actual territorial ambitions. China did not show evidence of wanting to take over Laos for itself, only to “create in Laos a regime that at the very least will be independent of the United States.”³⁵⁸ In addition to China’s perceived security threat of a pro-United States Laos, Chinese officials were also motivated by Laos’s shared border with South Vietnam. Chinese officials knew that support to the Pathet Lao was necessary in order to maintain control of Laos’s “crucial position in the growing revolution in South Vietnam,” which they utilized through the support to the Ho Chi Minh trail.³⁵⁹

Ideologically, China also deemed support to the Pathet Lao necessary. China desired to exert influence over other Asian communist parties because of its “claim to leadership in the envisaged revolutionary transformation of the world.”³⁶⁰ Mao Zedong, the revolutionary leader of the PRC, saw himself as the ideological leader after whom other communist revolutionaries should base themselves. China also viewed Laos as within its historical sphere of influence. The Chinese embassy in Vientiane stated that “Since most ancient times, the Chinese and Laotian peoples have gotten along with each other harmoniously like kinsmen.”³⁶¹

North Vietnam’s interests in Laos also goes far back in history. North Vietnam had more *direct* influence over the Pathet Lao than the Chinese due to the number of advisors. Qiang Zhai, a scholar on Chinese affairs, noted that “The North Vietnamese in general carried more weight with the Pathet Lao than the Chinese.”³⁶² PRC leaders at the time also acknowledged internally that North Vietnam had provided more assistance to the Pathet

³⁵⁷ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 93.

³⁵⁸ Paul F. Langer, *The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao: Analysis and Chronology* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 1972), 9, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD0741601>.

³⁵⁹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 94.

³⁶⁰ Langer, “The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao,” 2.

³⁶¹ Langer, 7.

³⁶² Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 122.

Lao than either China or the Soviet Union.³⁶³ Part of North Vietnam's significant role was due to China's insistence. Mao Zedong once told Ho Chi Minh, "you must bear more responsibility for Southeast Asia, especially Laos."³⁶⁴ The suggestions that the North Vietnamese had more direct influence over the Pathet Lao may be accurate, but it overlooks the significant impact that China had over North Vietnam. Although North Vietnam was known to have more direct influence and troops within Laos, China was the ultimate supporter of North Vietnam. North Vietnam needed China's support against the United States in the region, but it also desired its own hegemony in Indochina.

North Vietnam and China were both direct contributors to the RLG's downfall because the Pathet Lao could not have survived without their foreign support. Despite Laos's eventual fall to communism in 1975, the partnerships that the United States developed with the anti-communist forces in Laos are worth contrasting to the partnership with South Vietnam because of the vast difference in the U.S. efforts in the face of a similar threat. The next section outlines the first component of the framework—willingness.

B. WILLINGNESS

Overall, the willingness of Vang Pao and the Hmong guerrillas was sufficient to conduct guerrilla operations, but the desire of the RLG to maintain political control of the country was significantly lacking. Vang Pao and the Hmong had a deep-seated interest in defending their own way of life against the North Vietnamese and also had a war-like culture. Although the Hmong had some issues that stemmed from their mistrust of the Lao Lum and the tendency to only value fighting for their own village, Vang Pao and the United States overcame these issues with leadership, substantial incentives, and legitimate oversight of operations. The RLG armed forces had significant problems with willingness that stemmed primarily from instability within the RLG leadership, especially with the coalition governments, and cultural barriers that inhibited a high functioning army. The United States was unable to overcome the RLG's lack of willingness, even with an enormous amount of incentives in material and aid. The first component of the partnership

³⁶³ Zhai, 108.

³⁶⁴ Zhai, 108–9.

framework—willingness—helps outline the strengths and weaknesses of the Hmong and the RLG. There are several evaluation criteria to consider when assessing the willingness of potential partners: the *initial overlap of interests*, the *incentives* used by the principal to influence the desired behavior, the *uncertainty* of the success of the task, and the *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent.

The *initial overlap of interests* between the United States and the anti-communist forces in Laos overlapped in many, but not all, respects. The United States' primary interests in Laos were to stop the spread of communism in East Asia and to defend the United States' international prestige. The United States feared that if Laos fell to communism, Thailand, India, South Vietnam, and others would eventually follow. In order to defend Laos from the communist threats, the United States partnered with the RLG forces and the Hmong to combat the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese within Laos. The United States ultimately wanted a non-communist Laotian government that could defend itself. Support for the Hmong as a society was a military necessity for defending against communist advances, not a direct national interest.

The presence of a common enemy, the communists, was arguably the sole common interest between the RLG and the United States. Sometimes, even that common interest was in question. The RLG was not a stable political entity, as shown by the numerous coups and turnover of control within the government. Even General Phoumi, the United States' primary anti-communist political leader in Laos, had difficulty motivating his troops to combat the Pathet Lao effectively. The neutralist-led, coalition government that followed General Phoumi displayed weaker anti-communist interests. Phouma, the neutralist who controlled the coalition government, seemed to work with the communists or the United States, whichever seemed to suit him best at the time. These differences in interests at the political level raised the cost of incentivizing for the United States.

Additionally, the RLG political leaders often opposed supporting the Hmong guerillas or supplying arms to any of the mountain tribes. Even General Phoumi, the staunch anti-communist, opposed it. U.S. advisors eventually convinced Phoumi that arming the Hmong was a military necessity. However, Phoumi still expressed his doubts, referring to the Hmong as “crybabies” that were “too primitive to undertake the raid and

sabotage missions that the PEO chief had proposed and too treacherous to be indulged in their incessant demands for help.”³⁶⁵ The coalition government that followed Phoumi was kept out of the loop on most of the CIA funding and support to the Hmong because of fear that it would leak information would to the Pathet Lao. The lack of openness from the United States about the Hmong program was a result of different interests between the United States and the RLG.

The initial Hmong interests overlapped more with the United States than the RLG’s interests did, but conflicts still existed. Vang Pao believed that he only had two alternatives to protect the Hmong way of life.³⁶⁶ Vang Pao could either flee the Pathet Lao invaders or stay and fight. Vang Pao chose to stay and fight the Pathet Lao, but not because of full support for the RLG. The Hmong and the lowland Laotians that controlled the RLG lived different lifestyles in different areas, and had mutual suspicions of each other. The CIA handlers who made initial contact with Vang Pao brought up the potential that “arms given to fight the communists might be turned against the [RLG].”³⁶⁷ U.S. advisors brought up similar concerns of Hmong separatism before beginning the Hmong pilot training program.³⁶⁸ Some were unsure if Hmong pilots would use the planes against the RLG once tension with the Pathet Lao ended.

Vang Pao’s leadership and assurances to the United States represented the overriding factor that allowed the partnership to begin and continue. When asked about possible separatist aspirations of the Hmong, Vang Pao admitted mutual suspicion between the Hmong and the RLG, but also stated that his status as an RLG officer showed that assimilation was possible and that he “wanted his people accepted as part of the Laotian policy.”³⁶⁹ However, for many Hmong support for the RLG was merely an undesired byproduct of defending their own way of life against the Pathet Lao. Another problem with the initial Hmong interests was the Hmong’s notorious belief that the only thing that

³⁶⁵ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 33.

³⁶⁶ Ahern, 31.

³⁶⁷ Ahern, 31.

³⁶⁸ Ahern, 298.

³⁶⁹ Ahern, 32.

mattered was their small village or mountaintop. Despite the differences, the presence of a common enemy provided enough overlap of interests between the United States and the Hmong for a partnership. However, the differences in initial interests raised the cost of incentivizing the Hmong. The United States would eventually end up providing for large portions of the Hmong population, including the warriors' families.

The *incentives* used by the United States to influence the RLG and the Hmong were extensive. For the Hmong, the United States offered Vang Pao very lenient behavior-based terms and incentives. These incentives include cash, weapons, ammunition, training, air support, food, humanitarian support, and diplomatic leverage within the RLG. The incentives that the Hmong required were quite extensive, partially because of differences in initial interests and partially because of the Hmong's limited internal resources. The widespread aid and support, used as incentives by the United States, did provide leverage with the Hmong, but it also created a dependency. Without U.S. aid later in the conflict, the Hmong would have surely fallen apart.

The Hmong's tendency to only care about their specific valley or mountaintop was expensive for the United States to overcome in many respects. The CIA initially paid Vang Pao cash for the entire Hmong payroll, which Vang Pao acknowledged skimming from to pay for the relocation of Hmong populations to safe havens.³⁷⁰ Although the policy of directly paying Vang Pao did eventually change to routing the cash through the local commanders, the incentives of payroll to all the volunteers did not. The United States' most obvious incentive was the cash payments to the Hmong, but other incentives also existed.

The United States also supported and fulfilled the humanitarian needs of the Hmong such as protection, food, and relocation. USOM ran the majority of these humanitarian missions. Unfortunately for the Hmong, this assistance that the Hmong refugees came to rely on was tied to hostilities with the Pathet Lao. The 1962 Geneva Accords that brought the temporary political settlement and cease-fire also brought disruptions in food deliveries. Despite warnings that a settlement would bring changes, Vang Pao and the Hmong had "not really adjusted to the fact that we cannot keep shoving tons of rice out of

³⁷⁰ Ahern, 102.

airplanes indefinitely.”³⁷¹ Shortages during the temporary halt of U.S. aid caused the CIA to fulfill the most desperate needs through large scale purchases from Thailand. This case was one example where the United States showed that the incentives were dependent on the political situation more so than the direct behavior or outcome of specific Hmong actions.

The incentives that the United States offered the RLG were just as generous, if not more so, than incentives to the Hmong. The MAP provided the RLG with a significant amount of military equipment at no cost. The United States also subsidized a large portion of the RLG military budget. These incentives were loosely controlled and did not provide the United States with the necessary leverage over the RLG. Like South Vietnam, the RLG became extremely dependent on the United States.³⁷² The RLG’s dependency on the United States seemed to give it just as much freedom of maneuver as it gave the United States leverage because of the belief on both sides that a withdrawal of aid would cause the RLG to collapse quickly.

The *uncertainty* for the Hmong to complete the given objectives was low in the beginning, as the Hmong were well suited to conduct guerrilla and harassing operations around the Plain of Jars, but increased by the end because of the Hmong’s increased role. For the Hmong, the objective was, at least initially, to tie down North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces in order to buy time for the RLG. Given that the United States continued to provide support, the Hmong were ideally suited to conduct guerrilla operations within familiar territory. The problem was not in the uncertainty of the initial task but in the uncertainty of what the initial task grew into. The convenience of using Hmong, and other highland tribes, to combat the Pathet Lao using guerilla tactics caused the United States to rely on them too much. Eventually, the Hmong conducted operations with battalion-sized elements, far different than the initial small raiding teams. In the case of the Hmong, it was necessary to remember that small guerilla forces have limitations. For instance, the ultimate success of the RLG required the development of conventional troops to hold territory.

³⁷¹ Ahern, 144.

³⁷² Ahern, 529.

Unfortunately, the partnership with the RLG, which focused on developing conventional forces, was unlikely to succeed.

The task of the RLG was more uncertain than that of the Hmong. Developing a force that could defend itself against communist advances would not be easy because this involved holding territory. The North Vietnamese, with Chinese support, far surpassed the RLG in both the quality and quantity of forces, if counting the number of North Vietnamese forces inside North Vietnam as well. If the threat of a U.S. and SEATO led retaliation was taken away, the North Vietnamese could have overtaken the RLG whenever they chose to. North Vietnam had enormous advantages over Laos including population, economy, and size and quality of the armed forces. Additionally, the RLG was never totally unified, and its armed forces had cultural tendencies that made the use of force challenging. All of these factors made the notion that the United States could develop the RLG to stand on its own significantly uncertain.

The *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent was significant. Several first-hand accounts of the interactions with the Hmong guerrillas noted how information asymmetry inhibited communication and allowed the Hmong to tell Americans what they thought the Americans wanted to hear. Thomas Ahern, a CIA historian with first-hand experience with the Hmong in Laos, noted,

The Hmong nearly always counted enemy forces as numbering either “hundreds” or “thousands,” and the altitude of an aircraft overhead as “a thousand meters.” Any single-engine jet airplane was a “MiG,” in fact never seen over Hmong country. I [Ahern] served with Vang Pao at Ban Pa Dong in the spring of 1961 before being sent to Thakhek in the upper Panhandle that summer to create an irregular force of ethnic Lao. There, I encountered some of the same communication problems while debriefing presumably more sophisticated subjects.”³⁷³

Aside from communication problems, the inability to oversee the vast array of RLG operations contributed to the information asymmetry problem. This problem was similar to the issues faced in South Vietnam. Operations in Laos were carried out over a large area

³⁷³ Thomas L. Ahern, “Intelligence in Public Media: A Great Place to Have a War,” *Studies in Intelligence* 61, no. 4 (2017): 60.

with limited means of transportation. It was unlikely for the United States to monitor everything sufficiently.

In sum, the willingness of the Hmong was manageable, while the willingness of the RLG was lacking. This disparity contributed to the course of the war and the partnership. First, it encouraged the United States to over-rely on Hmong and other mountain tribes for combatting the Pathet Lao. Instead of acting as a mere guerrilla force to buy time for the RLG, the United States soon advised the Hmong to grow operations and try to hold territory around the Plain of Jars. Second, it caused the development of the RLG to turn into a seemingly hopeless endeavor. The RLG's lack of willingness, as outlined in this framework, contributed to the notion that the RLG would only ever amount to merely "a tripwire to give SEATO and the United States sufficient time to deploy military forces to prevent the impending collapse of the RLG."³⁷⁴ The next component of the framework—capability—outlines both the limitations of the Hmong and the painfully evident problems with the RLG.

C. CAPABILITY

The capability of the Hmong and the RLG reflected strengths and weaknesses. First off, the Hmong had a warrior culture but lacked in numbers, war material, economic support from the tribes, and existing military structure. With that said, the Hmong learned and adapted to guerrilla warfare training quickly. The RLG strengths and weaknesses were almost entirely opposite of the Hmong. The RLG had existing military equipment, training, and organizations, and numbers, but lacked a warrior culture and respectable leadership. Moreover, the RLG seemed to not advance with U.S. advisors and training. The second component of the partnership framework helps to identify these strengths and weaknesses. There are several evaluation criteria to consider when assessing the capability of potential partners: the *strategy*, the *initial capabilities* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties* (vertical, horizontal, the means with which collective efficiencies were achieved), and the *principal's techniques* of increasing the agent's capabilities.

³⁷⁴ Celeski, *Special Air Warfare and the Secret War in Laos*, 81.

The U.S. *strategy* in the northern Laos conflict differed from Vietnam in ways and means, but not desired ends. The United States' desired ends were to "prevent the communist takeover of the Kingdom of Laos, or at least preserve its neutrality."³⁷⁵ The ways that the United States used were partnerships with the RLG and the Hmong guerillas, as well as U.S. air power. The means were principally the CIA, U.S. SF personnel, Thailand, and U.S. air assets. It is important to note that the decision to partner with the Hmong was not an end in itself; it was an attempt to "help the RLG negotiate from strength" and to buy time for the development of the RLG forces.³⁷⁶ Most of the U.S. advisors knew that "creating a Hmong guerrilla force would not by itself offer the means of expelling neutralist and communist forces from the Plain of Jars, let alone from the rest of northeastern Laos. But it might at least prevent the enemy from consolidating his control while the United States and the RLG struggled to make the regular army a fighting force."³⁷⁷ The Hmong's role slowly increased throughout the conflict as the United States began to lose faith in the RLG and gain confidence in the Hmong.

The *initial capabilities* of the RLG and the Hmong were low but in different respects. The RLG Army was "incapable of defending the kingdom" because of poor leadership, morale, and training.³⁷⁸ The capabilities of the RLG were so low that in 1964, U.S. Ambassador Unger recommended that the United States continue to conceal support to the RLG out of concerns for U.S. prestige if "publicly linked with such an inept and uninspired army as the [RLG] today."³⁷⁹ Much of this was a result of the difficulties stemming from the prevalent Buddhist faith of the RLG armed forces and poor leadership. Without aggressive leadership, the RLG would never develop capable armed forces. The RLG officer corps and the RLG soldiers would run at the sound of gunfire and refuse to fire their weapons or go on the offensive. No amount of military equipment or training could overcome these fundamental issues. The RLG already had large amounts of

³⁷⁵ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 1.

³⁷⁶ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 45.

³⁷⁷ Ahern, 36.

³⁷⁸ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 30.

³⁷⁹ Castle, 73.

American military equipment leading up to 1959 because the United States had supported the French in the region and supplied American weapons and equipment. Unfortunately, the equipment was not the problem. The RLG forces were simply not aggressive or motivated like an army should be.

Conversely, the Hmong had a fierce war-like culture, but they had no organization, training, or equipment needed to be considered an army. On the positive side, “these Iron Age tribesmen were the best natural riflemen that [the initial CIA handler] had ever seen.”³⁸⁰ The Hmong were also able to endure life as guerrillas very effectively. Ahern said, “[The Hmong] displayed astonishing speed and endurance as they traversed mountain ridges carrying weapons and ammunition. Their cheerful acceptance of extraordinarily harsh conditions and their abiding hatred of the Vietnamese had to compensate for their lack of conventional military discipline.”³⁸¹

The Hmong’s limited conventional capabilities made the prospect of a decisive Hmong military victory almost impossible, but the limited objectives that the United States gave the Hmong were attainable. The CIA initially recognized that the Hmong could not “contest with regular formations for control of territory. Holding the high ground while they harassed enemy installations and lines of communication below was the most that could be expected of them.”³⁸² Fortunately, the United States employed them in this manner, fitting with the Hmong capabilities and predispositions.

The Hmong’s weaknesses limited the strategic utility and created significant logistical problems for the United States. For instance, the Hmong did not have a large population or a stable economic foundation to support them. Once Vang Pao partnered with the CIA, the United States slowly began to provide everything that the Hmong needed. The disruption to the Hmong way of life caused by the conflict soon meant that the United States had to support the majority of the population with food and security. The Hmong families could no longer support themselves with food and water, let alone support the

³⁸⁰ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 43.

³⁸¹ Ahern, 59.

³⁸² Ahern, 148.

Hmong fighters. Additionally, the relatively small population of the Hmong caused sustainability problems for the Hmong, many of which should have been anticipated by the United States. Unfortunately, one CIA officer noted after the war that the conflict's "cost to the Hmong in human life and in economic and social disruption... was unforeseen."³⁸³ Not only was the impact on the Hmong unforeseen, but the Hmong would be hard-pressed to control anything outside of the mountainous areas of northern Laos, especially when asked to contend with the large conventional North Vietnamese army.

In order to overcome the weakness of the RLG and the Hmong, the United States carried out various *structures of the interorganizational ties*. The unique aspects of the U.S. partnership efforts came in the form of vertical interorganizational ties with air power and the Hmong. However, the United States also carried out various horizontal interorganizational ties, especially with the efforts to build the RLG forces.

The United States implemented vertical interorganizational ties with the Hmong guerillas in several unique ways. First, the implementation of "civilian" U.S. air support for supply, mobility, and fires was a vertical tie because it connected U.S. capabilities with the capabilities of the Hmong. The CAT, or Air America, was the primary means with which the United States executed this tie. The "sheep-dipped" pilots, referring to U.S. military pilots who were temporarily transferred to civilian agencies to maintain the appearance of abiding by the Geneva Accords, were critical for the survival of the Hmong resistance. Ahern said, "from the beginning of January 1961, the survival of the Hmong resistance depended on air support for delivery of supplies and equipment."³⁸⁴ The unique mode of employing "civilian" aircraft and crews in Laos, while politically necessary, did have its drawbacks. It gave politicians the ability to say that they were not using military forces, but it also dictated the use of inferior aircraft. CAT aircraft, like the H-34 and WWII era planes (PV-2), had deficiencies that "no amount of skill could entirely compensate

³⁸³ Ahern, 522.

³⁸⁴ Ahern, 93.

for.”³⁸⁵ The problems with these aircraft were not thoroughly addressed until the introduction of U.S. military planes following Operation TRIANGLE in 1964.

The evolution of the air war in Laos following Operation TRIANGLE into one that utilized more U.S. military aircraft was still a vertical interorganizational tie with the Hmong and the RLG. Operation TRIANGLE brought more capable U.S. aircraft to northern Laos, which enabled U.S. forces to overcome the deficiencies of the RLG and Hmong forces. This vertical tie was critical for supporting the RLG and the Hmong in northern Laos, but it too had its limitations. The U.S. airpower was not able to break the stalemate because airpower cannot hold territory by itself.

In addition to vertical ties involving U.S. civilian and military aircraft, the development of the Hmong guerrillas was also a vertical tie. The United States developed the Hmong resistance from nothing. Although Vang Pao was already an RLG military officer, the resistance elements that he and the CIA helped to build were previously non-existent. The United States saw the Hmong as an opportunity because of their natural dislike of the North Vietnamese and their war-like culture. This vertical interorganizational tie was a critical component to combatting the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese.

On top of the unique vertical interorganizational ties, the United States also implemented horizontal ties with the RLG to build and improve existing conventional forces. By 1961, the United States had advisors down to the battalion level in the RLG forces. The United States supplied the RLG forces with weapons, ammunition, and military equipment through the MAP. The United States also trained the RLG forces from the infantry to the pilots, with much of the training conducted by U.S. forces stationed in Thailand.

On top of horizontal ties with the RLG, the United States also helped implement horizontal interorganizational ties by employing Thai forces in Laos. Using existing Thai troops offered several advantages for the United States. First, the Thai forces were able to act as translators between the RLG and the United States. Second, many of the Thai forces

³⁸⁵ Ahern, 98.

had already received training from the United States, including training on guerrilla warfare. Third, Thailand's shared border with Laos allowed for smooth movement of military equipment and personnel into the theater. Finally, Thailand had its own interests in keeping Laos a non-communist country. All of these factors made Thai forces significant on the ground in Laos.

The *principal's techniques* of increasing the agent's capabilities were in line with some previously identified best practices, but not all. The U.S. advisors were committed to enduring relationships with the Hmong but not the RLG forces. The United States partnered at multiple levels, and with better interagency cooperation than in Vietnam, but similar dependency problems emerged. Finally, the level of technology that the United States introduced was generally appropriate for this partnership.

The CIA successfully carried out enduring relationships with the Hmong and Vang Pao. Ahern said, "To most of the CIA people involved, abandoning the Hmong in the aftermath of defeat had been simply unimaginable."³⁸⁶ Ahern thought this belief "stemmed more from emotional identification with a brave but needy partner than from a sober view of American constancy toward client allies."³⁸⁷ Decision-makers in Washington clearly did not hold the same emotional identification toward the Hmong, but the advisors on the ground seemed to carry themselves as if the Hmong and the United States were tied together. The advisors' attitudes ultimately benefitted the partnership and is in line with creating enduring relationships.

Unfortunately, the relationships with the RLG were not quite as enduring as the relationships with the Hmong. The high turnover in SF and other military personnel would have made it challenging to create enduring relationships. Additionally, the use of Thailand for training separated much of the U.S. trainers from the U.S. advisors in Laos. The high turnover of military personnel and the separation of much of the instruction from the advising meant that RLG forces had to interact with many different U.S. personnel for short periods. One area where this was not the case is in the partnership between air forces. The

³⁸⁶ Ahern, 524.

³⁸⁷ Ahern, 525.

United States was able to train Laotian pilots, and conduct sorties from Thailand alongside previous trainees. This aspect falls more in line with previously identified recommendations for enduring relationships, but not entirely because of the rotation of personnel.

Partnership at multiple levels clearly existed in this case. The massive scale of support came in almost every form and from many different U.S. agencies. The CIA, USOM, USAID, and the U.S. military all coordinated efforts and partnered with various RLG and Hmong components. These agencies probably coordinated out of necessity. For the U.S. military was not in a position in Laos to make command decisions like it was in Vietnam, and many of the other U.S. agencies recognized the benefit of U.S. military assets and personnel. The role of the U.S. ambassadors as the command and control element of the war also seemed to be more conducive to interagency cooperation. Everything had to be run through the country team and the ambassador, including military operations. The level of interagency collaboration in Laos seems acceptable when compared to the extensive interagency rivalries that existed within Vietnam. The United States' support to the RLG and the Hmong was so vast that it created a dependence.

The United States mostly provided the appropriate level of technology to the Hmong guerrillas. The CIA, SF, and Thai advisors understood the need for equipment that could be sustained by guerillas in the field. The primary weapons provided to the Hmong were lightweight carbines and M-1 rifles.³⁸⁸ The United States eventually supplemented these rifles with mortars and recoilless rifles, but each had a tactical and operational necessity. The Hmong excelled by using mortars and recoilless rifles against North Vietnamese regulars in the Plain of Jars. The terrain and the enemy's use of armored mobility made these weapons necessary for successful resistance. Concerning communication equipment provided to the Hmong, the CIA and SF teams provided the RS-1 radio and one-time cipher pads but specially selected literate Hmong to train and operate them. In this case, the United States' effort provided the appropriate equipment, increasing the level of technology and firepower when the situation dictated.

³⁸⁸ Ahern, 44.

In sum, the capabilities of RLG and the Hmong were strong and weak in different aspects. The RLG's limited capabilities stemmed largely from cultural beliefs, corruption, and low morale. The RLG had equipment, organization, and training necessary to develop into a capable force, but a lack of will seemed to play a significant role in that potential remaining unfulfilled. The Hmong, on the other hand, had a robust intrinsic willingness to combat the Pathet Lao but had structural and organizational weaknesses that limited their potential. The United States' interorganizational ties were able to help the Hmong overcome many of their gaps in capabilities like equipment, technology, airpower, but the Hmong's limited numbers and resources created a potential capability ceiling. No amount of support or material would have likely made the Hmong successfully become a conventional force capable of combatting the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao. On top of problems with the capability of the RLG and the Hmong, the enemies' interests and decision making also caused issues in Laos. China and the North Vietnamese were determined enemies. The next component of the partnership framework—effects—explores the impacts that the United States had on enemy decision making.

D. EFFECT ON THE ENEMY

The United States' partnership with the RLG and the Hmong produced some desired effects like tying down communist troops and delaying the conflict, but ultimately fell short in degrading the communists' desire to maintain pressure on the RLG. The combined RLG forces, the Hmong irregulars, and U.S. airpower did buy time for the development of the RLG. The U.S. partnership did create a buffer area for the Laotian capital and Thailand. Unfortunately, China's and North Vietnam's ideological and security interests outweighed the costs of supporting the Pathet Lao. China and North Vietnam both ideologically wanted the spread of communism. From a security standpoint, they desired that Laos would deny the use of its territory to the United States and allow the movement of personnel and material into South Vietnam. China's and North Vietnam's ability to deny violating any of the peace agreements (1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords), allowed them to continue support and direction to the Pathet Lao. There are several evaluation criteria: the *type of cost* used for influence (punishment or denial), the *means of communication* (direct

or indirect signaling), and the *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals, including the great power and the proxy.

The *type of cost* used for influence by the United States was almost entirely punishment. As opposed to Vietnam, where the United States combined punishment costs with significant denial operations, U.S. strategy in Laos primarily employed guerrilla tactics and air power. U.S. advisors trained the Hmong to implement punishment costs on the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese regulars through guerilla warfare. As stated earlier, the Hmong would conduct sabotage operations or raids. They did not attempt to control territory, only cause damage to the enemy forces.

Additionally, the U.S. use of airpower in Laos provided a means to instill punishment costs on the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. The United States supported the RLG Air Force and conducted its own air operations against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam. The RLG Air Force, at its peak, had 175 aircraft, most of which the United States provided.³⁸⁹ With these aircraft, U.S. air advisors supported “1,500 to 2,500 sorties a month.”³⁹⁰ The combined U.S. and RLG air campaigns created high costs on Pathet Lao forces throughout the conflict, although actual numbers of destroyed enemy forces are challenging to estimate because of the information asymmetry. The United States knew that the RLG reported a dishonestly high number of enemy casualties. Finally, the United States threatened to use punishment costs through SEATO and conventional invasion. While this threat was never actually carried out, it was a relevant factor that effected communist decision making.

Denial costs were still present in Laos, despite being less prominent than denial costs in Vietnam. Denial costs came primarily in the form of intelligence operations used to monitor communist movements, especially in northern Laos. The CIA, Air America, and the U.S. Air Force supported intelligence-gathering efforts. The CIA used its relationship with the mountain tribes to develop human intelligence networks while the air

³⁸⁹ Celeski, *Special Air Warfare and the Secret War in Laos*, 285.

³⁹⁰ Celeski, 285.

assets flew reconnaissance flights. These efforts were meant to provide some level of border security to protect against communist advances.

The *means of communication* that the United States used was a combination of direct and indirect. Although much of the support offered to the RLG and the Hmong was secret, making communication difficult, the United States continually signaled intent throughout. The United States did not communicate directly with communist rivals before the reestablishment of the coalition government in 1962. After the 1962 Geneva Conference, open communications took place more frequently. The coalition government, led by neutralist Prince Phouma, had communist representation forcing interaction with communist factions. The 1962 Geneva Conference itself also provides an example of direct communication with North Vietnamese and Chinese officials.³⁹¹ Of course, direct communication continued, culminating with the Vientiane Agreement in 1973. Interestingly though, the Vientiane Agreement did not refer to any specific communist group, referring to the Pathet Lao as the “Patriot Forces side.”³⁹²

The United States also attempted indirect communication throughout the conflict. The communist rivals often did not receive the indirect signaling the way that the United States intended. For example, Kennedy proposed the establishment of the MAAG in place of the less overt PEO to signal serious intentions. Unfortunately, the communist rivals already assumed that the United States was providing military assistance, so were unaffected. Other overt actions, meant to signal resolve to the communist rivals, also came in the form of moving large conventional forces. For example, President Kennedy ordered the Seventh Fleet to the South China Sea and the Gulf of Siam shortly after taking office.³⁹³ According to a presidential aid, Kennedy meant this act to signal that the communist rivals needed to decide whether to opt for “a cease-fire and neutralization... or American intervention.”³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 92.

³⁹² Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 118.

³⁹³ Castle, 29.

³⁹⁴ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 333; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 29.

The *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals is the most critical aspect of the effects component of the framework. Unfortunately, the partnership did not appear to change the outcomes of communist decisions drastically. The primary rivals in Laos were the Pathet Lao, North Vietnam, and China. The Pathet Lao also received assistance from the Soviet Union, especially immediately following the 1960 coup. However, outside of support immediately following the coup, “the Russian involvement there [in Laos] has been limited.”³⁹⁵ A 1972 RAND study identified the two chief sponsors of the Pathet Lao to be Hanoi (North Vietnam) and China, not the Soviet Union.³⁹⁶ Due to this belief, and the overall intent of this study, the following section focuses on the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a great power sponsor instead of the Soviet Union.

China’s perceived benefits of supporting the Pathet Lao outweighed the perceived costs. The costs on China came in the form of military and economic support. China provided aid, not only through North Vietnam but also directly to the Pathet Lao.³⁹⁷ The Chinese-built road network in northern Laos called the “Laotian-Chinese Friendship Highway,” helped support shipments of military equipment to the Pathet Lao, and helped facilitate the training of Pathet Lao units inside China.³⁹⁸ The road construction, involving over 20,000 Chinese workers, alarmed many U.S. officials.³⁹⁹ The road system gave China leverage and influence over the Pathet Lao because it facilitated Pathet Lao operations and Chinese military aid.

Any significant advances toward the border of China or significant advances of right-wing forces in Laos consistently caused China to increase aid to the Pathet Lao. For example, immediately following General Phoumi’s recapture of Vientiane, Chinese leaders called multiple meetings with Hanoi to discuss the situation and facilitate planning and assistance to the Pathet Lao. Following these hasty meetings, the PRC provided the Pathet

³⁹⁵ Langer, “The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao,” v.

³⁹⁶ Langer, vi.

³⁹⁷ Langer, 20.

³⁹⁸ Langer, 21.

³⁹⁹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 180.

Lao with “weapons and supplies that could equip 20,000 soldiers.”⁴⁰⁰ Generally, weak military positions drove the concessions that the Chinese and the Pathet Lao made. Going into the 1962 Geneva Conference, Chinese leaders encouraged the cease-fire in order to “win time to build base areas, mobilize masses, and develop its armed forces for the eventual success of the revolution.”⁴⁰¹

Overall, North Vietnam was motivated by ideological and security factors similar to China. Ideologically, North Vietnam viewed the Hmong irregulars as a threat to the revolutions in both Laos and Vietnam.⁴⁰² From a security standpoint, North Vietnam’s own military history “seems to have made Vang Pao look to Hanoi like a threat to [North Vietnam’s] territorial integrity.”⁴⁰³ North Vietnam saw the Plain of Jars as a region that the United States could use to invade, but also an area that could foster separatist movements in Vietnam. North Vietnam’s ideological and security concerns show the importance of at least pressuring the RLG and the United States in Laos.

The Pathet Lao’s decision-making appears to be more influenced by direction from the North Vietnamese than the Chinese. International observers noticed this, stating, “the main decisions and plans of the Pathet Lao were ‘a joint enterprise’ with leaders in Hanoi.”⁴⁰⁴ Foreign assistance to the Pathet Lao, like assistance to the Hmong and the RLG, was indispensable. A RAND study stated that “the primitive state of the economy of the Communist zone of Laos and the scarcity of its resources preclude any hope of rapid modernization with substantial outside aid. The Pathet Lao/[North Vietnamese Army] forces operating in Laos are entirely dependent on imports for their weapons and ammunition, and in the case of the [North Vietnamese Army] units also largely for food.”⁴⁰⁵ The role of foreign assistance to the Pathet Lao and the RLG was similar, but the foreign influence obtained over the Pathet Lao seems to be higher since the Pathet Lao was

⁴⁰⁰ Zhai, 96.

⁴⁰¹ Zhai, 97.

⁴⁰² Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 526.

⁴⁰³ Ahern, 526.

⁴⁰⁴ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 96.

⁴⁰⁵ Langer, “The Soviet Union, China, and the Pathet Lao,” 11.

not a recognized government. Due to the Pathet Lao's closeness with China and Hanoi, along with its inability to conduct operations without direct support, likely, United States' actions did not change Pathet Lao decision making directly. Instead, the United States first had to influence Chinese and North Vietnamese decision making.

Ultimately, the primary goal when the United States partnered with the Hmong resistance was to buy time for the RLG forces to develop. The Hmong did successfully accomplish this by tying down Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces for years. Unfortunately, the RLG forces still failed to create the necessary capabilities for maintaining control over Laos. The communists knew the limitations of the RLG once the United States removed its airpower and they took advantage of them. Despite the ultimate fall of RLG, the partnership with the RLG and the Hmong had other benefits. Undoubtedly, it forced North Vietnam and China to commit resources that they could have used against the United States in South Vietnam. North Vietnam had three entire divisions focused on combat in northern Laos at its height, which could have been, and were indeed eventually used against South Vietnam.⁴⁰⁶

In sum, the United States' partnership with the RLG and the Hmong had mixed results concerning effects on communist rivals. On the one hand, the partnership delayed communist advances and their ability to control the Laotian capital. On the other hand, the partnership ultimately failed to develop an RLG that was capable of standing on its own. China's and North Vietnam's interests in Laos outweighed the costs. The *type of cost* that the United States used for influence was primarily punishment. The *means of communication* were both direct and indirect signaling of intent. The *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* of the rivals cannot be determined precisely, but it is reasonable to assume that the partnership merely forced the conflict into a stalemate. North Vietnam and China remained clear in their ultimate desire to eliminate U.S. influence. They simply chose to refrain from openly invading the capitol in Vientiane while they chipped away at the international norm in Laos. Without the United States' direct presence, the fall of Laos was only a matter of time.

⁴⁰⁶ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 529.

E. CONCLUSION/LESSONS

The ultimate failure of the war in Laos, shown by the collapse of the RLG in 1975, is a poor measure to judge the partnership effort, especially with the Hmong. The United States' partnership with Laos is important for this study for three primary reasons: it provides a contrast to the U.S. actions taken in Vietnam, it provides a look at Chinese security considerations in the region, and it provides a look at political constraints that forced the United States to incorporate unique modes of executing the partnership. Some of the unique modes include CIA/SF covert support to irregulars, the reliance on U.S. airpower in the second half of the conflict, and the non-military command and control of the operations. Although the United States also used airpower and irregulars in Vietnam, it was not the primary focus as in Laos. This partnership also shows the limitations of guerrilla operations, even when successful. The limitations of guerrilla operations is even recognized by Mao, who said, "guerrilla operations alone cannot produce final victory."⁴⁰⁷ Guerrilla operations may hinder operations for determined enemies like North Vietnam and China, but not completely stop them.

Overall, the Laos case reinforces the value and explanatory power of the partnership framework. It explains the success that the Hmong irregulars had, at least in obtaining limited objectives. The Hmong did keep the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam tied down in the Plain of Jars for several years. Even after South Vietnam fell to communism, Vang Pao "still ruled the mountains southwest of the Plain of Jars" and remained one of the last remaining anti-communist forces in Laos.⁴⁰⁸ This framework also shows the failures of the partnership with the RLG as a whole. The framework highlights concerns with the RLG in terms of every component—willingness, capability, and effects. Thomas Ahern said it best when he stated, "No amount of American aid or advice could make the Lao the masters of their own fate."⁴⁰⁹ Ahern's comment suggests a similar notion that the partnership framework suggests: that the real root of the problem with the RLG was a lack of

⁴⁰⁷ Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 62.

⁴⁰⁸ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 529.

⁴⁰⁹ Ahern, 529.

willingness against a determined enemy, not necessarily of capability. Maybe Ahern was correct in his evaluation, but Laos's fate was indeed sealed after the United States ended its partnership and air support. From then on, control of Laos was easily within the communists' grasp.

V. THE FRIENDSHIP PROJECT: A LOOK AT SACO

From 1942 to 1945, the U.S. Navy orchestrated a seemingly stunning unconventional warfare (UW) campaign in China through the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO). SACO partnered with the Chinese Nationalist government with the focus of competing against the occupying Japanese Empire. A complicating factor was the Chinese Nationalist Government competition with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This case is unique because it involves unconventional warfare that was primarily executed by conventional U.S. Sailors and Marines. The success of this particular partnership within a complex political environment is worth investigating because the nature of the conflict and the means to initiate and sustain the partnership are distinct from the previous two cases in Vietnam and Laos. SACO provides a look at a partnership in a declared war but within a low priority theater without significant American armed forces operating unilaterally. The fact that this partnership was one of the last U.S. military experiences in mainland China also makes it relevant today because of the context it provides for current tensions.

The Chinese have their own phrase for UW. They call it “*quxian jiuguo*,” which means “saving the nation in a devious way.”⁴¹⁰ SACO’s use of *quxian jiuguo* was a stunning military success operationally; however, it experienced strategic drawbacks because of multidimensional competition between several players, including the Imperial Japanese, Chinese Nationalists, CCP, British, and even inter-governmental rivalries within the United States. This seemingly successful military partnership in a complex environment provides an excellent case to test the partnership framework and to explore China as a unique rival of the United States.

A. BACKGROUND

While SACO itself is controversial and polarizing between the United States and the PRC, so too is the earlier Western history in China. A brief description of the sources

⁴¹⁰ Yu Shen, “SACO Re-Examined: Sino-American Intelligence Cooperation During World War II,” *Intelligence and National Security* 16, no. 4 (2001): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520412331306320>.

of contention in the century leading up to WWII will help put SACO into the broader context of western relations with China. China's interaction with the Western world during the Opium Wars in the mid-1800s led to "The Century of Humiliation."⁴¹¹ The Opium Wars resulted in China's loss of power and stability. China capitulated to Western powers and signed what it viewed as unequal treaties that enabled foreign economic and political domination. Anger over these treaties sparked the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, resulting in devastation, fourteen years of war, and twenty million dead.⁴¹²

The end of the 1800s seemed to expose more weakness within China as coups, failed reforms, and lost wars mounted. The Boxer Rebellion, which was supported by the Imperial Court, resulted in foreign intervention and humiliating reparations.⁴¹³ The Wuchang Uprising, seen as the birth of modern China, brought a brief period of stability, followed by what is known as the warlord period.⁴¹⁴ Throughout the warlord period, up until the unification campaigns of Chaing Kai-Shek (CKS) in 1928, the warlords were the law and government within China.⁴¹⁵ The warlord period was rife with violence and desperation. During this period, WWI treaties forced China to forfeit territory to Japan, and the perceived unjust loss of territory provided an additional source of contention with Western powers and Japan. China recalls the period following the Opium Wars with resentment toward colonial empires, and that resentment colored the Chinese thinking throughout the SACO partnership. It fueled the dislike of colonial powers such as the British but also caused suspicion of Americans. The SACO partnership emerged in this context of fear and resentment, making its successes even more unlikely.

⁴¹¹ Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x>.

⁴¹² Linda Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy: U.S. Sailors Undercover in China: Espionage and Sabotage Behind Japanese Lines During World War II* (Botley, Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2012), 33.

⁴¹³ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 34.

⁴¹⁴ Kush, 34.

⁴¹⁵ Kush, 35.

The SACO partnership, like all U.S. and Western interests in China before this period, is best described as both complicated and controversial. This particular partnership was driven primarily by two vastly different men, U.S. Navy Officer Milton Miles and Chinese Nationalist Major General Tai Li.⁴¹⁶ Miles was able to create a successful partnership with Tai Li despite significant doubts by many members of the U.S. State Department and military attachés. Many said that, at best, Tai Li would never work with a foreigner and, at worst, critically described him as “the Himmler of China.”⁴¹⁷ The personal relationship between Tai Li and Miles was so significant that Miles was able to, in a highly unorthodox arrangement, bypass the theater commander and report directly to the Joint Chiefs. This unorthodox arrangement was even supported by the China-Burma-India (CBI) “Theater Commander,”⁴¹⁸ General Joseph Stilwell, who wrote to General George Marshall that “SACO’s success depended on complete cooperation from Tai Li, who would never accept having a U.S. Army general between himself and Miles.”⁴¹⁹ It was Miles’s personal partnership with Tai Li, a vicious anti-communist, which has led to controversy.

The SACO partnership started with a small, modest operation, codenamed “Friendship Project,” primarily focusing on reporting weather and scouting the Chinese coast for potential amphibious landings by U.S. forces. The Friendship Project grew and evolved into SACO, and later Naval Group China, with Miles agreeing to train and equip Tai Li’s 50,000-man guerrilla army.⁴²⁰ U.S. officials reported this partnership as a stunning success with a significant contribution to the war against the Japanese at a relatively low cost in lives and treasure. The reports from Miles claim the partnership supplied critical intel, rescued over seventy downed U.S. pilots, and killed 26,000 Japanese

⁴¹⁶ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 149.

⁴¹⁷ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 8.

⁴¹⁸ He was officially designated Commanding General of U.S. Army Forces in the CBI Theater, Chief of Staff to the Supreme Commander China Theater (Chaing Kai-shek), supervisor of Lend-Lease, and U.S. representative on any Allied War Council. See Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, Random House Trade Paperback Edition (New York, NY: Random House, 2017), 298.

⁴¹⁹ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 28; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 114.

⁴²⁰ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 152.

while only losing five Americans.⁴²¹ These are impressive numbers that would point to a successful partnership, yet following WWII and the takeover of China by the CCP, American political support to the Chinese Nationalists has contributed to complicated relations between the United States and Communist China. The People's Republic of China (PRC), the descendant of the CCP, has used SACO to accuse the United States of providing partisan support to a robust and corrupt security apparatus that committed war crimes, atrocities, and prolonged the following civil war.⁴²²

Miles arrived in China for participation in SACO in April 1942.⁴²³ The U.S. Navy wanted intelligence on future landing sites on the mainland of China and weather reports to enable operations in the Pacific. Although it may seem trivial today, gathering weather data was no easy task and required placing men on the ground in forward locations. Lack of appropriate weather forecasts and data was a contributing factor to the strategic surprise at Pearl Harbor for the United States and at Normandy for Germany.⁴²⁴ Weather data in China was necessary to project offensive operations in the Pacific and to anticipate Japanese activities. SACO became responsible for obtaining weather data throughout the vast territory of China.

In addition to collecting weather and coastal data, SACO set up camps throughout China to conduct training and operations against the Japanese. Miles built a specific type of command in SACO that pushed for acceptance of the Chinese culture, as opposed to a British Empire mindset of superiority. He demanded that all his men showed respect for the Chinese, and this resulted in enhanced and reciprocal cooperation.⁴²⁵ Miles's approach was key to SACO's success in adverse circumstances. It enabled an unorthodox group of U.S. Navy Sailors to spearhead an inland guerrilla warfare campaign.

⁴²¹ Roy Olin Stratton, *SACO: The Rice Paddy Navy* (Pleasantville, NY: C.S. Palmer Pub. Co., 1950), vii; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*.

⁴²² Shen, "SACO Re-Examined," 165.

⁴²³ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 26.

⁴²⁴ T. L. Cabbage, "The German Misapprehensions Regarding Overlord: Understanding Failure in the Estimative Process," *Intelligence and National Security* 2, no. 3 (1987): 153.

⁴²⁵ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 140.

The Kuomintang (KMT) party, or the Chinese Nationalist government, was led by Chiang Kai-Shek (CKS), a well known and imposing historical figure who certainly wanted to rid China of the Japanese presence, but was also in a deep struggle to retain and consolidate his own domestic power. CKS came to power officially on October 10, 1928, at the end of the period when opposing warlords controlled the various regions of China.⁴²⁶ As historian Barbara Tuchman wrote, CKS “was never to be free of these challenges by rival members of the pack, never to be wholly secure in authority. The necessity of bargaining and maneuvering to keep the warlord challengers off balance and maintain his own was the condition of his rule.”⁴²⁷ CKS, despite U.S. beliefs to the contrary, was in charge of only a loosely unified China. He had fragile control over many areas, as shown by the fact that even warlords who helped him obtain power often refused to disband their armies and submit to the central authority.⁴²⁸ To make matters worse for CKS, the KMT government had been resisting the Japanese, at great cost, since 1937, several years before the official entry of the United States. Weak domestic control and military hardship under Japanese occupation led to CKS’s desire to shift as much responsibility for fighting the Japanese as possible to the Allies.

Owen Lattimore, an expert on China and the U.S. political advisor to CKS before the U.S. entry into the war, outlined China’s and CKS’s resentments on the perceived share of the fighting. Lattimore observed China’s perception that Britain and the United States were warning Japan against aggression in East Asia everywhere except for within China.⁴²⁹ Additionally, Tuchman said that China perceived that the “American effort to improve transport over the Burma Road was not to help China per se but to keep China fighting Japan so that America and Britain would not have to fight her.”⁴³⁰ Much of the resentment toward the Allies came from CKS.

⁴²⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 147–51.

⁴²⁷ Tuchman, 150.

⁴²⁸ Tuchman, 163.

⁴²⁹ Tuchman, 275.

⁴³⁰ Tuchman, 275.

CKS's preferences were completely natural; he wanted consolidation of his power both internationally and domestically, and he realized that support from the Allies would ultimately help him against the Japanese and his future domestic competitors. However, CKS resented several actions taken by the Allies. He believed that the Allies' desire to prosecute the war in Europe first would result in China lacking a seat at the peace table and the restoration of British colonies in East Asia. CKS also felt betrayed by the Allies following the second Cairo Conference when the decision was made to postpone an offensive operation already planned against Japan in Burma. Some argue that CKS's sense of betrayal from this led him to wage "passive war against Japan" and to have a "virtual truce between the Kuomintang and Japanese."⁴³¹ The KMT always hid its resentment under the surface of gratefulness. In one way, the KMT resented certain actions by the Allies, but in another, they understood how critical the assistance was. The Republic of China (Taiwan), the descendant of the KMT, summed up the importance of the relationship with the United States in its official history of the Sino-Japanese War stating, "The United States moved from sympathy to assistance and co-operation with China in WWII. Such assistance which can never be forgotten has left a glorious page in the annals of the twentieth century."⁴³²

CKS became the Supreme Allied Commander China Theater with a spot for a U.S. officer as Chief of Staff. General Stilwell filled this position for most of the war until President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) replaced him with General Wedemeyer. CKS's authority as Supreme Commander seemed to be undermined at times by the Allies, chiefly the British, who did not always submit to his positional authority.⁴³³ The Allies' undermining of CKS is exemplified by the Quebec Conference, which created a new South East Asia Command under a British officer without consulting the Chinese.⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936–1945* (New York, NY: Random House, 1970), 765.

⁴³² Ming-kai Chang and Hsu Long-hsuen, *History of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945)*, trans. Wen Ha-hsiung (Taipei, Taiwan: Chung Wu Publishing Co., 1971), 556.

⁴³³ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 294.

⁴³⁴ Maochun Yu, *The Dragon's War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937–1947* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 110.

Comparatively, the United States demonstrated sympathy and support for China, which began well before WWII. American Christian Missionaries were prevalent in China and they cultivated sympathy for the Chinese people within U.S. public opinion. The impact of these foreign missionaries in China is significant, even contributing to Chinese frustrations leading up to the Boxer Rebellion and necessitating U.S. intervention in 1900.⁴³⁵ FDR had grand plans for the KMT government under CKS as a major world power next to the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union.⁴³⁶ FDR was the dominant political driver who shaped relations with China. When General Stilwell asked FDR before reporting to China if he had a message for CKS, FDR responded by saying, “tell him we are in this thing for keeps, and we intend to keep at it until China gets back all her lost territory.”⁴³⁷ FDR’s strong statement demonstrates his serious intent to support CKS, despite his later statements near the end of the war that requested control of CKS’s armed forces.⁴³⁸

It is important to note, however, that the United States had dissenting and pessimistic views about the importance of China as a partner in a financial and democratic sense leading up to WWII. The optimistic projections of enormous trade through the Open Door policy disappointed many with dismal investment and trade numbers in the 1930s (As percentage of the total U.S. foreign trade and investment, China represented only 1% of total worldwide investment and 4% of total foreign trade).⁴³⁹ Even throughout the war, pessimistic views of China and the KMT government continued. Tuchman stated that “the consensus of most American officials and correspondents working in China was that the Kuomintang was incompetent, corrupt, oppressive, unrepresentative, riddled by internal

⁴³⁵ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, Revised paperback edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014), 71.

⁴³⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945*, 425.

⁴³⁷ Tuchman, 303.

⁴³⁸ See FDR’s frank message to CKS on July 6, 1944 which charged him with placing General Stilwell in command of all Chinese Armed Forces. Tuchman, 563.

⁴³⁹ Yu, *The Dragon’s War*, 184.

weakness and unlikely to last.”⁴⁴⁰ Indeed, many at the time argued that the KMT government was not truly a democracy.⁴⁴¹

The KMT’s attempts to manipulate or overpower Western leaders often strained diplomatic relations. For instance, in what looks to be the tail wagging the dog, CKS would give ultimatums to the United States, threatening to stop fighting the Japanese. Many Chinese believed that they could manipulate westerners in positions of power. The chief of a Chinese military mission once said mockingly, “Let me see the British officials and I will turn them around my little finger.”⁴⁴² In the summer of 1942, CKS issued an ultimatum to the United States, demanding that America commit three of its own divisions to restore communication between Burma and China, sustain 500 combat planes within China, and deliver 5,000 tons of military equipment per month via air over “the hump.”⁴⁴³ The hump was the nickname given to the difficult but sole logistical route into China. While Japan occupied all other roads and ports, the logistical route required flying over the Himalayan mountains. CKS’s ultimatum was most likely a bluff because it is unlikely that he would obtain a separate peace with the Japanese. A separate peace would have been outside his interests because his goal rid China of all Japanese influence. In another case, CKS demanded a one billion dollar loan to keep fighting after the United States backed out of a commitment made at the Cairo conference for an amphibious landing in China. This demand outraged many U.S. officials.⁴⁴⁴ Stilwell warned CKS that “our people are fed up.”⁴⁴⁵ These ultimatums demonstrate that CKS desired American troops, air support, and as much war material as he could get, but that he also had diverging interests from the United States at times. While CKS’s interests occasionally diverged from the interests of the United States, they did not diverge very far from General Tai Li.

⁴⁴⁰ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 425.

⁴⁴¹ Owen Lattimore, “The Fight for Democracy in Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 20, no. 4 (1942): 703, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20029186>.

⁴⁴² Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 400.

⁴⁴³ Tuchman, 377.

⁴⁴⁴ Tuchman, 493.

⁴⁴⁵ Tuchman, 493.

General Tai Li was an absolutely loyal servant and believer in CKS with a deep level of trust between them going back to the beginning of their relationship at the Whampoa Academy (Chinese military academy). Tai Li showed his loyalty early as a student when he began to pass intelligence on the communist tendencies of his classmates to CKS, who was the academy's commandant.⁴⁴⁶ CKS gave Tai Li the nickname "'Rain Hat,' a nod to his knack for shielding the Generalissimo in times of trouble."⁴⁴⁷ Tai Li was fiercely loyal in both a good and a bad way. Frederic Wakeman, the author of the Tai Li biography *Spymaster*, observed that Tai Li likely was responsible for the death of over 2,000 of his own agents and carried out politically motivated killings ordered by CKS.⁴⁴⁸ His fierce loyalty to CKS and China is what makes Tai Li such a complicated figure. He was, on the one hand, a very competent military leader and intelligence officer for China, and on the other hand, a monster. The monstrous side of Tai Li coordinated assassinations of political enemies, executed his agents for mistakes, and utilized brutal methods of torture.⁴⁴⁹ However, the competent and loyal commander side of Tai Li was observed by many. Many American SACO members saw Tai Li as an active military leader who could motivate his men with powerful speeches.⁴⁵⁰

Tai Li's fierce loyalty and desire to support CKS's regime carried over to his disgust for communism. Tai Li was staunchly anti-communist and was continually thinking about the nationalist position in the post-war years against the communists.⁴⁵¹ His answer for securing post-war positioning was simple; he wanted to strengthen his security apparatus and intelligence gathering functions while gathering equipment that he could use in the inevitable future fight against the communists. To further this end, he wanted to reduce the losses of his forces and equipment fighting the Japanese. Miles described Tai

⁴⁴⁶ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 48.

⁴⁴⁷ Kush, 49.

⁴⁴⁸ Frederic E. Wakeman, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 365.

⁴⁴⁹ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 50–51.

⁴⁵⁰ Stratton, *SACO*, 25.

⁴⁵¹ Yu, *The Dragon's War*, 55.

Li's desire for F.B.I. type training as his "most earnest wish—a wish so important to him that he was willing to trade almost any service for it."⁴⁵² The KMT knew that they would need this internal policing capability in the fight against communism after the war.

Tai Li also desired international recognition of China as a sovereign power. This desire led to his hatred of the British, who he viewed as having imperialistic intentions in China, as well as his resentment of what was referred to as "old China hands."⁴⁵³ The old China hands were people who proclaimed themselves as China experts because of pre-war business dealings in China but often were prejudice against the Chinese people and lacked respect for China's sovereignty. The presence of the British secret police within China before the war contributed to Tai Li's resentment. He advocated for the expulsion of Britain's China Commando Group before SACO arrived due to Britain's insistence on total command and control.⁴⁵⁴ In some ways, the removal of the China Commando Group made Tai Li free to demand more control over the partnership with the United States in SACO, but it also opened the door for the Americans. Following the expulsion of the China Commando Group, Tai Li told his agents, "don't be discouraged by the departure of the British. They have gone away, and that's all right. But the Americans have already packed their luggage and are on their way to Chungking now!"⁴⁵⁵

The American heading to fill in the role of Britain's China Commando Group was then Commander Milton "Mary" Miles. Miles had significant experience working in China before the war, but contrary to the "old China hands," he developed a deep respect for the Chinese people. He implemented policies in SACO that showed his respect: men were forbidden to use derogatory terms for the Chinese, disrespect for Chinese food and utensils was not tolerated, and the men were never allowed to show impatience with the Chinese.⁴⁵⁶ Critics of Miles say that he was naïve to KMT's actual agenda, duped by Tai Li, and even

⁴⁵² Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 147.

⁴⁵³ Miles, 119; Yu, *The Dragon's War*, 55.

⁴⁵⁴ Yu, *The Dragon's War*, 56.

⁴⁵⁵ Yu, 67.

⁴⁵⁶ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 140.

accuse him of “going native.”⁴⁵⁷ Whether Miles was fooled or not, it is clear that his interests aligned very closely with the KMT government. CKS sent Miles a gift after the war that summed up Miles’s attitude; it was a scroll with the saying, “Two men in the same boat help each other.”⁴⁵⁸ In Miles’s mind, the KMT government and the United States were in the same boat.

While Miles believed the KMT and the United States to have identical interests, not everyone within the United States agreed. Patrick Hurley, FDR’s personal representative to Chungking, and General Wedemeyer, General Stilwell’s replacement, both supported opening up relations with the CCP in Yenan to support a potential offensive in CCP controlled areas.⁴⁵⁹ The KMT advised against any support to the CCP because resources were limited and any support offered to the CCP would have been diverted away from the KMT. Despite being in a temporary truce with the KMT, the CCP’s most immediate goal was “arms acquisition for a final military showdown with the Nationalist government.”⁴⁶⁰ Scholar Maochun Yu stated, “It was known that Yenan’s ultimate goal was not to defeat the Japanese, as all in China believed that Japan would be defeated sooner or later. The final showdown was to be with the Nationalists; this the Communists did not hide.”⁴⁶¹ The CCP’s ability to take advantage of the war to build and consolidate its power frustrated the Republic of China, the successors to the KMT, for decades after the war.⁴⁶²

The CCP’s primary goal clearly contradicted the efforts of the United States to support the KMT. For many within the OSS, though, the intelligence and guerilla warfare potential of the CCP against Japan was irresistible. OSS officers observed that “there is virtually no spot in Japanese-occupied China in which the Yenan armies do not have

⁴⁵⁷ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 63; Yu, *The Dragon’s War*, 120.

⁴⁵⁸ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 108.

⁴⁵⁹ Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 184–85; Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 773–76.

⁴⁶⁰ Yu, *OSS in China*, 184.

⁴⁶¹ Yu, 167.

⁴⁶² Chang and Long-hsuen, *History of the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945)*, 549.

permanent agents of guerrilla troops.”⁴⁶³ Ultimately, support to the CCP did come for a time, but it did not come close to the level of support to the KMT. This variation in support is because Washington pushed back on Wedemeyer and the OSS’s initiative.⁴⁶⁴ The support given by the OSS to the CCP was known by the United States to have adverse long-term impacts with CKS and Tai Li. The relationship also ended abruptly over, among other things, the CCP’s killing and mutilation of an OSS agent named John Birch.⁴⁶⁵

Following the surrender of Japan, SACO quickly and unceremoniously stood down and sent personnel back to the United States. President Truman dissolved the OSS, which made the SACO agreement no longer active.⁴⁶⁶ Officially, SACO was terminated on October 1, 1945, but it took members several months to completely redeploy from China. Shortly after the official end date, a “small and hurried ceremony” was held to honor the partnership and the KMT.⁴⁶⁷ This brought an end to the war in China for the United States, but not for the KMT, which still had to contend with the growing threat from the CCP. Between 1945 and the KMT’s downfall and retreat to Taiwan in 1949, CCP forces destroyed most of the elite KMT units that SACO trained.

The SACO partnership is a case of a successfully executed military partnership in GPC. SACO, though, had weaknesses that are outlined in the partnership framework, primarily the disparity of willingness at the political level. The next section is the first component of the framework, willingness, applied to SACO.

B. WILLINGNESS

There are several evaluation criteria to consider when evaluating the capability of the partner: the *initial overlap of interest*, the *incentives* used by the principal, the *uncertainty* of the tasks, and the *informational asymmetry*. Overall, SACO proved to be a willing partner despite a few deviations in long-term interests and disagreements over

⁴⁶³ Yu, *OSS in China*, 166.

⁴⁶⁴ Yu, 192.

⁴⁶⁵ Yu, 239.

⁴⁶⁶ Yu, 252.

⁴⁶⁷ Yu, 252.

incentive structures. The *initial overlap of interests* was high because of the common enemy of Japan. The *incentives* used were very generous behavior-based loans, military equipment, and training. The *uncertainty* and the *informational asymmetry* were both decreasing throughout the partnership. All the above factors lead to an acceptably willing partner.

The *initial overlap of interests* between the two SACO partners, the Nationalist Chinese government, or the Kuomintang (KMT) party, and the U.S. government requires a more in-depth look. The KMT's and the United States' interests both clearly overlap with respect to the desire to remove Japan and its puppet governments from China, but the interests also conflicted in several areas. The overlap and the conflicts of interests should be examined at the political level with the KMT and U.S. governments, as well as the military level with General Tai Li and U.S. military leadership.

At the political level, the KMT and the United States had overlapping interests with respect to the desire to defeat Japan and the desire for a stable and sovereign China. The interests at this political level conflicted due to CKS's insistence on retaining domestic power against potential political rivals and military power for the coming conflict with the CCP. The United States wanted CKS to expend his effort against Japan, while CKS wished to gather and reserve forces and material to secure his own power after the war. FDR wanted to support CKS fully as a great power nation but showed frustration at his lack of initiative to fight the Japanese.⁴⁶⁸ For FDR, China was only one region in the global conflict, and CKS was only one of several vital allies. The need of the United States to balance resources in China with other theaters meant that, politically, FDR could not provide CKS with everything he wanted.

The Chinese military partner most influential to SACO, as stated previously, was General Tai Li, the Chief of the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics of the Military Council of the Chinese Nationalist Government. Tai Li's initial preferences were primarily to support CKS's regime, which included the expulsion of the Japanese, the eventual defeat

⁴⁶⁸ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 774.

of the communists, the strengthening of his own security apparatus, and the recognition of a sovereign China by the international community.

Miles's initial interests were to support the U.S. war effort against Japan by both supporting the U.S. Navy and the KMT as the sovereign power in China. Miles initially focused on prepping the environment for the U.S. Navy's potential amphibious landings on the China coast.⁴⁶⁹ Miles believed that the only way to achieve this was to work through the KMT government; cooperation was necessary vice the British tactic of domination.

The *incentives* used by the principal to influence the desired behavior came primarily in material and political benefits offered to CKS. These carrots offered were behavior-based incentives with little or no strings attached to actual outcomes. The United States wanted to defeat Japan and support a stable East Asia region following the war, so offering military equipment and international recognition to the KMT as a sovereign world power was within the United States' own interests. Because the United States viewed the incentives as within its interests, limited strings were attached to specific end states or objectives specified at the higher levels. Although General Stilwell consistently tried to obtain the authority for quid pro quo to use Lend-Lease material as leverage against CKS, Washington regularly denied him.⁴⁷⁰

Secretary of the Treasury Hans Morgenthau proposed outcome-based incentives in 1942 through loans issued to the KMT government. The outcome-based stipulations were rejected by CKS, ultimately leading to financial support with virtually no strings attached.⁴⁷¹ Morgenthau also proposed bypassing the KMT central government to pay the troops directly every month, which would have reduced possibilities for corruption and would have encouraged operations. CKS refused to accept the transferred risk and turned down every proposal for more U.S. control or supervision of the loans. CKS claimed that loans to help fight a common enemy should not require pre-arranged terms. Thus, to keep the KMT government in the fight, the Americans capitulated to loosely controlled,

⁴⁶⁹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 417.

⁴⁷⁰ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*.

⁴⁷¹ Tuchman, 305.

behavior-based incentives. These incentives encouraged China to commit only enough resources in the fight against the Japanese to continue receiving payments and material. The United States eventually resented the 1942 loan stipulations and the rate of exchange, both of which caused problems with further loans in 1943.⁴⁷² The exchange rate, which was estimated at six times the real value, actually placed a high cost on incentivizing CKS, leading some to believe that “even the United States was not rich enough to fight in China.”⁴⁷³

The material provided to the KMT government from the beginning of Lend-Lease was a significant factor for incentivization. Tuckman stated succinctly that, following the declaration of China as eligible, the “Lend-Lease became the core and foundation and, from the Chinese point of view, the most important aspect of the Sino-American relationship.”⁴⁷⁴ The KMT government was isolated, without access to an uncontested port to receive supplies. Before the completion of the Burma Road, which Stilwell spearheaded, the United States had to fly all the equipment into China at a great expense.⁴⁷⁵ Prior to and throughout the war, Lend-Lease brought vital military equipment over “the hump” from Burma/India. The logistical challenges and costs to provide these incentives proved tasking to the United States.

The *uncertainty* within partnerships, with respect to both completing and monitoring the specified objectives or tasks, is important because it directly affects the risk for the principal and the agent. In the case of SACO, the tasks were ambitious: establishing weather stations throughout a vast geographical area in enemy-held terrain, fighting a modernized Japanese Army, and building intelligence networks to monitor the Japanese. These ambitious tasks, though, did not have an unreasonable amount of uncertainty to them in either the ability to measure the success or the ability to obtain it. Japan even realized low uncertainty was a strength for the KMT, when they noted in an estimate of KMT forces

⁴⁷² Tuchman, 493.

⁴⁷³ Tuchman, 495.

⁴⁷⁴ Tuchman, 268.

⁴⁷⁵ Tuchman, 612.

that the single greatest tool that the KMT had was its belief in the eventual victory of Britain and the United States.⁴⁷⁶ Essentially, the main thing that the KMT government had to do was to continue fighting the Japanese and not give up. The task at hand for the KMT government was never to defeat the Japanese by themselves, which would have increased the uncertainty significantly. The plan for the KMT was a part of a broader strategy to put pressure on the Japanese, with American offensives through the Pacific. Additionally, the ability to provide support to weather monitoring stations was well within Tai Li's abilities. He already had an established network of spies and informers throughout China that could support movements and locations.

The *information asymmetry* between the principal and the agent was significant in the beginning despite the special relationship between Tai Li and Miles. Tai Li was risk-averse when it came to American lives, which resulted in him vetoing all the proposals for Americans to accompany Chinese counterparts on operations until October 1944. Before allowing American SACO personnel to accompany the KMT on operations, historian Linda Kush said, "[the DOS] accused Tai of using SACO to hoard American arms and equipment rather than to defeat Japan. Rumors had been flying that Tai Li did not want Americans out in the field because they would discover his deceit."⁴⁷⁷ Some SACO officers suspected similar problems with Tai Li, noticing that he always asked for more American weapons and equipment while requiring Americans to stay within the protected camps.⁴⁷⁸ This is the classic information asymmetry problem that occurs when it is impossible or costly to monitor activities. Initially, Miles and his American counterparts had to trust Tai Li at his word. The information asymmetry decreased, however, after the American SACO personnel were allowed to accompany the KMT on operations.

In summary, General Tai Li and the KMT government were willing partners for the United States despite some conflicts in long-term interests at the political level. The *initial overlap of interests* was substantial at both the political and military levels. At the political

⁴⁷⁶ Saburō Hayashi and Alvin D. Coox, *Kōgun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (Baltimore, MD: Monumental Printing Co., 1959), 47.

⁴⁷⁷ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 71.

⁴⁷⁸ Kush, 70.

level, FDR and CKS were strong supporters of a sovereign China, free from imperialist intervention and Japan. At the military level, Tai Li, although anti-communist, was similarly anti-Japanese. This framework would suggest that the overlap of interests in SACO was enough to make the cost of incentivizing low. The *incentives* offered through SACO were loosely controlled, behavior-based incentives, mainly in the form of war material and training. The incentives through loans and Lend-Lease provided minimal stipulations for the KMT government. The *uncertainty* in the environment was also relatively low, both in the ability to measure the agent's output and ability to achieve it. The *information asymmetry* between the United States and the KMT government was high initially, but decreased as U.S. SACO personnel started to accompany the Chinese in operations. Even a completely willing partner, however, needs some level of capability to be successful. The next section analyzes the second component of the framework—capability—as it relates to the KMT government and armed forces.

C. CAPABILITY

There are several evaluation criteria to consider when evaluating the capability of the partner: the *strategy*, the *initial capabilities* of the agent, the *structure of the interorganizational ties* (vertical, horizontal, the means with which collective efficiencies were achieved), and the *principal's techniques* of increasing the agent's capabilities. Although the KMT had several capability gaps, the United States successfully created interorganizational ties and used proven BPC techniques to improve the KMT and fulfill the Allies' strategy against Japan.

The *strategy* of the United States stemmed primarily from the idea that the United States would supply airpower, money, and equipment while the KMT government would provide the manpower and access within China. SACO's mission within that broad strategy was more specific. Then Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest King, gave secret verbal orders to Miles to "go to China and set up some bases as soon as you can. The main idea is to prepare the China coast in any way you can for U.S. Navy landings in three or four years. In the meantime, do whatever you can to help the Navy and to heckle the

Japanese.”⁴⁷⁹ Although in this initial concept it seemed like heckling the Japanese was an afterthought, it became a primary component shortly after a handshake deal between Miles and Tai Li in a rice paddy while under fire from Japanese airplanes.⁴⁸⁰

The desired end-state in the Pacific was the unconditional surrender of Japan, as explicitly stated by FDR following the Casablanca Conference.⁴⁸¹ Although the declaration of unconditional surrender has sparked debate, it nonetheless led to a plan to place maximum pressure on Japan.⁴⁸² Scholar Robert Pape argued that it was this maximum pressure on multiple fronts, not the atomic bombs, that led to the military vulnerability of Japan and eventual surrender.⁴⁸³ Japan’s military vulnerability was achieved through a variety of means, with the pressure in China through SACO as a small part. Initially, when the plan for landing allied forces in China was still a priority, SACO’s role in preparing the environment was critical. Once the United States eliminated this option, China’s role was diminished. The plans for the U.S. Navy to land forces in China never materialized because U.S. leadership deemed it unnecessary once air campaigns could reach Japan from territory outside of China, such as the Marianas and Okinawa.⁴⁸⁴ After plans to bypass the Asian continent took place, the United States moved the China theater to a secondary position. The risk in this strategy lies in the lofty desired end state of unconditional surrender, which was only partially achieved in conjunction with an enormous offensive by the Soviets in Manchuria.⁴⁸⁵

The *initial capabilities* of the KMT government were limited despite their enormous manpower. The KMT government lacked sufficient technology and equipment to stand up to a modern armed force such as Japan’s and had to resort to guerilla warfare

⁴⁷⁹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 18.

⁴⁸⁰ Miles, 52.

⁴⁸¹ Alan F. Wilt, “The Significance of the Casablanca Decisions, January 1943,” *The Journal of Military History* 55, no. 4 (1991): 519, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1985768>.

⁴⁸² Wilt, “The Significance of the Casablanca Decisions,” 527.

⁴⁸³ Robert A. Pape, “Why Japan Surrendered,” *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 156, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539100>.

⁴⁸⁴ Wilt, “The Significance of the Casablanca Decisions,” 526.

⁴⁸⁵ Pape, “Why Japan Surrendered,” 156.

as a resistance effort. On paper, the KMT government had 300 Army divisions standing by for use against Japan, but the reality was that most of these divisions were insufficiently manned and inadequately trained. General Stilwell often argued that the Chinese Army was of low quality, as shown by his constant pursuit of sweeping reforms. Stilwell's desired reforms consisted of reducing the number of Chinese divisions in total so that there could be some capable divisions versus the many worthless divisions.⁴⁸⁶

The KMT government was in control of a tremendous amount of personnel that it often could not afford to take care of. Many of the Chinese personnel that the SACO camps received were starving, weak, and illiterate.⁴⁸⁷ A former SACO supply officer, Roy Stratton, had duties that allowed him to stay in contact with all of the camps and he outlines this problem in his book, *SACO: The Rice Paddy Navy*.⁴⁸⁸ The low quality of personnel made training difficult for many of the SACO instructors. The U.S. instructors noted that many Chinese students also "suffered from scabies, conjunctivitis, ulcerations and poor eyesight."⁴⁸⁹ Additionally, the wide variety of Chinese dialects used by the students made training and coordination with the units difficult.⁴⁹⁰ The combination of these factors points to the conclusion that the initial capabilities of the Chinese guerrillas were deficient. This view was supported by General Stilwell, among others, who assessed that the morale and capabilities of the KMT army as a whole were low and needed to be revitalized.⁴⁹¹

The assessment of the Chinese as having limited capabilities is, of course, not agreed upon by everyone. Miles had high regard for the Chinese guerrilla warfare capabilities, as did other members of SACO.⁴⁹² Ted Cathey, a U.S. Marine in SACO, said that his Chinese column was "comparable to an American battalion if operating under

⁴⁸⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 371.

⁴⁸⁷ Shen, "SACO Re-Examined," 157.

⁴⁸⁸ Stratton, *SACO*; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 156.

⁴⁸⁹ Shen, "SACO Re-Examined," 157.

⁴⁹⁰ Shen, 158.

⁴⁹¹ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*.

⁴⁹² Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 347.

similar conditions.”⁴⁹³ The reports from various other observers also suggest differing thoughts on the initial capabilities of the Chinese guerillas; some of them were seen as extremely competent by members of SACO. However, others received in the SACO camps, and much of the Chinese regular army had limited capability. This wide range of ability is understandable when considering the large number of Chinese recruits and the inevitable variances between them.

While the individual potential of the Chinese SACO students had a wide variance, the aerology and technical capabilities of the Chinese were extremely primitive. The KMT government lacked the equipment and knowledge to obtain the necessary weather data needed to make forecasts. Despite this, Miles was able to obtain a historical weather data book that helped the United States anticipate weather patterns. The Japanese had a geographical advantage against the United States in the Pacific predicting the weather because they generally attacked from the West, moving in the same direction as weather systems. That is why the access within China for weather data was so important. The United States needed to match the extensive Japanese network that reported weather data from a wide range, even from within the Soviet Union.⁴⁹⁴

Technical capabilities of the KMT guerillas were limited primarily because of a lack of equipment for communications and weapons. Tai’s army had previously relied on runners to transport information instead of radios. Miles pushed for the creation of a radio communication network in China using American radio equipment to remedy the time delay of the runners.⁴⁹⁵ The communication network was needed to relay time-critical intelligence and weather data to General Claire Chenault’s Fourteenth Air Force and the U.S. Navy. Transmitting time-critical information could not have been accomplished with the KMT’s initial capabilities.

The initial intelligence capabilities of Tai Li were high. Miles and many who observed Tai were often impressed with his vast networks. After traveling through

⁴⁹³ Miles, 347.

⁴⁹⁴ Stratton, *SACO*, 96.

⁴⁹⁵ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 51.

Japanese held territory shortly after meeting, Miles noted the extent of Tai's intelligence network, amazed that he even "had—or had had—access to the Imperial Palace itself!"⁴⁹⁶ Tai Li's network was extensive, with agents reporting to him from everywhere from Washington to India. This high initial intelligence capability of Tai Li allowed the United States to gain access to an already mature network of information.

The weaknesses in initial capabilities were fixed or accounted for through the interorganizational ties between the United States and the KMT. The *structure of the interorganizational ties* involved a combination of vertical and horizontal efforts. The scope of the SACO partnership was quite broad. It encompassed camps all over China that conducted training on a variety of topics. The SACO headquarters in Chungking, referred to as Happy Valley by the Americans, was where coordination with Tai Li took place and where Miles's famous "What the Hell" pennant flew.⁴⁹⁷ This headquarters element controlled and organized vertical and horizontal integration through a variety of means. Additionally, efforts from other U.S. military services and organizations accompanied the interorganizational ties made through SACO.

Vertically, the United States partnered with China on several levels to build new capabilities or complement Chinese capabilities with American ones. The American Volunteer Group (AVG), known as the Flying Tigers, was a vertical integration effort to complement Chinese ground capabilities with a capable air force. The AVG effort was carried out by General Claire Chennault, who eventually came to command the Fourteenth Air Force.⁴⁹⁸ This effort, authorized before Pearl Harbor by an Executive Order in April 1941, recruited Army and Navy pilots by using high salaries and bonuses for shooting down Japanese planes.⁴⁹⁹ These pilots were released from active duty to act as, essentially, mercenaries for China. CKS and Chennault had high hopes for this air centric effort throughout the war despite what Tuckman said was the realization by many that "Stilwell

⁴⁹⁶ Miles, 47.

⁴⁹⁷ Stratton, *SACO*, 64.

⁴⁹⁸ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 267.

⁴⁹⁹ Tuchman, 267.

had been right all along in predicting that the effectiveness of the Fourteenth Air Force would only provoke counterattack on the airfields.”⁵⁰⁰

In addition to vertical integration efforts through the AVG, SACO also delivered vertical integration efforts through the introduction of new tactics and ideas to Tai Li’s secret police and cryptology Radio Intercept Units. In what became a controversial decision, Miles authorized the training of Tai Li’s soldiers, specifically the Juntong secret police, in interrogation and other police tactics.⁵⁰¹ Unit Camp Nine is what formed into a SACO School of Intelligence and Counter-Espionage, led by a former FBI agent, Charles Johnston.⁵⁰² Camp Nine was unique in that it did not only build on existing capabilities but introduced new ones. Additionally, the SACO Radio Intercept Units introduced new capabilities and equipment to intercept and decode Japanese radio transmissions.⁵⁰³ Camp Nine and the Radio Intercept Units both created vertical interorganizational ties within SACO by adding entirely new skills.

Outside of Camp Nine and Radio Intercept Units, SACO integrated horizontally through supplying and training existing Chinese commando troops and intelligence networks. SACO had fourteen major camps that conducted training, the majority of which focused on Tai’s commando troops.⁵⁰⁴ Camp One, the oldest camp in SACO, was responsible for training and equipping Tai Li’s Loyal Patriotic Army (LPA). Camp One trained 6,976 LPA students, more than any other SACO camp.⁵⁰⁵ Camp Two trained 3901 guerrillas in water raiding and river mining by the end of the war; these guerillas then went into the Chinese Commando Army following training.⁵⁰⁶ Some camps received their own names for the operations they conducted. Camp Thirteen was referred to as “The Yangtze

⁵⁰⁰ Tuchman, 562.

⁵⁰¹ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 155.

⁵⁰² Stratton, *SACO*, 338.

⁵⁰³ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 157.

⁵⁰⁴ Shen, 155.

⁵⁰⁵ Stratton, *SACO*, 79.

⁵⁰⁶ Stratton, 121; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 214.

Raiders” because of the success of the sabotage against Japanese shipping in the Yangtze River by guerrillas trained and accompanied by SACO personnel.⁵⁰⁷

SACO’s scope also involved training and equipping Chinese pirates on the South-Central coast of China to hijack Japanese vessels.⁵⁰⁸ These pirates added to Tai Li’s network by providing intelligence via radio, helping rescue downed pilots in Japanese territory, and providing safe passage for SACO members.⁵⁰⁹ The relationship with the Chinese pirates was another horizontal integration effort carried out by SACO.

While executing vertical and horizontal integration efforts, the United States also effectively carried out the partnership in alignment with best practices. When applied to the framework, the *principal’s techniques* of increasing the agent’s capabilities align with previously identified best practices of engagement at multiple levels, enduring relationships, and appropriate level of technology. Because of the wartime needs and the strong U.S. desire to put pressure on the Japanese wherever possible, the United States made efforts across the entire government and military enterprise.

The United States engaged with the KMT government at multiple levels throughout the SACO partnership. The extensive engagement included Chennault’s Fourteenth Air Force and Stilwell and Wedemeyer’s initiatives with the Army. Within SACO, Miles trained Tai’s units on intelligence, military, and police capabilities. The extent of economic aid to China was also substantial, as seen through the amount of cargo delivered over ‘The Hump.’⁵¹⁰ Accounting for all support to China through SACO and other means, the United States seems to have partnered with KMT sufficiently at multiple levels.

While in the context of partnership at multiple levels, the SACO partnership was also an enduring relationship, a factor that contributed to the overall success. True to how most of the U.S. military operated during WWII, Miles stayed in China until the war was over. The United States was committed, if not entirely to the KMT government, then at

⁵⁰⁷ Stratton, *SACO*, 330.

⁵⁰⁸ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 247.

⁵⁰⁹ Miles, 251–52.

⁵¹⁰ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 168–69.

least to the unconditional surrender of Japan. The attitude of this long-term commitment carried over to the men of SACO, whose enduring relationship resulted in an appreciation of Chinese culture and the building of genuine friendships with their Chinese partnerships. SACO members often tried to learn the language and often built relationships by playing sports with the Chinese.⁵¹¹ The ability of the SACO personnel to stay in the China theater to continue to develop the relationships aligns with previously identified best practices for building capabilities in partners.

SACO introduced the appropriate level of technology for Tai's units to be successful. The Chinese commando troops, which made up the majority of SACO's focus, received basic American-made weapons and ammunition like .45 caliber pistols, .38 caliber revolvers, carbines, Thompson submachine-guns, and grenades.⁵¹² With a basic level of training, Chinese commando students were able to operate and maintain this equipment, so long as they continued to receive ammunition. On the other hand, the technology introduced to the Chinese with regard to weather data, communication, and radio intercept equipment was more complicated. This technology was controlled, however, through the presence of American personnel. The Radio Intercept Units that were designed to intercept and decode radio communications actually excluded the Chinese in their operations.⁵¹³ The weather data training, although introducing new technology, was done with "very simple equipment, such as barometers and thermometers."⁵¹⁴ The ability of SACO to introduce simple equipment that did not exceed the Chinese ability to operate or maintain proved successful for a sustainable partnership.

In summary, Tai Li's forces and the KMT government had a sufficient level of capability for a successful partnership. The *strategy* demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan through attrition or annihilation, with China's role evolving into one purely of resistance and intelligence. The *initial capabilities* of the Tai Li and the KMT had gaps but

⁵¹¹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 155.

⁵¹² Shen, "SACO Re-Examined," 155.

⁵¹³ Shen, 156.

⁵¹⁴ Shen, 157.

were sufficient enough in the areas of intelligence, access, and the sheer number of personnel to justify the partnership. The *structure of the interorganizational ties* provided substantial connections both vertically and horizontally, filling the required capability gaps. Finally, the *principal's (U.S.) techniques* for increasing the agent's capabilities were in line with best practices.

D. EFFECT ON THE ENEMY

In the case of SACO, it initially seems that SACO's efforts had limited deterrent effects on Japan despite the high costs imposed. The seemingly limited effect is partly because this partnership took place in the context of total war, partly because of the high-cost tolerance of Japanese forces, and partly because of the high priority Japan placed on controlling China. Although SACO was successful at imposing costs on Japan through a resistance strategy, it is unlikely that this directly deterred Japan in China. In fact, Japan was still occupying a large portion of China when they surrendered at the end of WWII. Digging deeper, though, SACO and the KMT army were able to tie up almost one million Japanese troops in China, enabling other offensive operations with coercive effects in the Pacific. Therefore, this section will consider not only the direct deterrence effects of SACO's resistance in China but also SACO's impact in enabling the greater effort in the Pacific theater through weather mapping and intelligence networks.

The most common *type of cost* used by SACO against the Japanese was punishment through sabotage. SACO claimed a large number of Japanese lives and destroyed a significant amount of property: twenty-seven thousand soldiers killed, eleven thousand wounded, five hundred captured, eighty-two railways destroyed, three hundred forty-three railroad cars, sixty-four railroad bridges, and various other acts of sabotage.⁵¹⁵ This destruction was a significant cost imposed on the Japanese "with a smaller expenditure of men and supplies than any other force in the Far East."⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ Yu, *The Dragon's War*, 128.

⁵¹⁶ Yu, 128.

Additionally, SACO enabled other allied units in deterrence efforts through intelligence and weather reports. Reports from coastal lookouts did, in fact, result in the sinking of Japanese naval craft and transports.⁵¹⁷ The intelligence of Japanese ship movements enabled specific targeting. The coastal lookouts were even able to identify hidden Japanese targets to bombers. Sergeant Stewart, a SACO coastal lookout, used a radio to talk U.S. bombers onto a Japanese destroyer that was unseen from the air because it was camouflaged in trees.⁵¹⁸ Even though the coastal watchers' primary role was to prepare the coast for landings that were never to come, gaining the nickname within SACO as the "Dead End Kids," their intelligence on Japanese movements was valuable because it allowed U.S. forces in the Pacific to allocate resources to specific threats.⁵¹⁹

For any form of coercion to work, a nation must clearly communicate the threat. The *means of communication* used by the SACO partnership was entirely indirect. No known open negotiations took place between the political entities of KMT and Japan, so SACO guerrillas had to rely on demonstrating their capability and intent to cause damage through action.⁵²⁰ Although this attempt at coercion may seem unimportant because both sides were at war and were not merely threatening, but actively seeking to do damage in any way they could, even in total war adversaries attempt to influence enemy decision-making by their actions.

The *impact on the cost-benefit analysis* on the Japanese is difficult to determine, as is the success of any deterrence efforts. The Japanese did view Tai and Miles as a threat, however. Miles documented specific Japanese attempts to target SACO leadership. While hiding in a rice paddy due to Japanese bombing runs, Miles's translator turned to Miles and said, "They know you are here, you and General Tai."⁵²¹ Miles and Tai Li thought

⁵¹⁷ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 418.

⁵¹⁸ Miles, 420.

⁵¹⁹ Miles, 492.

⁵²⁰ Direct communication with Japanese "puppet" governments by the KMT may have taken place in some areas but no known communications with Japanese directly. The CCP was known to have ties with the puppet governments. Yu, *OSS in China*.

⁵²¹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 50.

that the Japanese specifically targeted them on this occasion. The Japanese also worked to uproot the resistance efforts throughout Japanese-occupied China. The Japanese were also known by SACO to have sent out “trained assassins” to attempt to kill guerrilla column leaders.

Additionally, there is evidence that the punishment through sabotage conducted by SACO had limited impacts on stopping specific Japanese advances. Miles himself admitted, “Though the ninety-three saboteurs (from Camp One) were successful in many of their missions and may have delayed the Japanese push a little, they did not prevent it.”⁵²² The Imperial Japanese mindset was to always move forward, sometimes in a fanatical way, to their objectives during WWII. Even a particularly determined stand by the KMT’s 10th Army in the city of Hengyang resulted in Japanese escalation and commitment of forty thousand additional troops.⁵²³

Japan was not always deterred by offensives in China by the Fourteenth Air Force either. After the Fourteenth built up airfields and conducted bombing runs, Japan simply advanced and took the airfields by force.⁵²⁴ Japan’s China Expeditionary Army responded to increased U.S. air operations with an offensive called Operation ICHI-GO.⁵²⁵ Japan intended ICHI-GO to disperse the significant KMT divisions and advance to seize two critical airfields being used by the Fourteenth in Kwangsi province.⁵²⁶ This advance put Chungking in danger of being overrun, pressed the very existence of the KMT government, and contributed to Wedemeyer’s support to opening relations with the Chinese Communists.⁵²⁷ The OSS’s initiatives to partner with the CCP had consequences that degraded the partnership with the KMT; however, these initiatives were a response to the violent Japanese offensive against the Fourteenth.

⁵²² Miles, 155.

⁵²³ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 772.

⁵²⁴ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 562.

⁵²⁵ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 768.

⁵²⁶ Toland, 768.

⁵²⁷ Yu, *OSS in China*, 184–85.

Despite SACO's limited ability to stop Japanese advances, SACO's resistance efforts did seem to tie up Japanese troops, benefiting the larger war effort. While imposing costs on the Japanese forces, many of these SACO guerrilla columns were successful at keeping entire Japanese divisions in place, such as Camp Five's First Column.⁵²⁸ The Japanese Army did become tied up because of the threat from the KMT army divisions and the resistance efforts. In 1942, the Japanese leadership committed approximately 820,000 troops in China to maintain control.⁵²⁹ When Japan surrendered in 1945, Japan had 1,050,000 soldiers in the China Expeditionary Army.⁵³⁰ Although SACO's resistance efforts did not seem to deter the Japanese directly, they clearly imposed costs on the Japanese by creating the need to dedicate men and equipment that could have been used in other theaters.

In addition to tying up troops that Japan could have used against the United States in the Pacific, the Chinese resistance limited the amount of territory Japan desired to control. In early 1942 (at the very beginning of SACO), the Japanese Army High Command and Japan's China Expeditionary Army estimated KMT forces as governing power as extremely weak and ripe for destruction.⁵³¹ The Japanese developed initial plans for Operation CHE-KIANG and Operation FIVE in order to "conduct large-scale operations aimed at Chungking itself" and to "crush the Chinese power to resist."⁵³² Although offensives took place in eastern China, Japan never executed the Chungking operation because of the need to divert attention to the struggle in the Pacific.⁵³³

The aggressive intent of the Japanese Army High Command in China shifted by the end of the war. Japan no longer desired to contest the KMT resistance everywhere, and instead only focused on areas where the KMT was strategically important. For instance, despite fears within the United States and CKS in 1944, "Tokyo had no intention of driving

⁵²⁸ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 363.

⁵²⁹ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 773.

⁵³⁰ Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, 150.

⁵³¹ Hayashi and Coox, 47.

⁵³² Hayashi and Coox, 48.

⁵³³ Hayashi and Coox, 50.

as far west as Chungking. The acquisition of more Chinese territory held no attraction; the eastern China air bases did.”⁵³⁴ Although preparation for handling the potential entry of the Soviet Union in the war against Japan also played a role in Japan’s cost-benefit analysis, Japan realized that the more territory it took in China, the more troops would be required to contend with stiff resistance. Essentially, the Chinese resistance drove the struggle into a stalemate.

Tokyo’s later estimates also show KMT’s impact on Japanese decision making. In early 1945, the Japanese Army High Command provided the China Expeditionary Army with the following intent in China: stop attempts by large American forces to advance into China, secure strategic areas on the continent (eastern air bases), and “strive to eliminate the influence of Chungking.”⁵³⁵ The intent to strive to eliminate influence was vastly different from earlier plan to crush Chungking. By Japan’s own admission, all it could hope to do in 1945 was to pester, not break the KMT resistance as it had expected in 1942. The Japanese Army High Command’s later estimate of Chinese strength in the summer of 1945 also shows the importance of the U.S. partnership with the KMT. The Japanese estimates specifically considered the fifteen to twenty American-equipped KMT divisions (out of the KMT’s 300 total divisions) to be the “nucleus” of the army and that the “fighting capability of organized militia units could not be discounted in actions against the Japanese.”⁵³⁶ Although the KMT Army and Chinese resistance efforts did not stop Japan from the ability to take a specific military objective, they did dictate tough choices for Japan and provided a stiffer resistance than Japan expected.

SACO’s efforts at impacting the cost-benefit analysis of Japan are most easily seen through enabling operations in the Pacific. SACO’s coastal lookouts provided intelligence on the movement of the Japanese fleet and air force along the entire Chinese coast from Shanghai all way to Swatow, seven hundred miles south down the coast.⁵³⁷ This

⁵³⁴ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 778.

⁵³⁵ Hayashi and Coox, *Kōgun*, 146.

⁵³⁶ Hayashi and Coox, 148.

⁵³⁷ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 417.

information, along with the reported weather data, allowed the U.S. Navy to plan offensives and anticipate Japanese operations in the Pacific. The weather data helped create a map to ensure that “long range planning can be made for carrier strikes in the Far East.”⁵³⁸ The information that the coastal watchers gave also allowed American forces to target and sink Japanese troop transports full of soldiers heading to the fight.⁵³⁹

In summary, although the direct deterrent effects on Japan may not be easily seen, despite the high costs implemented on the Japanese, SACO’s comparatively cheap price tag and its ability to enable operations in the Pacific contributed to its overall effectiveness. Although China’s strategy against Japan in WWII is summed up by General Stilwell as “winning by outlasting”⁵⁴⁰ instead of trying to deter, the SACO operations in China indirectly enabled other military operations that were important in the coercion of Japan. Additionally, SACO directly implemented high costs on Japan through the development of a Chinese resistance, which tied up significant Japanese forces in the area. SACO communicated capability and intent to Japan indirectly through its active operations. Overall, the effect on Japan caused by SACO seems worth the effort put in.

E. CONCLUSION/LESSONS

SACO is an example of a partnership that delivered wartime goals of resistance and intelligence against the Japanese in China, yet its value depreciated in the long run due to the eventual fall of KMT to the CCP in 1949. Miles himself considers SACO a success, yet the whole effort in Asia a failure. Miles said, “If there is anything to be saved from the mess the United States helped create in Asia it can be done only by learning from the lessons our failure should have taught.”⁵⁴¹ SACO was not a failure because of the successes during the war, but because of the United States’ short-sightedness in not staying with their KMT partners following the end of the war to ensure stability in China.

⁵³⁸ Shen, “SACO Re-Examined,” 157.

⁵³⁹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 418.

⁵⁴⁰ Jonathan Templin Ritter, *Stilwell and Mountbatten in Burma: Allies at War, 1943–1944* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2017), 18.

⁵⁴¹ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 586.

Overall, this case indicates that the partnership framework is useful at explaining the operational military success of SACO. The willingness of the KMT government and Tai Li were sufficient when accounting for the amount of political control exerted through the loans and funding at the political level. The capabilities of the KMT partners, while lacking in many respects, were integrated in a way that allowed for U.S. support to enable their strength in manpower and local knowledge. The effects on the enemy are harder to identify directly, but the SACO partnership indeed enabled massive offensives in the Pacific and tied up almost one million Japanese troops.

Where this partnership failed, it failed in the conflicting interests at the political level. The willingness component of the framework captures this divergence. Commitments in other theaters of the war, higher priority allies, and perceived corruption within the KMT all contributed to the United States' decision to reduce support following Japan's surrender. If the willingness component of the partnership was managed properly following the war, potentially, the KMT government could still be in power today.

The immediate military successes of SACO provide an opportunity to see a genuinely impactful military partnership in a unique environment on the periphery of total war. As Miles said, SACO's guerrilla operations show the "ability of a few men with limited supplies and equipment to strike and run, and poke and pinch, and grab and turn up elsewhere."⁵⁴² It was the ability of the United States to identify and carry out this partnership with the guerrillas who were willing, capable, and had desired effects on the enemy that made it operationally successful. It is also a uniquely relevant case concerning China's rise today because it serves as a prelude to the current friction between the United States and the PRC.

⁵⁴² Miles, 586.

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VI. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

This chapter offers a critique of the partnership framework as well as suggestions concerning security cooperation partnerships today. The first section discusses the relevance and importance of the framework, as well as the significant lessons learned from the three cases. The second section explores potential gaps in the partnership framework by challenging each component's foundational literature and by offering other relevant factors that could complement the existing framework. The third section outlines considerations for partnerships to compete with China in the South China Sea (SCS). This section will also comprise an overview of China's interests in the region and a background of the tension points, followed by broad observations and recommendations that the partnership framework provides. Admittedly, the SCS Sea is merely one challenge among many with China. The SCS is undoubtedly affected by global events and interactions, but focusing on one specific area allows for a more in-depth analysis. The challenges that China presents today are increasingly demanding on a global scale. As scholar Eliot Cohen has stated, referring to China, "No geopolitical challenge to the American world role comes close to that posed by the newly prosperous, nationalistic, and sometimes belligerent Middle Kingdom."⁵⁴³ His statement captures China's threatening traits and the importance of China as a U.S. rival.

A. FRAMEWORK LESSONS: COMMON THEMES FROM THE CASES

The partnership framework and cases provide an opportunity to identify various observations on the identification and development of security cooperation partners in GPC. These observations do not create an exhaustive or all-encompassing list of how to execute partnerships in GPC, but only note items that uniquely stand out in the collective study. This study does not *prove* any of these observations, as the scope of the study means that they may only apply to specific cases. Additionally, many of the observations may seem obvious to the reader; however, sometimes, these obvious statements are needed, as

⁵⁴³ Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016), 101.

these cases show. This section divides the observations into three different categories: what type of partner the United States should look for; what actions the United States should take to develop the partnership; and China's typical responses to U.S. partnerships.

1. Observations on Partners

This study suggests that some characteristics of potential partners are valuable to the United States. The first observation is that *interests matter, both at the political and military levels*. Second, *partners often have limited potential capabilities*. Third, *some partners are better suited to specific tasks*.

The first observation is that *interests matter, both at the political and military levels*. Each case exemplifies the importance of the political and military levels of partnerships. In Vietnam and Laos, the politics of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, and the politics of South Vietnam and RLG altered the nature of the partnership. Eisenhower relied on the deterrent initiatives of SEATO, airpower, and nuclear weapons in order to conserve American resources.⁵⁴⁴ Kennedy's desire for flexible response options drastically increased the number of advisors and the amount of support to South Vietnam and the RLG, changing the nature of the partnership. The interests of Diem and the South Vietnamese government created problems for the partnership, as did the interests of the various leadership personalities of the RLG. Diem's lack of control over the government caused him to create policies that alienated the population and fueled the insurgency.⁵⁴⁵ The RLG's instability and turnover of authority between the rightists, neutralists, and leftists left the question of what the RLG's intentions were utterly ambiguous.

SACO also presents an excellent example of why military planners need to understand the political environment that they are operating in when choosing partners. CKS and FDR completely drove the partnership. CKS's fear of the inevitable civil war following the defeat of the Japanese drove him occasionally to make outrageous demands

⁵⁴⁴ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 31.

⁵⁴⁵ Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 41.

for equipment and to withhold expending resources against the Japanese.⁵⁴⁶ CKS's political interests positively and negatively impacted the various U.S. efforts with the Chinese. His interests made Stilwell's initiatives in Burma difficult, Chennault's initiatives with the Air Force easier, and SACO somewhere in between. Political interests also caused CKS to reject British ambitions in the region while causing Tai Li to use U.S. training and material to suppress political opposition.⁵⁴⁷

The second observation is that the United States should take into account that *partners often have limited potential capabilities*. Military planners should account for each partner's limits and develop achievable capabilities, even if these capabilities are below U.S. military standards. A 2014 RAND study similarly stated that "fragile partner states may not be able to use [security cooperation] effectively."⁵⁴⁸ This observation is about expectation management. Many partner nations will not be able to effectively support the quantity of military equipment that the United States asks of them because of political or economic reasons. Each case illustrates this observation. Several studies indicate that the United States problematically overlooked South Vietnamese limitations and tried to build the GVN into an exact copy of itself by delivering enormous amounts of military equipment.⁵⁴⁹ In reality, South Vietnam was not suited to the political ideals, the military way of war, or the massive military structure of the United States because it was, at least in the short term, not going to have political stability or the resources needed to sustain that type of effort. The same can be said of the partnerships in Laos, although it seems that the United States grasped the RLG's and the Hmong's inherent limitations better than it grasped those of South Vietnam.

In the case of SACO, Tai Li's organization and the KMT's limitations seem to have been realized and employed accordingly, which benefited the partnership. The United States never thought that it could defeat the Japanese through a partnership with the KMT

⁵⁴⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 493.

⁵⁴⁷ Wakeman, *Spymaster*, 365.

⁵⁴⁸ Michael J. McNerney et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 2014), 94, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA598630>.

⁵⁴⁹ Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 60; Odom, "Broken Mirrors," 17.

government or SACO alone. The orders that Admiral King gave to Miles were to “do whatever you can to help the Navy and to heckle the Japanese.”⁵⁵⁰ So the policy-makers in the United States saw this partnership as a supporting effort to keep Japanese forces tied up on the Asian mainland, not as the main effort. Even Mao recognized that “guerrilla operations alone cannot produce victory.”⁵⁵¹ The United States set achievable expectations of the KMT and Tai Li’s organization, demonstrating that when limitations of partners are understood, it can better incorporate the partnership into broader efforts in a region.

The third observation is that *some partners are better suited to specific tasks*. While this observation may seem obvious, stating it and understanding it is critical. Laos and the Hmong show the most evident positive example of this observation. The CIA, at least initially, employed the Hmong in a manner that suited the Hmong’s natural strengths and inclinations. The Hmong’s networks and their way of life were well suited to guerrilla warfare around the Plain of Jars; however, the Hmong were not suited to sustain conventional military operations. Conversely, the Hmong’s guerrilla warfare would not have suited the majority of the RLG armed forces. The use of the Hmong guerrillas in their local areas was different from some of the guerrilla warfare cross-border operations carried out from Vietnam. In Vietnam, the Montagnard tribes conducted guerrilla operations far away from their familiar territory, often with grave consequences.⁵⁵² Essentially, the United States should find a partner’s natural skills and tendencies and employ them appropriately.

2. Observations on United States Partnership Efforts

This study suggests that the actions the United States takes can influence the success of the partnership. The first observation is that *the United States should carefully use incentive structures*. Second, *the United States should use interorganizational ties to improve specific partner capabilities and limitations*. Third, *the United States should*

⁵⁵⁰ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 18.

⁵⁵¹ Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 62.

⁵⁵² Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 73.

balance long-term commitments with short-term objectives. Finally, partnerships benefit from culturally conscious leadership and practitioners.

The first observation is that *the United States should carefully use incentive structures* to reduce the cost of oversight. Principal-agent theory and the first component of the framework suggest that outcome-based incentives provide the best leverage for a principal partner. In practice, however, the cases show that partner nations often reject these outcome-based incentives. The suggestions from principal-agent theory, therefore, may be more difficult to relate directly to relationships between nations. In Vietnam, Laos, and SACO, the United States struggled to put reasonable stipulations on aid and support. While outcome-based incentives seem harder to implement in security cooperation, that does not mean the United States should give up trying to put some stipulations and control measures on aid and support.

Providing huge incentives without stipulations can often backfire. In Vietnam and Laos, the United States created a dependency problem by giving aid to the point of diminishing returns. An extensive 2014 RAND study also noted diminishing returns in security cooperation with its finding that effects were “strongest at the low end of expenditures per country, and there [were] diminishing returns from increased expenditures.”⁵⁵³ In South Vietnam, the United States paid for over 80% of South Vietnam’s military expenditures.⁵⁵⁴ In Laos, the Hmong became dependent on the United States for not only military equipment but for food and necessities.⁵⁵⁵ The vastness of U.S. aid to South Vietnam and Laos did not give the United States the leverage it needed. Robert Komer observed that the very massiveness of U.S. support actually reduced leverage because it showed Vietnam and Laos that the U.S. was overcommitted.⁵⁵⁶

The SACO case also provides an example of the importance combined with the difficulties of incentive structures on partnerships. The United States struggled to

⁵⁵³ McNerney et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, 92.

⁵⁵⁴ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 306.

⁵⁵⁵ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 144.

⁵⁵⁶ Komer, *Bureaucracy at War*, 34.

implement controls over the lend-lease material given to the KMT. CKS consistently denied outcome-based stipulations, while demanding that financial support came with limited strings attached.⁵⁵⁷ The lack of stipulations and control measures gave CKS leverage over the United States, leverage that CKS utilized on several occasions. The ideal business-like incentives, described by agency theory, are what the United States should strive to reach, even while acknowledging that falling short is almost guaranteed. Nevertheless, the more thought-out incentive structures are, the more the United States can reduce cost and increase leverage.

The second observation is that *the United States should use interorganizational ties to improve specific partner capabilities and limitations*. The United States should decide whether vertical or horizontal relationships are most suitable to a particular partner force capability. Vertical and horizontal ties each have positives and negatives in certain situations. Each can carry more risk with specific partners. The United States also does not, and should not, consider partnerships as completely vertical or completely horizontal. Most efforts to build capability or fill in capability gaps require both vertical and horizontal efforts. For example, after 1964, the U.S. Air Force effort in Laos and Vietnam was mostly unilateral. The United States recognized a significant gap in Laos's and Vietnam's air capabilities, which required vertical ties (unilateral U.S. efforts) to fill. However, Thai, Laotian, and Hmong pilots eventually complemented the U.S. Air Force's unilateral operations in support of RLG ground units.

The SACO partnership also saw a blend of horizontal and vertical ties on the same capabilities. SACO focused on building on Tai Li's existing guerrilla and intelligence organization with new equipment and funds, but SACO also filled gaps vertically where required: all technical weather collecting and radio intercept equipment were run by U.S. personnel. Miles deemed the time and cost of training and supplying Tai Li's personnel with this technology too high, so he implemented vertical ties instead of horizontal ones. Miles set up this structure of ties deliberately. The United States should attempt to find the

⁵⁵⁷ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 152.

proper balance between these different types of interorganizational ties as each situation dictates.

The third observation is that *the United States should balance long-term commitments with short-term objectives*. This observation is also not new. A RAND analyst testified to Congress on security cooperation: “It is long overdue for the United States to prioritize long-term support to good governance over rapidly equipping tactical military units.”⁵⁵⁸ In each case presented here, the United States found itself in a clash of long-term and short-term interests. The actions of the United States in SACO provide the clearest example of this tension. Although the United States wanted a stable and secure China in the long term, it was willing to sacrifice China’s stability to put short-term military pressure on the Japanese Empire.

Balancing long and short-term interests is difficult to implement in practice. For example, when looking back on historical cases, it may seem obvious to the contemporary observer that the KMT government was bound to fail and that it was only a matter of time before the Japanese Empire would surrender. The importance of the KMT’s eventual failure would have been more difficult to forecast in the middle of WWII when the focus was on Japan as the imminent threat. So, it may be slightly unfair to say that the United States deliberately sacrificed long-term for short-term interests. This observation merely suggests that planners should put considerable thought into the second and third-order consequences of specific actions. A military planner can only project long-term benefits and consequences to a certain level with the information available. However, careful thought should be put into this balance between short and long-term objectives because, as SACO shows us, unforeseen long-term consequences can be considerable.

Finally, *partnerships benefit from culturally conscious leadership and practitioners*. This observation aligns with the general notion that security cooperation benefits from “investment in human capital.”⁵⁵⁹ The most obvious positive example of this

⁵⁵⁸ Michael J. McNerney, “Department of Defense and Security Cooperation: Improving Prioritization, Authorities, and Evaluations,” Testimony (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, March 9, 2016), 4, <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1014435>.

⁵⁵⁹ McNerney et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, 93.

is SACO, where Milton Miles's organization prided itself on respecting and appreciating Chinese culture. The close ties and relationships that SACO formed with their Chinese counterparts undoubtedly contributed to the success of an endeavor that many believed was hopeless.⁵⁶⁰ Laos is the less obvious positive example of the importance of cultural knowledge. The United States essentially outsourced this requirement by using Thailand to provide interpreters and cultural intermediaries for U.S. advisors.⁵⁶¹ When the inherent cultural experience is unavailable within the U.S. military, the best answer may be to hire local nations that are more familiar with the United States. Vietnam seems to be a cautionary tale for this observation. In Vietnam, U.S. advisors consistently failed to understand the local political and security environment. Much of that likely had to do with the cultural distance between the U.S. advisors and the South Vietnamese. The United States had glaring deficiencies in Vietnamese language training and often kept "maneuver distance" from South Vietnamese counterparts.⁵⁶² These deficiencies likely contributed to the failure in Vietnam.

3. Observations on China

This study also suggests insights into the decision making of rival great powers, specifically China. The first observation is that *even successful U.S. partnerships may not deter China and may, in fact, cause China to escalate tensions*. Second, *China has a distinct military culture, but not one that is beyond comprehension*. Third, *China often acts opportunistically, exploiting perceived weaknesses in rivals when it is in a position of strength*. Finally, *China has internal disagreements and domestic considerations over policy decisions like other nations*.

The first observation is that *even successful U.S. partnerships may not deter China and may, in fact, cause China to escalate tensions*. Admittedly, this observation is not unique or new, but it is nonetheless essential to highlight. Even before Vietnam, in late 1950, the United States witnessed China's massive escalation in Korea as U.S. troops were

⁵⁶⁰ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 104.

⁵⁶¹ Celeski, *The Green Berets*, 30.

⁵⁶² Spector, *Advice and Support*, 286, 293.

approaching the Yalu River. China's massive response has impacted U.S. military thinking ever since.⁵⁶³ However, it is important to note that China does not escalate in every case. China certainly values security along its borders, but it only escalates when it is willing and able. For example, it is plausible to claim that China would not have responded to a U.S. military escalation against North Vietnam in the mid-1950s because of domestic concerns and the Chinese fear of a Korea-like war.⁵⁶⁴ China was not prepared for another confrontation with the United States, and discussions among Chinese decision-makers indicates that such concerns may have restrained its actions. On the other hand, following President Kennedy's increase in support to South Vietnam, Ho and Mao both came to "reject moderation."⁵⁶⁵ This rejection suggests that the United States' increase in partnership with South Vietnam did not deter China or North Vietnam, but actually had the opposite effect of inciting increased vigor in violent unification efforts. Even during the Johnson administration, direct threats of heavy military pressure on North Vietnam resulted in the North's refusal to yield and to claim that it would not stop supporting the liberation of South Vietnam.⁵⁶⁶ In sum, China challenges U.S. influence where and when it can, not everywhere, all the time.

Second, *China has a distinct military culture, but not one that is beyond comprehension.* U.S. military planners should not overstate the success of China's military culture and way of thinking. Eliot Cohen noted, "Understanding Chinese strategy, and the appropriate American response, is made more difficult by myths—some consciously concocted and spread by the Chinese government, some rooted in American romantic conceptions of China."⁵⁶⁷ He went on to say, "It is easy to construe Chinese military thought as a kind of occult wisdom before which American naivete and muscle-bound

⁵⁶³ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 105–7.

⁵⁶⁴ See discussion on Mao's restraint against U.S. Forces in Strait of Taiwan crisis. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 69,82.

⁵⁶⁵ Zhai, 129.

⁵⁶⁶ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 131–33; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 130.

⁵⁶⁷ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 103.

strength are powerless.”⁵⁶⁸ Americans also occasionally give the Chinese too much credit when they unjustifiably misread Chinese statements and actions as having intelligent long-term strategic forethought. For example, in the early 1970s, many Americans misunderstood an exchange between the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, and Henry Kissinger about the impacts of the French Revolution.⁵⁶⁹ Zhou Enlai famously responded, “It is too early to tell,” but unfortunately, Enlai misunderstood the question and thought Kissinger was referring to the on-going student riots in France.⁵⁷⁰ Recognized strategist Edward Luttwak argues that not only did the often glorified ancient Han Chinese leaders struggle with military strategy, but the modern Chinese state also often has failing military strategies because of Chinese strategic culture.⁵⁷¹

This study seems to indicate a similar notion about China’s military culture—that some aspects of Chinese decision-making differ from the United States’ but that China’s can be analyzed and understood nonetheless. In all the cases examined, Vietnam, Laos, and SACO, the Chinese communists seem to be willing to stoically accept enormous losses and combat the United States indirectly and ruthlessly. However, after considering China’s decision-making process, it appears that China acts in much the same way as the United States. China is and has been willing to use masses of military force to protect perceived interests, just as the United States. The conventional thinking is that China and the United States differ in that while the United States has shown the tendency to rely on a mass of military power, China has shown tendencies to rely on psychologically oriented uses of military power. This contrast is slightly unfair to both China and the United States because each nation uses both strategies. The Laos and Vietnam cases provide examples of China’s and the United States’ variations in approaches.⁵⁷² In Vietnam, the United States relied primarily on developing South Vietnam’s conventional military by providing mass of

⁵⁶⁸ Cohen, 105.

⁵⁶⁹ Richard McGregor, “Zhou Enlai’s Cryptic Caution Lost in Translation,” *Financial Times*, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/871401827/?pq-origsite=primo>.

⁵⁷⁰ McGregor, “Zhou Enlai’s Cryptic Caution.”

⁵⁷¹ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. The Logic of Strategy* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 72–94; Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 107.

⁵⁷² Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, xv.

equipment and firepower. In Laos, on the other hand, the United States chose a much more psychological partnership approach, by working with the Hmong and other various tribes to focus on guerrilla warfare. China and North Vietnam's strategies in Vietnam and Laos were opposite of the United States, showing that they too rely on mass as much as psychological military options.

Third, *China often acts opportunistically exploiting perceived weaknesses in rivals when it is in a position of strength.* China has consistently recognized weaknesses in the U.S. position as opportunities for exploitation. In Vietnam, China appeared to view the United States' increase in military commitment to South Vietnam as not only a threat but also an opportunity to challenge the United States. China's method of support to North Vietnam and the Viet Cong provided a way to challenge the United States and to force them to commit resources indefinitely. In SACO, the Chinese communists also took advantage of the United States by accepting training and equipment while secretly limiting military attacks against Japan. It is important to remember, as the cases show, that China does not always act according to a master grand plan. China responds to changes in the U.S. position and looks for opportunities to exploit. So it is not just understanding Chinese plans and intentions that matter, but also understanding how China will perceive U.S. actions as either weakness or strength.

Finally, *China has internal disagreements and domestic considerations over policy decisions like other nations.* It is easy to assume that China's powerful autocracy is entirely in control, but that is not what history or the cases show. China has a long history of revolution, causing China to be often "preoccupied by internal stability."⁵⁷³ In Vietnam and Laos in the late 1950s, domestic problems contributed to China's de-escalation and openness to non-violent means of revolution. Zhou Enlai and Mao needed to turn inward to fix dissatisfaction, poverty, and food shortages.⁵⁷⁴ In addition to domestic considerations, there was also significant internal debate within the communist party about

⁵⁷³ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 109.

⁵⁷⁴ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 54.

how to support North Vietnam.⁵⁷⁵ Mao ultimately won in his desire for a hardline approach, but he still had to contend with other influential individuals. Even with the apparent intolerance for challenges to political authority, the CCP will inevitably have dissenting views within it. Even China's harsh response in the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 had to make it through "battles between hardliners and reformers" within the communist party.⁵⁷⁶ China's policy decisions concerning responses to U.S. security cooperation and partnerships seem likely to continue the trend found in this study.

4. Summary of Observations

This study identifies eleven total observations from the cases. These observations fall into three categories: identifying potential partners, identifying areas to improve U.S. efforts, and commentary on Chinese responses to security cooperation partnerships. The first category's observations on identifying partners are: 1) *interests matter, both at the political and military levels*, 2) *partners often have limited potential capabilities*, and 3) *some partners are better suited to specific tasks*. The second category's observations on U.S. efforts are: 1) *the United States should carefully use incentive structures*, 2) *the United States should use interorganizational ties to improve specific partner capabilities and limitations*, 3) *the United States should balance long-term commitments with short term objectives*, and 4) *partnerships benefit from culturally conscious leadership and practitioners*. The third category's observations are: 1) *even successful U.S. partnerships may not deter China and may, in fact, cause China to escalate tensions*, 2) *China has a distinct military culture, but not one that is beyond comprehension*, 3) *China often acts opportunistically, exploiting perceived weaknesses in rivals when it is in a position of strength*, 4) *China has internal disagreements and domestic considerations over policy decisions like other nations*.

⁵⁷⁵ Zhai, 51–65.

⁵⁷⁶ Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 1 (2001): 2.

B. FRAMEWORK CRITIQUE: OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS

A critic of the partnership framework may correctly point out that it does not account for everything that goes into engaging in security cooperation partnerships. While this is undoubtedly true, the intent is to simplify the complex phenomenon of partnerships in GPC environments to aid in our understanding, not predict every nuance. While this framework proposes three critical components for evaluating partnerships, considering other relevant factors may provide practitioners an evaluation of partnerships that is closer to all-encompassing. At first glance, several additional factors could contribute to a beneficial partnership: *potential benefits to the principal, leadership, geography, organizational challenges, ethics, and domestic politics*. While this list is undoubtedly not all-inclusive, it may move a practitioner closer to a complete assessment. Some of these factors addressed below could be captured within the three-component framework, but some extreme cases may call for consideration of the additional factor on its own.

Before considering other additional factors that could benefit the partnership framework in some instances, it is important to challenge the foundation that the partnership framework rests on. Fundamentally, the lens of GPC may not always suit every situation. Each component of the partnership framework rests on a theory or body of literature that offers an abstraction of reality in order to aid understanding. These abstractions inevitably cannot fit reality perfectly. While it may be beneficial to challenge the abstractions and the assumptions that they rest on, the framework offers a useful baseline guide that military planners can deviate from.

In some cases, military planners may have more success by focusing on local issues instead of trying to deter other rival great powers. David Kilcullen, a practitioner and scholar of counterinsurgency, suggests that focusing on great powers can enflame local grievances and actually make matters worse, in what he calls the “accidental guerrilla syndrome.”⁵⁷⁷ One step further than the accidental guerrilla syndrome is also plausible, that framing problems as GPC could lead to poor strategic decision making. Of note, some

⁵⁷⁷ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

argue that the Vietnam War is an example of a loss at the local level. Bob Andrews, a Vietnam veteran who had experience in small villages south of Saigon, argues that the critical aspect of this conflict was at the local level.⁵⁷⁸ The United States' decisions in Afghanistan in the 1980s also indicate poor decision making because of over-focus on the Soviet Union. Soviet leadership directly asked for "cooperation in limiting the spread of Islamic fundamentalism."⁵⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the United States overlooked this threat from the local level because of its fear of the Soviets, a mistake that the United States is still witnessing today not only in Afghanistan, but across the Middle East.

The first component—willingness—rests on principal-agent theory, which assumes that partnerships in GPC have one partner who has control (principal) and another who lacks control (agent). This notion of specific roles for the principal and the agent may not paint the whole picture, as often 'weaker' nations can exert a disproportional amount of control over 'stronger' nations. Scholar Douglas Borer describes this phenomenon as inverse engagement, arguing the small, dependent, and vulnerable nations may actually have more significant influence over policy decisions in engagements with more powerful nations because of variances in political sensitivity to economic and political pressures.⁵⁸⁰ Autocratic governments are often much less sensitive to political pressure than the United States and other democratic nations. The cases also seem to indicate that the phenomenon of inverse engagement may exist. In SACO and Vietnam, 'weaker' governments put pressure on the 'stronger' United States because of the position they were in. Essentially, practitioners who utilize the partnership framework should recognize the limitations and abstraction of using principal-agent theory to address willingness in partnerships. Additionally, principal-agent theory focuses on positive incentives to produce desired behavior in a partner, overlooking inherent coercion that takes place between sovereign nations.

⁵⁷⁸ William R. Andrews, *The Village War: Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Activities in Dinh Tuong Province, 1960–1964* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1973).

⁵⁷⁹ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 168.

⁵⁸⁰ Douglas A. Borer, "Inverse Engagement: Lessons from US-Iraq Relations, 1982–1990," *Parameters* 33, no. 2 (2003): 63.

The second component—capability—rests on business integration and building partner capacity literature, which also is an abstraction that has limitations. The application of business integration literature to security cooperation partnerships admittedly has some problems. First, partners are generally not in direct competition with each other like businesses. Direct competition is what the business literature rests on to delineate the differences between vertical and horizontal ties, making a direct application of the literature challenging. Second, all the partnerships in this study, and presumably all security cooperation partnerships going forward, cannot be categorized as purely vertical or horizontal; the partnership appears to typically be a combination of the two. The difficulty of classifying the relationship as either vertical or horizontal makes the analytical evaluation of either challenging because there is no one end of the spectrum to compare. Despite the challenges to this foundational literature, this study found the abstraction useful as a way to consider specific interorganizational ties conceptually.

The third component—effects—uses deterrence theory to help consider possible enemy responses. Although this study found this foundation useful, deterrence theory is also an abstraction of reality, with corresponding limitations. The SACO case is the best example of a challenge to the deterrence concept in the framework. Many of the SACO efforts to supply weather and intelligence information are arguably supporting larger deterrence efforts in the Pacific, but they were not deterrence efforts in and of themselves. Additionally, the nature of the conflict in SACO made the application of deterrence difficult. The goal of keeping Japanese troops tied up on the mainland of Asia through guerrilla action was not directly a deterrence effort, but a supporting effort that would allow more extensive operations in the Pacific. Finally, applying deterrence theory to non-state actors has challenges because of various communication problems, the ambiguity of actors, and in some cases, limited material to threaten. Nevertheless, this study found deterrence theory to be a useful starting point for most situations.

In addition to challenging the foundation of the framework, practitioners may benefit from expanding it with additional factors.

This framework may overlook *potential benefits that an agent can deliver* to the principal outside of building a capability to conduct its own action. Sometimes security

cooperation is simply a bargaining chip to achieve some other political end, such as trade benefits or access to critical territory. A military planner should not overlook the importance of taking action on something that the agent is particularly interested in so that the agent is more willing to do something that the principal is interested in. Trade benefits are one example of something that the partnership framework may have difficulty capturing. However, most potential benefits from the agent can be captured with an analysis of initial capability, especially if initial capability assessment is expanded to the political level. While the framework may capture most benefits, some cases may require separate consideration. None of the three cases present good examples of the need for this additional factor, but other cases surely exist that would be good examples. Partnerships often require bartering; a principal may have to work with a specific foreign security force that does not directly benefit U.S. interests in order to obtain access to something else that the nation has to offer.

This framework may also overlook the impact that *leadership* and specific personalities have on partnerships. Although leadership may be incorporated into the analysis of the willingness component, there may be a factor of inspiration stemming from leadership that the framework cannot completely capture. Is the leader that the principal is aligning themselves with going to be able to rally support for a cause, or will their support dwindle? Also, is the leader that the United States puts forward to carry out the partnership able to rally the necessary support to make the partnership successful?

Leadership was a significant factor in the successes and failures of the partnership with South Vietnam, particularly the leadership of Diem. Although accounts of Diem's leadership abilities differ, Diem ultimately was unable to unite South Vietnam under his leadership.⁵⁸¹ Whether anyone else could have provided adequate leadership is arguable; nevertheless, Diem was the critical component on the Vietnam side of the partnership, and the quality of his leadership should have been thoroughly scrutinized. The framework did account for Diem's leadership briefly in the initial overlap of interests, yet his leadership was a significant factor in the partnership that could require its own consideration. On the

⁵⁸¹ Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 34–37.

United States side, while many leaders rotated through and had impacts on the partnership in Vietnam, none stand out as a make or break individual. This rotation of leadership and lack of a strong personality to see the partnership through likely contributed to the failure. U.S. leaders seemed to be a part of a bureaucratic machine where the bureaucracy drove the partnership more than individual leadership.

Leadership also played a role in the case of Laos. Vang Pao was essential in the start and continuation of the relationship with the Hmong. Vang Pao seems to have been the perfect Hmong individual to lead the effort because of his charisma, his passion, and his intelligence.⁵⁸² His respect among the Hmong and the RLG was essential for the success of the program; his standing as a high ranking officer in the RLG showed the trust that the RLG had in him. Without Vang Pao's leadership, the partnership with the Hmong seems likely to have fallen apart. No less noteworthy were the leadership and ability of the CIA handlers in Laos who carried out initial contacts. It took the right personality with the right skills to identify Vang Pao's potential and to secure his trust.⁵⁸³

In SACO, Milton Miles's leadership throughout the partnership was an integral part of SACO's success. His ability to gain the confidence of Tai Li was critical for opening and maintaining the partnership. Additionally, his positive example and direction for his men to respect the Chinese partners set SACO apart from other Chinese partnership efforts like the British Chinese Commando Group.⁵⁸⁴ The mutual respect that was prevalent throughout the SACO culture enabled success. The SACO culture was unlikely to have developed as it did without Miles.

Geography is another potential factor that could affect the framework. How does the geography of the region impact the relationship, including the geopolitical situation and the terrain? While difficult operating terrain can create logistical and operational challenges, geopolitical considerations can drive the interests of partners and dictate the manner in which the partnership is carried out. Although this factor is a more important

⁵⁸² Quincy, *Hmong*, 170–72; Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 156.

⁵⁸³ Ahern, *Undercover Armies*, 31.

⁵⁸⁴ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 140; Yu, *The Dragon's War*, 56.

driver for the principal's strategy, geography clearly played a role in all three cases. While the partnership framework does not necessarily critique the principal's strategy, it is essential to consider how and why geography drives operations and partnerships.

Geography played a significant role in Vietnam and Laos. Geopolitical drivers were the main factors, but difficult operating terrain also shaped the character of the partnerships. The presence of China on the border was the most significant geopolitical factor in the conflict, but the presence of other regional nations like Thailand also played a significant role in shaping the nature of the partnerships. Geopolitics made the fate of Laos and South Vietnam important to all surrounding nations because neither Thailand or China wanted to share a border out of fear of the other. Operationally, geography shaped the partnership and the operations by making logistical movements difficult and creating ungoverned spaces favorable to guerrilla warfare. Both Vietnam and Laos had remote jungle environments with limited infrastructure, which drove logistical and operational considerations.⁵⁸⁵

Geography also played significant roles, both positive and negative, in the SACO partnership. On the positive side, the SACO partnership allowed U.S. personnel critical access and placement to strategically vital locations throughout China to collect intelligence and weather data. Without this access and placement, the Allied forces would have been at a disadvantage in the Pacific theater. On the negative side, geography made the implementation of SACO very difficult. Logistical challenges were always a limiting factor. The United States could only fly so much equipment over 'the Hump.'⁵⁸⁶ Once equipment did get to China, moving it around to support all the different SACO camps spread over vast distances was a challenge.

Another potential factor that could inhibit successful partnerships is the concept of *organizational challenges* or the challenges of operating in a complex Joint Interagency Intergovernmental Multinational (JIIM) environment. Multi-national environments can

⁵⁸⁵ Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization*, 2; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975*, 33.

⁵⁸⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 612.

make partnerships even more difficult because of the many competing interests. Organizational theory would suggest that organizations fight for their own interests and may not act in line with the overarching strategy.⁵⁸⁷ In some instances, organizational challenges may require separate consideration when engaging in partnerships. The framework partially captures organizational challenges within initial interests at the military level, but, in each of the three cases, organizational challenges impacted the success of the partnership.

Organizational challenges famously played a significant role in Vietnam. The MAAG and the MSUG did not view the conflict through the same lens, and each advocated its own method as the way U.S. policy makers should move forward.⁵⁸⁸ The tension between the MAAG and the MSUG was only one of many organizational conflicts that inhibited a unified U.S. effort. The title of Richard Komer's book on U.S. failures in Vietnam, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, says it all.⁵⁸⁹ In it, Komer argues that it was the very massiveness of the U.S. effort with the slow-moving and self-interested bureaucratic organizations working on their own projects that contributed to the failure. On an international scale, differences in national interests with the French also caused tension and inhibited progress in the partnership efforts in both Vietnam and Laos.⁵⁹⁰ The activities in Laos also had organizational challenges internal to the United States, but the central command and control of the U.S. ambassadors mitigated most of the challenges.

Organizational interests also played a role and negatively impacted the SACO partnership, both internationally and within U.S. organizations. Internationally, relations with the British and the French often conflicted with the SACO partnership. SACO was running under the assumption that CKS was the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the vast region running from Mongolia to Indochina to Burma. Britain's national interests

⁵⁸⁷ Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications," *World Politics* 24, no. S1 (March 1972): 40–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559>; Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Longman, 1999).

⁵⁸⁸ Spector, *Advice and Support*, 322.

⁵⁸⁹ Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*.

⁵⁹⁰ Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 17; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 247.

caused its leaders to oppose a SACO-run guerrilla and intelligence operation in Thailand that intended to “instigate an uprising to overthrow the Thai government” as well as provide a diversion for an advance by General Stilwell in Burma.⁵⁹¹ Britain pushed back on Chinese and American operations inside “their territory,” which caused wasted time, effort, and resources, including, curiously, the need to sell back U.S. Navy purchased horses bought to support the invasion.⁵⁹² Additionally, SACO operations against the Vichy French-controlled Indochina were wasted because of internal French squabbling over who should be in power within the exiled government.⁵⁹³

Organizational interests between U.S. organizations was as much of a problem in SACO as dealing with the variances in the national interests between the allied nations. Miles recognized that “the OSS, on the one hand, and SACO, on the other, were each attempting to progress in their own ways toward their divergent objectives.”⁵⁹⁴ Miles and Bill Donovan would often get in arguments over the direction to take in China. Yu noted, “In case after case, Miles’s military mind and Donovan’s legal mind collided.”⁵⁹⁵ Miles saw the OSS as trying to “bypass the Chinese,” as they often did through attempts to execute special intelligence activities without notifying Miles or Tai Li.⁵⁹⁶ These disagreements led Donovan to relieve Miles of his position as coordinator of the OSS in the Far East, while being unable to relieve him from the head of SACO.⁵⁹⁷ By Miles’s own admission, the relief did little to improve the “problems having to do with the division of work between the OSS and the Navy in China.”⁵⁹⁸ In addition to tensions between the OSS and SACO, General Stilwell often had a very Army-centric view of the problem in China, causing him to focus more on the territory to the West in Burma.

⁵⁹¹ Yu, *The Dragon’s War*, 109.

⁵⁹² Yu, 111; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 179.

⁵⁹³ Yu, *The Dragon’s*, 111–14; Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 182.

⁵⁹⁴ Miles, 159.

⁵⁹⁵ Yu, *The Dragon’s War*, 105.

⁵⁹⁶ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 159–61; Yu, *The Dragon’s War*, 119.

⁵⁹⁷ Miles, *A Different Kind of War*, 170.

⁵⁹⁸ Miles, 170.

This framework does not consider *ethical concerns* on their own. The framework primarily considers how to carry out partnerships to successfully achieve objectives, not whether the means required are morally acceptable. Partnering with foreign organizations that act unethically can have second and third-order consequences, even if the partnership achieves immediate objectives. The question of where morality and ethics should inhibit partnerships is not new and is not likely to go away. Scholar David Rapoport noted, “Cold War concerns sometimes led the United States to ignore its stated distaste for terror. In Nicaragua, Angola, and elsewhere the United States supported terrorist activity—an indication of how difficult it was to forgo a purpose deemed worthwhile even when deplorable tactics had to be used.”⁵⁹⁹ Leites and Wolf also noted potential ethical problems of building military capabilities in questionable partners when they said, “Improvements in these capabilities provide instruments with which more efficient repressive dictatorships can be developed.”⁶⁰⁰ Essentially, even if a military security cooperation partnership is exceptionally effective at developing a partner, the partner’s new capabilities could be used for more than the initially-intended purpose.

From a practical standpoint, even if partners are willing and capable of conducting a task, they could cause potential political and informational fallout if it becomes known that a global power was supporting an organization that has committed crimes or used deplorable tactics. This political and informational fallout could occur even if the principal has good intentions, such as a desire to address a specific ethical or humanitarian concern in a region, which drives a principal to partner with an ethically questionable organization. Joseph Nye suggests a potentially useful addition to the framework for considering morality in foreign policy implementation, which incorporates intentions, means, and outcomes.⁶⁰¹ While military planners do not have to make policy-level ethical considerations, they should understand the potential ethical drawbacks so they can

⁵⁹⁹ David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 58, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/>.

⁶⁰⁰ Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1970), 145–46.

⁶⁰¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr, “What Is a Moral Foreign Policy?,” *Foreign Policy* 3, no. 1 (2019).

promptly report relevant observations and provide thoughtful recommendations to policy-makers. The partnership framework can partially capture ethical concerns in the overlap of initial interests assessment; but, in some instances, it may be a significant enough factor for its own consideration. Each of the three cases had varying amounts of ethical concerns.

Vietnam and Laos each had some consequences that stemmed from unethical behavior in the partner. In South Vietnam, the United States had to overcome corruption within the ARVN and significant partisan problems within the internal security forces, mainly the VBI, but also the SDC and the CG.⁶⁰² The VBI had a notably recognized history of being used by the various Vietnamese leadership as a political instrument to retain power.⁶⁰³ Any abuses from these units that the United States partnered with likely resulted in further alienation of the population. Ethical concerns with partnerships in Laos are less noteworthy but surely were present.

In the SACO case, ethical considerations likely should have been a significant factor in the decision to partner with Tai Li. Unfortunately, WWII and the implementation of total war against Japan seemed to blind the United States as to the true nature of both CKS and Tai Li. The SACO partnership clearly caused problems for the Japanese and contributed to the Allied effort in the Pacific, but the long controversy and image of supporting these two individuals have tainted the Sino-American relationship since Mao consolidated power. Tai Li was a spy and, by all accounts, a ruthless leader.⁶⁰⁴ CKS was seen by many as a dictator, not the grand supporter of democracy that the United States had hoped.⁶⁰⁵ Both of these points were known and reported by the DOS and various military officials, yet the United States decided that the benefits of the partnership would outweigh the ethical concerns. General Stilwell famously did not get along with CKS. In his diary, he wrote that America was “forced into partnership with a gang of fascists under

⁶⁰² Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 54.

⁶⁰³ Rosenau, 54.

⁶⁰⁴ Kush, *The Rice Paddy Navy*, 50–51.

⁶⁰⁵ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 425; Lattimore, “The Fight for Democracy in Asia,” 703.

a one-party government similar in many respects to our German enemy.”⁶⁰⁶ He also thought Tai Li ran a Gestapo-like organization. To be fair, the United States seemed to favor the lesser of two evils, the other more significant evil being the Chinese communists. The need for the United States to choose between two evils seems likely to continue even today.

Finally, this framework does not consider the role of *domestic politics* in military decisions. Although this should not directly impact a military planner’s analysis or recommendation to policymakers, it could be a factor that influences political direction. In each of the cases, we saw domestic politics play a role, but particularly SACO. In SACO, for instance, FDR’s interests in supporting CKS and the KMT government was driven partly by domestic concerns. The population in the United States had somewhat of an attachment to the Chinese people, with a history of missionaries and presence in the country.⁶⁰⁷ Many Americans wanted to see the United States support the Chinese people. When military leaders deemed an occupation of the China mainland by U.S. forces as inefficient and questionably feasible, it drove U.S. military efforts into security cooperation partnerships.

In summary, each component of the partnership framework is an abstraction of reality that may not fit every situation. Each component draws from a theory or body of literature that may not entirely apply to security cooperation partnerships. While this study proposes the components of willingness, capability, and effects on the rival as the primary considerations in this framework, other relevant factors may have an impact. These factors include outside benefits that an agent delivers, the impact of leadership, geography, organizational interests, ethical considerations, and domestic politics. While this study proposes that these additional factors can mostly be captured through the primary three categories, willingness, capability, and effects as they have been outlined, certain cases may require additional consideration.

⁶⁰⁶ Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, 386.

⁶⁰⁷ Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 71.

C. FRAMEWORK APPLICATION: SOUTH CHINA SEA VIGNETTE

The United States and many east Asian nations are particularly concerned about China's incursions into the South China Sea (SCS). This section will consider the problem and offer suggestions on what type of partnerships *may* influence the situation in favor of U.S. allies. First, this section provides a brief background of the strategic scenario and various interests. The competition in the SCS is complicated because of the many players that claim territory, the complexity and ambiguity of international laws of the sea, and the interests of several considerable powers in addition to China and the United States. China has advanced its territorial claims in the SCS by building military structures and airstrips on man-made islands and using paranaul forces to assert control gradually.⁶⁰⁸ Several regional powers also claim rights to the South China Sea, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Malaysia.⁶⁰⁹ The various regional powers make the situation much more complicated than a pure two-sided competition.

China's interests in the South China Sea are significant for several reasons: security, history, and ideology. As in the earlier cases in this study, China may perceive the SCS as a border security threat. However, the SCS is different from the Vietnam and Laos cases in that the security threat seems to stem primarily from economic threats. Not only could this area be used by China's rivals to move military equipment, but they could also potentially disrupt trading through the region using sea denial. The potential disruption of trade routes is a particular vulnerability to not only China but also to the world economy. While an estimated 3.5 trillion USD in international trade transits the SCS annually, nearly

⁶⁰⁸ Bonnie S. Glaser and Matthew P. Funaiole, "South China Sea: Assessing Chinese Paranaul Behavior within the Nine-Dash Line," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, Studies in Chinese Maritime Development (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 189.

⁶⁰⁹ Sarah Raine, *Regional Disorder : The South China Sea Disputes* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351224062>.

forty percent of China's trade, including eighty percent of its oil imports, goes through the SCS.⁶¹⁰ The possibility of this trade route closing is a severe threat to China.

China also may see the presence of potentially hostile nations near its shore as a threat. The "first island chain" is significant because it refers to the "offshore archipelago that envelops Eurasia's eastern seaboard in its entirety" and is controlled mainly by U.S. allies, including Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines.⁶¹¹ In addition to the first island chain, which to China must appear to "[resemble] a Great Wall in reverse where Americans and their allies occupy the sentinel towers," there is a second island chain that centers on Guam and is also controlled by U.S. allies.⁶¹² The SCS is a means to extend maritime influence by allowing sea control off Chinese shores through forward basing, and to enable China to "puncture" the perceived hostile fortification of the first island chain if needed.⁶¹³

China uses a historical argument to justify its actions in the SCS. China views the sea as historically under Chinese control and protection. China, traditionally a land power, recognized the importance of sea-power long before the current president Xi Jinping.⁶¹⁴ According to China expert Toshi Yoshihara, President Xi "may be today's most vocal proponent of China's pivot to the Pacific, but he is only the latest among five generations of CCP leaders to gather rudiments of sea power."⁶¹⁵ Essentially, China has placed importance on sea power and the SCS for generations, even if the United States has only recently recognized the threat.

Ideologically, China views itself as a growing world power and sees expansion into the SCS as a logical way to protect and advance itself. Xi describes this expansion as, "a

⁶¹⁰ Ronald O'Rourke, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 5, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42784>; "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?," *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): China Power Project* (blog), August 2, 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

⁶¹¹ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, Second (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 71.

⁶¹² Yoshihara and Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific*, 70.

⁶¹³ Yoshihara and Holmes, 74.

⁶¹⁴ Yoshihara and Holmes, 137.

⁶¹⁵ Yoshihara and Holmes, 102.

strategic pivot for building the nation into a great maritime power, and an important component of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”⁶¹⁶ This rejuvenation of the Chinese nation that Xi speaks of seems to be one of the many driving factors that have encouraged China to pursue maritime power and aggressive claims in the SCS.

In order to control the SCS, China uses a variety of military means: conventional naval power, anti-access equipment, and irregular naval power. Conventional naval power includes China’s significant increase in conventional naval power, including aircraft carriers, submarines, and advanced surface combatants.⁶¹⁷ Anti-access area denial includes land-based means that can engage rival fleets offshore, such as Chinese Air Force assets and anti-ship missiles.⁶¹⁸ China’s irregular naval power is the “heart of [China’s] approach” in the SCS and should be particularly focused on by military planners when looking at partnerships.⁶¹⁹

China has employed a variety of paranaul forces including the China Coast Guard (CCG), Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) forces, civilian fishing fleets, and the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) to “advance its territorial and maritime claims.”⁶²⁰ China is using so-called “cabbage tactics,” which relies on “surrounding a contested area with myriad fishing boats, maritime law enforcement vessels, and navy warships such that the location is wrapped in layers like a cabbage.”⁶²¹ These so-called cabbage tactics are China’s way to achieve its objectives to establish control in the SCS through gradual and non-escalating actions.

Access and stability are the United States’ specific interests in the SCS. A Congressional Research Service report states that specific policy-level interests include “dissuading China from carrying out additional base construction activities in the SCS,

⁶¹⁶ Yoshihara and Holmes, 115.

⁶¹⁷ Yoshihara and Holmes, 153–62.

⁶¹⁸ Yoshihara and Holmes, 150, 163.

⁶¹⁹ Glaser and Funaiole, “South China Sea: Assessing Chinese Paranaul Behavior within the Nine-Dash Line,” 202.

⁶²⁰ Glaser and Funaiole, “South China Sea,” 189.

⁶²¹ Glaser and Funaiole, 192.

moving additional military personnel, equipment, and supplies to bases at sites that it occupies in the SCS, initiating island-building or base-construction activities at Scarborough Shoal in the SCS, declaring straight baselines around land features it claims in the SCS, or declaring an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the SCS.”⁶²² General U.S. interests include fulfilling security commitments to allies, maintaining a regional balance of power that is favorable to the United States, and defending the principles of freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute resolution.⁶²³ While the United States has interests in the SCS, it does not take a position on the territorial claims of one nation over another, only that the countries resolve the disputes peacefully.⁶²⁴

While conventional naval power is likely required to deter China, meeting China’s so-called cabbage tactics also requires building friendly paranaul capabilities. Managing the broader U.S. coalition is undoubtedly essential, but unless partner military forces are willing and able to contest China’s incursions on the same paranaul level, China’s ability to expand control in the region seems likely to continue. Partnerships are indeed one part of the current administration’s strategy. A Congressional Research Service study explicitly states the need for “maintaining and strengthening diplomatic ties and security cooperation with, and providing maritime-related security assistance to, countries in the SCS region; and encouraging allied and partner states to do more individually and in coordination with one another to defend their interests in the SCS region.”⁶²⁵

International law and conventional military force, however, may not be enough to deter China’s advances in the SCS. Even the July 2016 ruling by the international arbitral tribunal United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which ruled against China, did not change China’s stance. China released a statement shortly after the ruling,

⁶²² O’Rourke, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress*, 1.

⁶²³ O’Rourke, 14.

⁶²⁴ M. Taylor Fravel, “U.S. Policy Towards the Disputes in the South China Sea Since 1995,” Nanyang Technological University Policy Report (Singapore: Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and Nanyang Technological University, 2014), 1, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/PR140330_US_Policy_Towards_Disputes.pdf.

⁶²⁵ O’Rourke, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress*, 18.

which “maintained that China has territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea.”⁶²⁶ Jonathan Odom argues that China is breaking various international laws including, state responsibility, the law of territorial sovereignty, the law of the Sea, and the law for the use of force.⁶²⁷ Referring to China, Odom writes, “When the gray zone of paranaul activities by one state meets the black letter of international law, other states must be willing to draw a red line and do what is necessary to enforce it.”⁶²⁸ Until other states find a way to counter China’s actions, China will likely continue.

Cooperation from willing partners is critical for competing against China in the SCS. Although other forms of U.S. national power are required to encourage the U.S. partners, security cooperation with regional partners could also be useful. The partnership framework helps to identify several suggestions. First, military planners should look at the current state of partners, including initial interests and initial capabilities. Second, the United States should consider the structure of interorganizational ties, incentive structures, and best practices when the right partner is identified. Finally, the United States should undertake constant strategic reassessments to consider China’s likely responses.

The framework identifies that finding a partner that has an adequate level of initial capability and willingness will reduce the overall cost of incentivizing and building capabilities; however, identifying which initial capabilities and interests are essential is needed for the framework to be sufficiently useful. Concerning interests at the political level, U.S. military planners must consider a potential partner’s national interests in the short and long term. In each of the cases in this study, the U.S. military traded long-term interests for short-term military gains. Military planners should carefully consider the potential long-term interests of various partners. Without long-term considerations, U.S. effort and resources can turn out to be all for nothing. On the other hand, in every partnership, there inherently is some level of risk that interests will split and resources will

⁶²⁶ Glaser and Funaiole, “South China Sea,” 190.

⁶²⁷ Jonathan G. Odom, “When Gray Zone Meets Black Letter: China’s Paranaul Strategy and International Law,” in *China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, Studies in Chinese Maritime Development (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 53–68.

⁶²⁸ Odom, “When Gray Zone Meets Black Letter,” 68.

be wasted. Security cooperation partnerships often take a long time and do not produce immediate results. Patience is necessary, but so is some level of objectivity toward a partner's potential. Initial capabilities are just as important as initial interests.

Once a suitable partner is identified, military planners should consider how specific interorganizational ties will fill specific capability gaps and how incentive structures will motivate the partner and provide leverage for U.S. advisors. There are positives and negatives of vertical and horizontal ties. Vertical ties allow the United States to create capabilities to the exact specification of the needs, but they are also more expensive and risk failure in implementation. Horizontal ties could be cheaper, as the efforts would build upon an existing capability of a unit. The existing unit, however, may be more difficult to shape because of existing tendencies.

Once adequate interorganizational ties and incentive structures are planned, U.S. military planners should do an initial assessment, and constant reassessments, of likely Chinese responses. The cases indicate that Chinese military decisions are not beyond comprehension, but they change over time with the environment. The United States must change with the environment as well. Deterrence is a critical component in challenging China's actions, yet it is also problematic. Expert in gray zone competition, Michael Mazarr, noted, "There is also a clear asymmetry of interests at work on these issues [in the South China Sea]; China's interests in staking its claims are greater than the U.S. interests in restraining them."⁶²⁹ The asymmetry of interests, as the earlier cases showed, represents a problem for the United States if using unsustainable approaches. Developing partner forces that can *contest* China's paranaul force, while maintaining the broader conventional deterrence with China could prove to be one way that the military component of U.S. national power can contribute to addressing China's so-called gray zone tactics. Even Leites and Wolf, in their 1970 RAND study, identified that it often takes paramilitary forces to address other paramilitary forces.⁶³⁰ This assertion, of course, needs further

⁶²⁹ Michael J. Mazarr, "The Role of Deterrence in Responding to Chinese Gray Zone Campaigns," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, Studies in Chinese Maritime Development (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 262.

⁶³⁰ Leites and Wolf Jr, "Rebellion and Authority," 154.

justification as well as reassessment throughout execution. It is merely one example of one security cooperation option that could address the problem

Admittedly, the suggestion to develop partner paranaval forces represents a narrow view of the problem in the SCS. Addressing China's actions in the SCS, as well as its global gray zone tactics requires not only other military efforts, but also efforts in the diplomatic, economic, informational, and legal realm. Without the other elements of national power to support, one single effort is surely doomed to fail. However, fundamentally, each element of national power should strive to make its efforts both effective and efficient. Failed efforts and waste in one element of national power can affect the United States' position to carry out activities adequately in another element of national power. The military, in particular, can be quick to expend enormous resources once given a mission. Military planners owe it to the U.S. government and to the people to have clear justification and reason for the expenditure of resources.

Not only are these suggestions narrow-minded because they only focus on the military component of national power, they also are narrow-minded because of geographic constraints. While this section only considers developing partner paranaval forces to contest China's paranaval forces' cabbage tactics, other geopolitical regions and events inevitably affect events in the SCS. Protests in Hong Kong, civil unrest due to the coronavirus, or resistances in the Uyghur population are three of many examples that could impact China's decision making in the SCS.⁶³¹ They also represent additional opportunities for the United States to apply pressure against China if needed—a way to go on the offensive instead of defensive.

⁶³¹ Andrew J. Nathan, "How China Sees the Hong Kong Crisis: The Real Reasons Behind Beijing's Restraint," *Foreign Affairs*, September 30, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-09-30/how-china-sees-hong-kong-crisis>; Michael F. Martin, *Hong Kong's Protests of 2019* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11295>; Charlie Campell, "The Coronavirus Outbreak Could Derail Xi Jinping's Dreams of a Chinese Century," *Time*, February 6, 2020, <https://time.com/5778994/coronavirus-china-country-future/>; Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici, "Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang," *International Security* 44, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 9–47, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00368; Joshua Tschantret, "Repression, Opportunity, and Innovation: The Evolution of Terrorism in Xinjiang, China," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 4 (July 4, 2018): 569–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1182911>; Lingling Wei, "China Strains to Stamp Out Coronavirus Criticisms at Home," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-strains-to-stamp-out-coronavirus-criticisms-at-home-11580207403>.

In sum, the tensions in the South China Sea are a challenge to every form of U.S. national power, and security cooperation partnerships are merely one possible contributing effort to the solution. The partnership framework offers a mental framework for considering potential partners, refining U.S. actions, and projecting possible Chinese responses in order to make security cooperation partnerships efficient and effective. While precise recommendations for U.S. actions would require a more detailed study, the framework offers a way to consider security cooperation through willingness, capability, and effects. If military planners and practitioners apply this framework to theater plans, including those supporting allies in the SCS, the United States could potentially improve on past partnership failures.

D. CLOSING THOUGHTS

Security cooperation partnerships have been, and will likely continue to be, significant in GPC. The complexity of security cooperation partnerships, along with its essential role in GPC, makes this topic worthy for consideration. Commenting on the complexity of partnerships and the need for constant analysis of security cooperation efforts, RAND analyst Michael McNerney states, “Make no mistake: Working with foreign militaries is more art than science. But it certainly shouldn’t be abstract art.”⁶³² In order to reduce the ‘abstract art’ of security cooperation into something closer to science, this study provides a vehicle to guide further discussion and analysis—the partnership framework. In addition to looking internally at improving security cooperation efforts, this study also looks externally at the reactions of near-peer rivals, specifically China. The complexity of security cooperation partnerships is compounded by the United States’ view of China as a rapidly rising and, yet, somewhat exotic and foreign culture.

China is one particular rival of the United States that is successfully degrading the position of the United States by using every means of national power available. While conventional U.S. military capabilities are necessary, the U.S. military should look to improve other ways of challenging China below traditional military conflict. The U.S.

⁶³² McNerney, “Department of Defense and Security Cooperation,” 1.

military should not solely focus on unilateral conventional capabilities because it could give China an advantage in the competition space. Author William Holstein states, “There is absolutely no reason for a U.S. military confrontation against China. The two countries have, in effect, merged their economies. Military conflict would be incredibly destructive and perhaps not successful from our perspective.”⁶³³ Military conflict, indeed, should be avoided. However, that does not mean that the military is useless outside of deterring total war. Finding and developing the right partners, while striving to understand potential Chinese responses is one crucial option that the U.S. military should consider prioritizing and improving. Although the organizational interests of the U.S. military generally do not incentivize military members to prioritize partnerships and security cooperation, this study argues that it is essential to success. In GPC, success seems unlikely without security cooperation.

Indeed, the U.S. military has put a priority on developing partnerships. The 2018 NDS directs the U.S. military to strengthen existing partners and attract new ones, while at the same time make tough choices about where to place resources to reduce waste.⁶³⁴ In a sense, the NDS asks the military to create more partnerships effectively and efficiently. The NDS’s direction seems reasonable when considering the extensive amount of security cooperation in both quantity and variety that the U.S. carries out. The United States spends between fifteen and twenty billion dollars on up to 4,000 security cooperation events per year.⁶³⁵ The DOD, however, does not lack in analyzing security cooperation; there is a vast amount of strategic guidance and direction, including Theater Campaign Plans, country coordination plans, and extensive coordination requirements.⁶³⁶ Despite significant attempts to control and guide security cooperation from senior levels, much of it seems to happen haphazardly, and much of that likely falls on military planners, not senior leaders or policy makers. This observation is reinforced by the author’s own

⁶³³ William J. Holstein, *The New Art of War: China’s Deep Strategy Inside the United States* (New York, NY: Brick Tower Press, 2019), 198.

⁶³⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, 8–10.

⁶³⁵ McNerney, “Department of Defense and Security Cooperation,” 2.

⁶³⁶ McNerney, 2.

experience—and frustrations—working with foreign partners, which was, in large part, a motivation for this study. This study is the first step for military planners to help improve potential partnerships to carry out the NDS's intent of creating effective, but cost-efficient partnerships.

This study strives to provide a logical and necessary justification for security cooperation partnerships in GPC. The primary means of achieving this logical justification is through what this study defines as the partnership framework. The framework is developed and then illustrated through three historical cases involving U.S. security cooperation partnerships, GPC, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This partnership framework can help guide military planners to do their own analysis on whether or not a specific partner is worth engaging, how the United States should justify spending specific resources (incentives and interorganizational ties), and finally, how to consider potential rival responses.

This study focuses on identifying the critical variables and enabling further discussion of wise and effective security cooperation partnerships against China. The cases show the reader that the United States has struggled with similar challenges in the past. They also show the reader that the U.S. military, especially, has enormous impacts on local and geopolitical environments when it introduces money, equipment, and training. When the United States puts its heavy thumb on the scale in many of these smaller nations, the impacts resonate significantly. Sometimes these impacts are positive, but sometimes they are harmful. The United States expends enormous resources on security cooperation with huge impacts on host nations; U.S. military planners owe it to their own nation, and the nations they are partnered with, to make the best possible choices. If this study is in any way a guide to finding the best choices for the United States and its partners, it will have served its purpose well.

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