

Security Force Assistance in the Middle East: New Approaches for a New Era

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Brief Analysis

Through professional military education, exchange-officer programs, and U.S.-based exercises, Washington can gain long-term influence with partner militaries throughout the Middle East and North Africa at modest cost.

The events of the Arab Spring underscore that militaries are the most durable institutions in the midst of political chaos, and that military-to-military relationships must remain strong and trustworthy. At a time of dwindling resources for international outreach, the United States can accomplish many of its security force assistance objectives in a low-cost, low-signature manner by expanding professional military education (PME) opportunities, broadening exchange-officer programs, and integrating partner nation units into exercises and training on American soil.

PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

The State Department's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program provides various opportunities for students from allied and friendly nations, including short-duration cadet training and noncommissioned officer courses as well as year-long courses provided by each service branch's War College and the Command and General Staff College. Over half a million foreign students have participated in U.S. PME programs since 1950, and approximately 200 students from over 125 countries attend year-long courses in America annually. PME is an excellent vehicle to expose individuals from partner nations to U.S. military training. It also helps showcase the importance the U.S. military places on human rights, the rule of law, and civilian control of the armed forces.

Perhaps most important, partner nations often send rising leaders to American military courses. Twenty-three alumni of the U.S. Army War College have become heads of state in their respective nations. In addition, nearly half of the senior officers educated at the Naval War College have attained flag rank, and more than 200 (approximately 10 percent) have gone on to lead their nation's navies. At the Command and General Staff College, over half of the international graduates have attained flag rank, and most occupy very influential positions in their armies. As American and foreign graduates move into positions of significant responsibility, these relationships have fostered good communication and coordination on issues of mutual concern.

MIDDLE EASTERN PARTICIPATION

Jordan and Bahrain are good examples of key allies whose heads of state attended U.S. military courses. Jordan's King Abdullah II attended the Naval Postgraduate School, and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa is a Command and General Staff College graduate. Many senior Jordanian and Bahraini military officers have also

attended U.S. courses through IMET, and they now have personal and professional relationships with countless senior U.S. officers serving at CENTCOM, NAVCENT, and ARCENT.

Similarly, given Egypt's steady participation in IMET courses over the years, the majority of its current military leaders have attended a U.S. course at some point in their career. In the early days of the 2011 revolution, U.S. officials leveraged their relationships with these officers to gain good situational awareness and understanding of unfolding events. Meanwhile, the Egyptian military's overall conduct during the revolution, while far from perfect, was more responsible and professional than many would have presumed.

CREATING A REGIONAL INSTITUTE

Currently, IMET is unable to accept all of the students that partner governments in the Middle East and North Africa wish to send, mainly due to space restrictions and the limited number of English-speaking candidates. In FY2011, the United States hosted 1,801 European students in PME venues, but only 994 from the Near East. Although most European and NATO militaries have PME institutions of their own, many Middle Eastern partners do not, and they would almost certainly welcome the opportunity to train more of their promising leaders in the United States.

One solution is to establish a training institution tailored for the region. For example, a "Near East Institute for Security Cooperation" (NEISC) could support the priorities of CENTCOM and, to a lesser extent, AFRICOM, as well as the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. NEISC would complement the efforts of the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center (NESA), which focuses on strategic issues and dialogue with executive-level national security practitioners from the region, many of whom have attended IMET courses. Between NEISC and NESA, the United States would have multiple venues to educate and influence partner officers throughout their careers, from cadet through general.

As for course offerings, NEISC could include an array of programs:

- short-duration cadet and company-grade officer courses focused on small-unit tactical training
- a noncommissioned officer program
- a Captains Career Course equivalent
- a flagship program provided by the Command and General Staff College, targeting high-potential majors and lieutenant colonels

Students would be educated on the virtues of civilian control, professional military values, service to nation, and human rights, in addition to traditional military competencies. To overcome the language barrier, NEISC instruction and course materials could be offered in Arabic, enabling the United States to train and educate substantially more emerging leaders from the region than IMET currently allows.

Some observers would undoubtedly cite cost as a barrier to expanding international PME opportunities, but the funding required by such programs is relatively miniscule. For example, the annual operating cost for the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), which provides PME to Central and South American partners, is approximately \$12 million. NEISC's needs would be even smaller; a conservative estimate of annual operating expenses is less than \$10 million.

MULTINATIONAL EXERCISES IN THE UNITED STATES

Multinational military exercises foster cooperation, strengthen relationships, reinforce partnerships, and better reflect an era in which virtually all foreseeable military operations will have a multinational component.

Opportunities for joint training in the Middle East and North Africa are limited, but there are many ways to include

partners in training events in the United States, particularly at the combat training centers at Fort Irwin, California, and Fort Polk, Louisiana.

For example, the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin could easily integrate an Iraqi tank company in its Armored Brigade Combat Team rotations. The Iraqi army's 9th Mechanized Division is equipped with M1 tanks and could benefit greatly from using the fleet of training M1s available at NTC. The U.S. Army's Arabic linguists could facilitate basic communication and coordination with the visiting Iraqi unit, and the opportunity to work with a partner military would greatly enhance the training experience for U.S. personnel. Tactical relationships would be strengthened, which would in turn resonate at the higher echelons of both militaries. And the Iraqi participants would be exposed to the best combined arms training venue in the world, witnessing firsthand the benefits of tough, realistic exercises against a very capable simulated adversary.

Likewise, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk could include partner units such as Jordanian infantry companies in its rotations of regionally aligned Brigade Combat Teams. Inviting Jordanian personnel to U.S.-based exercises would open the door for even more cooperative exercises and training events in Jordan.

Less troop-intensive options are available as well. The Egyptian land forces command could easily conduct a bilateral simulation or command-post exercise with either ARCENT or regionally aligned echelon units in the United States. Given current conditions in Egypt, CENTCOM's ability to conduct a traditional Bright Star exercise is limited.

EXPANDED EXCHANGES

Exchanging staff officers with regional militaries is particularly important for the U.S. Army because nearly 90 percent of Middle Eastern and North African military power consists of ground forces. Although the U.S. military currently integrates exchange officers from partner nations, it typically does so at the division level or higher, and the officers in question generally hail from NATO countries (e.g., Britain, Canada) or Australia. By adding exchange officers from select Middle Eastern and North African countries, U.S. units and headquarters responsible for those regions could significantly enhance their understanding of the area and foster future cooperation.

Clearly, U.S. interests in the Near East will remain strategically critical for the foreseeable future. By developing the most promising leaders through PME in the United States, expanding exchange-officer programs, and integrating foreign units in U.S.-based exercises, Washington can gain long-term influence with partner militaries throughout the region at modest cost.

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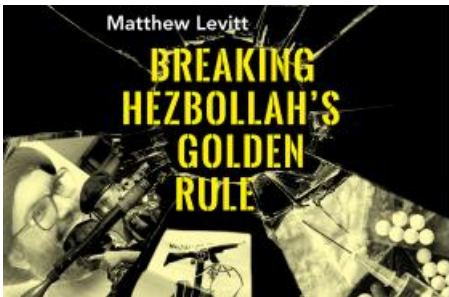
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