

**Lethal Aid and Human Security:  
Exploring the Impact of Transnational Flows of Military Assistance  
to Fragile States**

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Proposed Dates: June 22-24, 2017

A three-day research workshop bringing scholars and practitioners together to discuss emerging scholarship, develop new research collaborations, and explore the critical issues posed by the provision of military aid and assistance to actors in fragile states.

Themes: foreign military aid, security assistance, state sponsorship of violent nonstate actors, human security, governance, conflict-affected countries, fragile states

Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to promote emerging scholarship and launch new research projects that will improve our understanding of how transnational flows of lethal aid affect human security in fragile states. States provide tremendous amounts of military aid and assistance to foreign governments, as well as to nonstate armed groups. Much of this aid goes to regions plagued by political unrest, violence, criminal networks, and armed conflict. The human security impacts of cross-border flows of weapons, military equipment, combat advisors, military financing, and other forms of lethal assistance are a significant concern for nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations on the ground in volatile regions. Anecdotal evidence and reports published by organizations concerned with human security suggest that the impacts are primarily, if not exclusively, negative.<sup>1</sup> State suppliers of military aid, however, emphasize the important foreign policy objectives and positive security contributions of their assistance programs. The Commander of US Southern Command states, for example, that the “cornerstone” of the command’s mission is building the capacity of partner security forces in Latin America so that they can “control their borders, address drivers of insecurity and instability, respond to natural and man-made disasters, and contribute to regional security.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that transnational flows of weapons are high on the agenda of many intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations working in fragile states. Evidence of the risks of funneling lethal aid into conflict zones and weak states is abundant: heavy weaponry provided to a sympathetic group is diverted to hostile actors; governments use a donor’s arms transfers to commit atrocities against innocent civilians; the small arms and ammunition supplied to a combatant in wartime perpetuates a state of insecurity and low-intensity violence in the region long after the war has officially ended. Moreover, the scope of the phenomenon is tremendous. The UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE) estimates the value of worldwide arms exports at over five trillion dollars in 2015. At least one of the warring parties received military aid or assistance from a foreign government in 128 of the 200 internal armed conflicts that began between 1946 and 2014.<sup>3</sup> The United States allocated \$17.4 billion dollars for

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, reports from the Secretary General of the United Nations (S/PV .6299), the UN Security Council (S/PRST/2010/7), the Stimson Center, and the Small Arms Survey.

<sup>2</sup> Posture Statement of Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, 10 March 2016, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan, Patricia L., and Johannes Karreth. 2015. *Strategies and Tactics in Armed Conflict (STAC)*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina

security assistance to foreign governments and nonstate opposition groups in FY 2016.<sup>4</sup> And, in 2012, the United Nations spent \$43.6 billion dollars of its Peacebuilding Fund on Security Sector Reform projects.<sup>5</sup>

How do transnational flows of lethal aid affect human security in fragile states? Unfortunately, a search of articles published in top political science and international studies journals over the past decade suggests too few scholars are studying these issues.

### Objectives

This conference aims to spur research that fills critical gaps in our understanding of the causes and consequences of transnational flows of lethal assistance. The workshop will bring together academic researchers and experts grappling with these issues in the field to develop research questions, explore connections to existing theoretical and empirical work, and begin collaborations that will result in new knowledge of benefit to the academic community and practitioners.

The primary objectives of this colloquium are to:

1. Promote emerging research and jump start new research on the human security implications of transnational flows of military aid and assistance to actors in fragile states.
2. Bring together scholars developing analytical frameworks, conducting systematic data collection and coding, and employing a range of analytical tools to better understand transnational flows of lethal aid and human security in fragile states.
3. Begin a sustained dialogue between scholars and practitioners to improve the quality and policy relevance of academic research on these themes.
4. Outline a research agenda that fills a gap in the academic literature in international security, conflict processes, and comparative politics.

### Intellectual significance

The theme of this workshop crosses traditional boundaries between international political economy, security studies, international relations, and comparative politics. The movement of lethal aid across borders can impact conflict and cooperation between states, the stability of governments, levels of political and criminal violence, economic development, the quality of governance in recipient states, and other many other outcomes of interest to members of the International Studies Association. As the Stimson Center website notes, "From small arms to unmanned aerial vehicles, managing how conventional arms are transferred or employed is vital in determining the course of global conflicts, civil wars, regional disputes, economic development and humanitarian and human rights challenges."

Unfortunately, there is a disconnect between the focus of practitioners on the ground in post-conflict countries and the focus of scholarship. Numerous governmental, nongovernmental, and intergovernmental organizations attempt to track transnational military aid and conventional weapons flows, work with governments in post-conflict and other fragile states to reform security sector practices, and assist in the disarmament of extralegal militant groups. Judging by the research published in International Studies Association journals, scholars have been less interested in these issues.<sup>6</sup> Over the last decade, the impacts of development aid have been extensively investigated. In contrast, only three

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<sup>4</sup> This figure includes Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), and several smaller funds. U.S. Department of State. "Foreign Military Financing Account Summary." U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 30 June 2016. [http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/military/country/2010/2017/is\\_all/](http://www.securityassistance.org/data/country/military/country/2010/2017/is_all/)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/publications/ssr/ssr\\_perspective\\_2012.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/publications/ssr/ssr_perspective_2012.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> A recent article in the *International Studies Quarterly* by Phayal, Khadka, and Thyne (2015) is a notable exception.

original research articles on the impacts of foreign military aid were published in the top fourteen political science and international relations journals during this time period (Bapat 2011; Dube and Naidu 2015; Sullivan, Tessman, and Li 2011).<sup>7</sup> While direct military intervention receives significant scholarly attention (c.f., Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce 2008; Gent 2008; Grigoryan 2010; Murdie and Davis 2010; Peksen 2012; Pickering and Kisangani 2009), more indirect aid provided to state and nonstate actors is understudied. As governments attempt to calculate the risks of providing military assistance to domestic opposition groups or fragile post-war regimes, and the international community contemplates interventions to promote security sector reform in states emerging from civil wars, the academic community can provide only limited guidance. We lack both solid theory and sufficient evidence about the long-term effects of military assistance on political and criminal violence, state repression, civilian protection, public health, government stability, peace duration, human rights protections, rule of law, and public goods provision, among other outcomes.

Questions of interest include, but are not limited to:

- The effects of arms transfers to warring parties on post-conflict peacebuilding, prospects for democratization, and human security after war termination.
- How foreign support for state operations to counter terrorism, drug trafficking, or armed opposition groups affects the sponsored governments' treatment of noncombatants.
- The effects of military aid provided to a state's armed forces during security and governance transitions.
- Whether the effects of weapons transfers, training, and financial support differ from the effects of direct military intervention.
- The ability of external actors to positively influence security sector reform (SSR) and advance human rights conditions through the provision of security assistance in transitions from war to peace.
- The effectiveness of donor state policies to mitigate against the misuse or diversion of weapons transfers and lessen adverse impacts on societal welfare.

### Format

*Thursday evening:* Keynote address by a prominent official from an intergovernmental or nongovernmental organization, open to the public, followed by a reception for conference participants.

*Friday morning:* Theme panels made up of academic researchers and international experts from military, governmental and nongovernmental institutions.

*Friday afternoon:* Sessions devoted to workshopping research papers and proposals.

*Saturday morning:* Continuation of research proposal workshops and closing session.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on a search for the terms "military aid", "military assistance", "security assistance", and "arms transfers" in articles published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *Conflict Management & Peace Science*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Politics*, and *World Politics* since 2005. By comparison, a search for the terms "development aid", "development assistance", "foreign aid", and "economic aid" produced more than forty published articles.

Participants who are practitioners will be placed on themed panels with academic researchers. Experts with extensive experience on the ground in conflict-affected and fragile countries can provide invaluable information and perspective, help scholars generate and refine research questions, connect researchers with new sources of data, and help scholars find a wide audience for their research results. Practitioners will be asked to prepare remarks in response to a list of questions submitted by academic participants prior to the conference.

Scholars on the theme panels will also prepare remarks in response to questions submitted by practitioners prior to the conference. Scholars can help practitioners think systematically about causality and the implications of causal inference for the issues they address in their professional roles; develop rigorous ways to evaluate the impact of interventions; and use theory and data to inform their work. After the prepared remarks, a moderator will facilitate discussion among the panel participants and between the panel and audience.

For the research proposal workshops, academic participants will be expected to circulate a working paper or detailed research proposal two weeks prior to the workshop. Papers and proposals may be based on new research or further develop an ongoing project. Projects may also be developed in collaboration with other workshop participants. Multiple, concurrent small-group sessions will be spent discussing participants' project proposals and developing new and expanded collaborative projects. Each working session will last for one and a half hours and be structured to include brief formal comments from discussants assigned to each project and active dialogue among participants. In advance of the conference, I will circulate a framing paper that participants can use to locate their research within the larger project.

The closing session will provide an opportunity for participants to share key take-away points from the individual panels and workshops and to discuss future directions for research on transnational flows of military aid and assistance to fragile states.

International Studies Association (ISA) members at area universities will be invited to attend the keynote address and panel presentations.

### Location

The conference will be held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This location offers proximity to several major research universities as well as Fort Bragg, home of the US Special Operations Command, which has been extensively involved in missions to train, equip, assist, and advise foreign forces in dozens of countries. The area is also home to the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) and is easily accessible from the Raleigh-Durham International airport.

### Participants

Twenty-three scholars have committed to participating in the workshop. These scholars are from six different countries, eleven U.S. states, and all four U.S. regions of the ISA. More than half of the participants are women. Participants are drawn roughly equally from professor, associate professor, and assistant professor ranks. In addition, a Ph.D. candidate and postdoctoral research fellow have confirmed their participation. Additional graduate students and faculty from Research Triangle area universities will be invited to attend as observers. I expect eight practitioners to participate from governmental and nongovernmental organizations such as the International Crisis Group, Small Arms Survey, Stimson Center, US State Department, U.S. Army, and Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

### Dissemination

A transcript of the keynote address, prepared remarks, research proposals, and meeting notes will be posted on a website created for this research initiative. Graduate students and faculty from relevant

departments at area universities, as well several officers stationed at Fort Bragg, will be invited to attend the keynote address and panel presentations. The keynote address will be publicized and open to the public. In addition, participants will organize a panel, a roundtable, and a working group for the 2018 meeting of the International Studies Association. A subset of participants in this workshop will collaborate to produce articles for a special issue of an academic journal and an edited book to disseminate the results of this project to a wide audience.

#### Other Sources of Funding

The Carnegie Corporation of New York has committed \$18,000 to provide partial support for this conference in its fellowship award to the conference coordinator. Carnegie support will be used to cover airfare for all participants and expenses for the practitioners invited to attend the conference. The Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) and the Department of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will provide \$6000 in additional funding for the keynote speaker, opening reception, and a graduate assistant. Funding is also being sought from the College of Arts and Sciences at UNC Chapel Hill.