



**Sant'Anna**  
Scuola Universitaria Superiore Pisa

# Security Assistance in Fragile Contexts

Master in International Security Studies (MISS)

Prof. Kevin Koehler, PhD

AY 2025/2026

## Course Information

**Term:** AY 2025/2026, Semester I

**Credits:** 6 CFU

**Schedule:** Wed, 11-13 and Fri, 16-18

**Dates:** 24/09/2025 to 21/11/2025

## Instructor Information

**Name:** Prof. Kevin Koehler, PhD

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**Office Hours:** Wed, 14-16 (by appointment)

## Contents

International actors have long attempted to project power by supporting armed actors in other places, particularly in contexts of conflict and instability. These practices, subsumed under the heading of **security assistance**, are at the center of this course. Why do states provide security assistance? Is security assistance an approach to (post-conflict) stabilization, a form of war making by proxy, or a postcolonial ordering device (or all of the above)? Why does security assistance frequently fail to meet its declared objectives?

We begin by problematizing the concept itself, starting from the notion of the state outside the world of Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democracies (WEIRD). We then discuss a range of theoretical perspectives on security assistance itself, including principal-agent models, proxy war arguments, and postcolonial approaches.



Equipped with a conceptual toolkit, we move on to examine a variety of security assistance strategies from the perspective of **providers**. We look at the (evolving) security assistance strategies of the United States, the European Union and its member states, and of NATO, but also focus on non-Western providers such as Russia, Iran, and the Arab Gulf states. In the last part, finally, we discuss specific **cases** of security assistance aiming at understanding how security assistance policies interact with conflict and instability, but also with larger strategic interests.

As part of the course, we will have a series of interventions by outside experts, including both academics and security assistance practitioners.

## Bibliography

All assigned readings are listed below in the course calendar and can be accessed [here](#).

## Course objectives and learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the conceptual and historical background of security assistance
- Analyze the strategies of key provider states and organizations
- Evaluate case studies critically
- Apply theoretical perspectives to real-world contexts

## Teaching methods and activities

- Lectures
- Expert guest speakers
- Class discussions
- Group work

## Assessment

The assessment will be based on **three elements** which build on each other. All participants are expected to develop a **case study** of security assistance by a specific provider or in a specific context, in the form of a short paper (maximum **3,000 words**). The paper will be circulated to the group **at least 3 days** before the relevant class session, and all other participants are expected to read it.

During the corresponding session, the **authors will present** their paper (maximum **15 minutes**).



The third element is a **final project**, which can (but does not necessarily have to) build on the case study. This final product should be a **full academic paper** (maximum **5,000 words**), including:

- a research question derived from the (theoretical) literature,
- a research design explaining how the question will be answered,
- an empirical analysis section,
- and conclusions.

The **final grade** will be composed as follows:

- **Case study:** 30%
- **Presentation:** 20%
- **Final project:** 50%



## Course calendar

### 1. Introduction to the Course

**Wednesday, 24 September 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Rolandsen, Øystein H., Michael Dwyer, and William Reno. 2021. “Security Force Assistance to Fragile States: A Framework of Analysis.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15 (5): 563–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1988224>
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### Part 1: Concepts

### 2. States and Control

**Friday, 26 September 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Herbst, Jeffrey. 2000. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Part 1.
- Migdal, Joel S. 2001. *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

### 3. States and Security

**Wednesday, 1 October 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Ayoob, Mohammed. 1995. *The Third World Security Predicament*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Krieg, Andreas. 2022. “Regime Security.” In *Contemporary Security Studies*, edited by Alan Collins, 218–232. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



#### 4. State Fragility

**Friday, 3 October 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Grävingholt, Jörn, Sebastian Ziaja, and Merle Kreibaum. 2015. “Disaggregating State Fragility: A Method to Establish a Multidimensional Empirical Typology.” *Third World Quarterly* 36 (7): 1281–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1038340>
  - Woodward, Susan. 2017. *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.
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### Part 2: Theoretical Approaches

#### 5. Principal-Agent Relations

**Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Biddle, Stephen, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker. 2017. “Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41 (1–2): 89–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1307745>

#### 6. Proxy War

**Friday, 10 October 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Rauta, Vladimir. 2020. “Framers, Founders, and Reformers: Three Generations of Proxy War Research.” *Contemporary Security Policy* 42 (1): 113–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1800240>
- Stark, Alexandra. 2023. “The Historical Evolution of Proxy Wars” In *Routledge Handbook of Proxy Wars*, edited by Assaf Moghadam, Vladimir Rauta, and Michel Wyss, 153–162. London: Routledge.



## 7. Postcolonial Approaches

**Wednesday, 15 October 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Tholens, Simone, and Chiara Ruffa. 2023. “The Elephant in the Med: Postcoloniality and European Security Assistance Practices.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 573–596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183662>
  - Tholens, Simone, and Al-Jabassini, Aymenn. 2023. “(Re)ordering the Mediterranean: The Evolution of Security Assistance as an International Practice.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 433–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183658>
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## Providers

## 8. U.S. Security Assistance

**Friday, 17 October 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Joyce, Renanah Miles, Theodore McLauchlin, and Lee Seymour. 2024. “Train the World: Examining the Logics of US Foreign Military Training.” *International Studies Quarterly* 68 (2): sqae044. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae044>
- Matisek, Jahara. 2018. “The Crisis of American Military Assistance: Strategic Dithering and Fabergé Egg Armies.” *Defense & Security Analysis* 34 (3): 267–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500757>

## 9. European (Union) Security Assistance

**Wednesday, 22 October 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Gaub, Florence and Walsh, Alex. “EU and Member States’ Security Assistance: Complementary or Contradictory?” In *Security Assistance in the Middle East*, 133–148. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781955055994-008>
- Håkansson, Calle. 2023. “The Ukraine War and the Emergence of the European Commission as a Geopolitical Actor.” *Journal of European Integration* 46 (1): 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2239998>



## 10. NATO Security Assistance

**Friday, 24 October 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Koehler, Kevin. In *Security Assistance in the Middle East*, 149–170. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781955055994-009>
- Lanoszka, Alexander, and Jordan Becker. 2023. “The Art of Partial Commitment: The Politics of Military Assistance to Ukraine.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (3): 173–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2162758>

## 11. Russian Security Assistance

**Wednesday, 29 October 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Manfredi Firmian, Federico. 2024. “Russia’s State Capture Strategy in Africa, from Wagner to the Africa Corps.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, December, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2432832>
- Spearin, Christopher. 2024. “Russia’s Wagner Group/Africa Corps: An Authoritarian Conflict Management Examination.” *Conflict, Security & Development* 24 (5): 479–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2024.2415659>

## 12. Iranian Security Assistance

**Friday, 31 October 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Divsallar, Abdolrasool, and Hamidreza Azizi. 2023. “Towards a Non-Western Model of Security Assistance: How Iran Assists Militaries.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 550–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183661>
- Jahanbani, Nakissa, and Suzanne Weedon Levy. 2023. “Iran’s Proxy War Strategy.” In *Routledge Handbook of Proxy Wars*, 340–353. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003174066-31>

## 13. Arab Gulf States’ Security Assistance

**Wednesday, 5 November 2025, 16:00–18:00**



- Hedges, Matthew. 2021. “Small State Security Engagement in Post-Arab Spring MENA: The Case of the United Arab Emirates.” *Asian Affairs* 52 (2): 412–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2021.1916248>
  - Krieg, Andreas. 2023. “Security Assistance to Surrogates – How the UAE Secures Its Regional Objectives.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 454–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183659>
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## Cases

### 14. Iraq

**Friday, 7 November 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Costantini, Irene, and Dylan O’Driscoll. 2022. “Twenty Years of Externally Promoted Security Assistance in Iraq: Changing Approaches and Their Limits.” *International Peacekeeping* 30 (5): 562–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2022.2149501>
- Jansen, Alies. 2024. “Understanding Security Force Assistance: A Matter of Control?” *Defense & Security Analysis* 40 (1): 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2024.2295102>

### 15. Mali

**Wednesday, 12 November 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Marsh, Nicholas, and Øystein H. Rolandsen. 2021. “Fragmented We Fall: Security Sector Cohesion and the Impact of Foreign Security Force Assistance in Mali.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15 (5): 614–629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1988226>
- Gazeley, Joe. 2022. “The Strong ‘Weak State’: French Statebuilding and Military Rule in Mali.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 16 (3): 269–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2022.2030627>





## 16. Ukraine

**Friday, 14 November 2025, 11:00–13:00**

- Lanoszka, Alexander, and Jordan Becker. 2023. “The Art of Partial Commitment: The Politics of Military Assistance to Ukraine.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (3): 173–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2162758>
- Marsh, Nicholas. 2023. “Responding to Needs: Military Aid to Ukraine during the First Year after the 2022 Russian Invasion.” *European Security* 32 (3): 346–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2023.2235121>

## 17. Syria

**Wednesday, 19 November 2025, 16:00–18:00**

- Al-Jabassini, Abdullah, and Emadeddin Badi. 2023. “The Making of Rivals and Strange Bedfellows: Patterns of Turkish and Russian Security Assistance in the Syrian and Libyan Civil Wars.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 501–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183663>
  - Rolandsen, Øystein H., and Kjetil Selvik. 2023. “Disposable Rebels: US Military Assistance to Insurgents in the Syrian War.” *Mediterranean Politics* 29 (4): 528–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2023.2183664>
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## 18. Conclusion: First, Do No Harm

**Friday, 21 November 2025, 11:00–13:00**