



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

E-NOTES

February 2013

WHEN FOREIGN POLICY GOALS EXCEED MILITARY CAPACITY, CALL THE PENTAGON

By Derek S. Reveron



Derek Reveron is a professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. These views are his own and do not represent official policy. He can be reached at www.usnwc.edu/derekreveron.

With dozens of treaty allies and a strategic priority of promoting the sovereignty of weak states, the U.S. military has been gradually shifting from a force designed for confrontation to one intended to promote international cooperation. To be sure, the U.S. military retains a technical and doctrinal advantage as a warfighting entity. However, over the past two decades, the military has been incorporating new organizations, doctrine, and training to prioritize efforts to prevent war through security force assistance. This has shifted focus to weak states where sub-national (e.g., gangs in Central America) and trans-national security challenges (e.g., al-Qa'ida) jeopardize sovereignty and regional stability.¹ Consequently, countries such as the Philippines, Georgia, Colombia, Uganda, and Pakistan have requested security assistance from the United States. While level of support varies, U.S. forces are enabling partner countries to combat challenges that threaten their own stability.

This shift in focus has raised concerns about the “militarization of U.S. foreign policy,” which began in the 1990s with the recognition that combatant commanders are as much policy entrepreneurs as they are war fighters.² Generals like Tony Zinni or Wesley Clark epitomized the new breed of warrior-diplomat who directly engaged with foreign heads of state.³ Far from rogue generals, these military leaders were directed by President Bill Clinton to engage with the world and promote security by assisting partners and assuring allies in a security environment freed from the Cold War dynamic. President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama continued the practice of using the military to assist almost every government of the world. As Administrations from both parties came to value the military’s capabilities in peace and war, some contended that defense overshadowed (if not displaced) traditional diplomacy and development efforts.⁴ Within defense circles, critics assumed that helping weak states jeopardized American military dominance and undercut preparations for major war.⁵ More recently, critics highlight that in an era of declining budgets, the United States military cannot afford nor overcome unintended consequences of attempting to be a “global force for good.”⁶ These are valid concerns, but the United States shows no signs of retreating from a global leadership role and instead seeks partnerships as a key component of U.S. strategy.

¹ Stephen D. Krasner and Carlos Pascual, “Addressing State Failure,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, (July/August 2005).

² Derek S. Reveron (ed.), *America’s Viceroy: The U.S. Military and Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

³ Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Keeping Peace with America’s Military*, (New York: WW Norton, 2004).

⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Leading through Civilian Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2010.

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66799/hillary-rodham-clinton/leading-through-civilian-power?page=show>

⁵ Gian Gentile, “COIN is Dead: U.S. Army Must Put Strategy over Tactics,” *World Politics Review*, November 22, 2011.

<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/10731/coin-is-dead-u-s-army-must-put-strategy-over-tactics>

⁶ Gordon Adams, “Continental Shift: Why the Pentagon Should Pay Less Attention to Africa,” *Foreignpolicy.com*, January 25, 2013.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/25/continental_shift?wp_login_redirect=0

With shared challenges of terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and shared goals of development and protecting human security, there are unprecedented levels of international cooperation to share information, target terrorists, and provide governments the tools they need to confront national threats before they become regional ones. This is on display in Afghanistan where 50 countries operate under the ISAF flag, or in the Indian Ocean where 27 countries operate as Combined Maritime Forces. At the center of the coalitions is a U.S.-sponsored framework to enable partners to contribute to international security.

President Barack Obama intends to continue the American tradition of enabling partners throughout the globe. As he noted in his second inaugural address, “America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe. And we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crisis abroad. For no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful nation.” By training and equipping other militaries, the goal is to reduce U.S. American military presence internationally and allow others to provide for their own security. This has positive benefits not only for the U.S. defense budget (e.g., an Afghan soldier costs hundreds per month compared to an American soldier who costs thousands per month), but also for international security. While my earlier book *Exporting Security* explains why the United States assists governments from Afghanistan to Zambia, an overlooked area is security assistance provided to developed countries.

CAPACITY MATTERS

As France recently learned in Mali, while it has capable ground forces and aircraft, it has limited ability to sustain these forces just 2,000 miles from home. To support its foreign policy agenda, France needed the United States Air Force to fly its forces and refuel its attack aircraft. As the operation continues, the United States will probably provide intelligence for French and African forces as they shift to stability operations.

Counterterrorism can certainly explain U.S. intervention in Mali; however, enabling French success explains the timeline. More importantly, the case of U.S.-supported French intervention in Mali is illustrative of the role the United States plays in supporting developed countries. France is the latest developed country to need U.S. assistance, but requests like this are common. This is true for almost every one of the 50 countries serving in Afghanistan today, as it was true with European countries in the Balkans, Australian forces in East Timor, and British forces in West Africa. These examples highlight that the foreign policy goals of many developed countries exceed their military capacity, which requires them to rely on the U.S. military for assistance. As developed countries’ defense budgets fall further, reliance on the United States is going to increase. This remains a decades-old frustration. Most recently, the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, “There is a lower limit on how little we can spend on defense, while living up to our responsibilities.”⁷

Pragmatically, the United States would like its partners to do more, but shared challenges and limited budgets will reinforce the value of American logistics, combat experience, and intelligence capacity. Further, American support of other countries reinforces the treaty arrangements with 27 NATO countries and five Asian countries. Twenty years ago, there seemed to be little relevance to these treaties and security arrangements, let alone a rationale for invoking them or expanding them. Yet, the opposite occurred. NATO increased its membership three times from 16 to 19 in 1999, again to 26 in 2006, and again to 28 in 2009. At the same time the number of NATO members increased, NATO changed from its traditional mission of territorial defense to one of global security engagement. With each expansion, new members require training and equipping to NATO standards. With each new operation, NATO countries require access to U.S. intelligence, critical technology, and global logistics.

In addition to formal treaties of alliance, an additional dozen countries are offered protection under the U.S. security umbrella either by law, such as the *Taiwan Relations Act* or by policy such as United States’ support for Israel.⁸ These protections include provisions to train and equip their militaries. Another dozen countries are offered special security provisions through Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status. MNNA does not confer a mutual defense

⁷ Quoted in “In Europe, a Moment of Truth on Defense,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2013.

⁸ Congress enacted the Taiwan Relations Act “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.” Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8, April 10, 1979.

relationship, but the largely symbolic act implies a close working relationship with another country's defense forces.⁹ It is more akin to a preferred buyer's program allowing countries like Australia, Japan, and South Korea access to advanced weapons systems. With weapons purchases also come long-term training and maintenance contracts. From a U.S. perspective, it has a comparative advantage in defense exports; strategically, programs like these are intended to overcome the free-rider problem the United States faces with its partners.¹⁰ For every Joint Strike Fighter Japan buys, the United States can deploy one less to northeast Asia.

Given the diplomatic nature of these security partnerships, the Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs focuses these activities, regulates the defense trade and arms transfers to reinforce the military capabilities of friends, allies, and coalition partners, and ensures that the transfer of U.S.-origin defense equipment and technology supports U.S. national security interests. Further, the Bureau promotes regional security through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and dialogue, as well as through the provision of security assistance to friendly countries and international peacekeeping efforts. The overall goals of security assistance include creating favorable military balances of power (e.g., selling weapons and training to Saudi Arabia to balance Iran), advancing areas of mutual defense or security arrangements (e.g., collaborating with Japan on missile defense technology), building allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations (e.g., South Korea), and preventing crisis and conflict (e.g., facilitating Colombia's success against the decades-old FARC insurgency). Historically, Israel has been the largest recipient of security assistance and its neighbor Egypt benefited from its recognition of Israel and the Camp David Accords.¹¹ Given its proximity to the United States and challenges with drug trafficking organizations, Mexico has recently emerged as a top recipient of security assistance. Given the history of American military interventions in Mexico, this has required new efforts to build trust to reassure the government that it seeks to strengthen it and not undermine it.¹²

One reason the United States concentrates assistance on just a few countries is to promote particular countries as regional leaders. In practice, this means that Jordan hosts an international special operations exercise, peace operations training center, and an international police training center. Or in Latin America, Colombia provides helicopter training for regional militaries and El Salvador hosts a regional peacekeeping institute, attracting military personnel from countries throughout the Western Hemisphere. Given the significant U.S. investment in Afghanistan's military and police training infrastructure, it is likely that Afghanistan could eventually host regional training if the insurgency subsides to acceptable levels. This approach not only strengthens key partners, but it also reduces the need for American presence and the negative attention it sometimes generates. We see the benefits of this today where U.S.-trained Colombian pilots are training Mexican pilots in Colombia.

⁹ Title 10 U.S. Code Section 2350a authorizes the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to designate MNNA for purposes of participating with the Department of Defense (DOD) in cooperative research and development programs. MNNA Status does not entail the same mutual defense and security guarantees afforded to NATO members. Status makes a nation eligible for priority delivery of excess defense articles, buy depleted uranium ammunition, have U.S.-owned War Reserve Stockpiles on its territory, enter into agreements with the USG for the cooperative furnishing of training on a bilateral or multilateral basis under reciprocal financial arrangements, use U.S. provided Foreign Military Financing for commercial leasing of certain defense articles, makes a country eligible for loans of materials, supplies and equipment for cooperative R&D projects and testing and evaluation, and makes a country eligible for expedited processing of export licenses of commercial satellites, their technologies, components, and systems.

¹⁰ U.S. military spending is the highest in the world at about 4.5 percent of GDP; most European countries spend just under two percent. Only six countries meet the NATO target of two percent of GDP to support defense.

¹¹ Given the Arab Awakening and long-term challenges of U.S.-Israel relations this may be changing.

¹² The Marine Corps hymn remembers past invasions of Mexico: "From the Halls of Montezuma..."

Table 1: Top Recipients of U.S. International Assistance (Account 150)		
Fiscal Year 2011 (\$ in thousands) ¹³		
<i>Overall</i>	<i>Non-Security Assistance</i>	<i>Security Assistance</i>
Israel	Afghanistan	Israel
Afghanistan	Pakistan	Egypt
Pakistan	Ethiopia	Afghanistan
Egypt	Kenya	Pakistan
Kenya	Nigeria	Jordan
Ethiopia	South Africa	Colombia
Jordan	Tanzania	West Bank and Gaza
Nigeria	Uganda	Iraq
South Africa	West Bank and Gaza	Mexico
West Bank and Gaza	Mozambique	Lebanon

In addition to the Department of State budget for security assistance, the Defense Department directly funds security assistance through section 1206/7 and other command funds such as Commander's Emergency Response Program. This authority did provoke more concern about militarizing foreign policy; however, this only makes up about \$1 billion annually, which is less than 15 percent of security assistance funded by the State Department. Further, U.S. ambassadors must approve all programs. Thus, the Department of State exerts considerable control of programs at both budgetary and implementation levels through the embassy country team.

CHANGING ROLE OF THE MILITARY

With national security focused on weak states and persistent security concerns among stable allies like South Korea, the U.S. military has been changing over the last 20 years from a force of confrontation to one of cooperation. The military has learned that partnership is better than clientism and is adapting its command structure once optimized for waging major combat to one that is focused on conflict prevention. There is still a tremendous warfighting

¹³ Derived from Department of State, FY2011 International Assistance Summary Tables. These data do not include supplemental funds or programs funded outside the Department of State. Regional designations are based on the Department of State's regional boundaries that vary slightly from the Defense Department's boundaries.

capability in the U.S. military, but coalition warfare is the norm and developing compatible warfighting partners is a key goal of this cooperative strategy. In some sense, this turns the idea of militarization of foreign policy on its head; the Pentagon is being demilitarized and valued for its ability to impart military capabilities to U.S. partners.

Given the current structure of the international system and technological advances, the United States does not need partners in the same way as it did in the past where they provided direct benefits through coaling stations, maintenance facilities, or large bases. While the number of forward bases is still substantial, the number of forward deployed forces are greatly reduced. More importantly, the nature of the presence has changed; the United States aspires to create true partners that can confront their own threats to internal stability (e.g., assistance to Colombia's military) or alleviate security dilemmas (e.g., future basing in Australia). It also seeks to foster independence by training and equipping militaries to support the global demand for peacekeepers.¹⁴ The United States certainly gets increased access to countries around the world through these programs, but given the overwhelming military dominance of the United States, it does not abuse these relationships or ignore seemingly insignificant states. Instead, it seeks to create partners where sovereignty is respected and all parties derive benefits. The latest example of this is U.S. withdrawal from Iraq as dictated by a U.S.-Iraqi agreement.

While the Defense Department's capacity certainly explains why international assistance missions increasingly have a military face, it is also essential to understand that there is a global demand for U.S. security assistance. The Defense Department has recognized that there are limits to what it can do; the military wants and needs partners from across the government, allies and private organizations. Unfortunately, these ideas remain stunted in the broader foreign policy community that gets easily overwhelmed by the size of the Defense Department's resources. For critics, U.S. military activities in permissive environments bring old memories of invasion or coup. For them, U.S. foreign policy is on a dangerous militarization path. While that part of U.S. military history is real and still resonates in many parts of the world, it is wrong to overlook the changes that have occurred over the last two decades. Further, it is wrong to overlook the significant demands developed countries place on the United States.

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684

For more information, contact Eli Gilman at 215-732-3774, ext. 255, email fpri@fpri.org, or visit us at www.fpri.org.

¹⁴ See Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) at the Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/gpoi/>