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THE REAL REBALANCING: AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND THE TRAGEDY OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

John R. Deni



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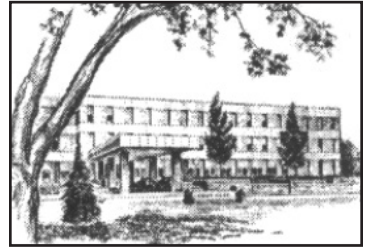


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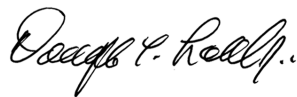
FOREWORD

As this monograph goes to press, the nuclear agreement negotiated between Iran and the so-called P5+1 – the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council consisting of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, plus Germany – is the subject of heated debate within Washington. The negotiations that produced the agreement perhaps best exemplify the efforts by the Barack Obama administration to use diplomacy to address the most vexing security challenges of the day. The United States and Iran have struggled to overcome mutual hostility and distrust stemming from the 1953 coup against the Mohammad Mossadegh government and the 1979-80 hostage crisis, not to mention Teheran's use of Hezbollah as a proxy against American ally Israel. Yet despite this, the administration persisted over several years to first intensify and broaden economic sanctions against Iran, and then to engage in painstaking negotiations with an authoritarian country that routinely and methodically employs anti-American rhetoric.

In many ways, this shift in approach toward greater reliance on diplomacy – or, as Dr. John R. Deni puts it, this rebalancing – represents a marked contrast with the approach of President Obama's predecessor. The administration of President George W. Bush was frequently accused of favoring the use of unilateral military power over multilateral diplomacy and development as the primary tool of American national security. Indeed, the effort to rebalance the three-legged stool of U.S. national security has been a hallmark of the Obama years, as Dr. Deni persuasively argues in this monograph. In Dr. Deni's view, this

defining characteristic of President Obama's foreign policy overshadows in scope, depth, and importance the other "rebalance" most often associated with the 44th President – that is, the rebalance to the Pacific.

However, Dr. Deni argues that the tragedy of President Obama's rebalance toward diplomacy and development is not that it represents an America in retreat, but rather that the rebalance has not succeeded. Despite unambiguous rhetoric, official pronouncements, and policies all aimed at rebalancing toward diplomacy and development and away from defense, in fact, there is much evidence to indicate that U.S. foreign and national security policy remains militarized, perhaps overly so. Nonetheless, even in a tale of failure, there are important implications not simply for U.S. national security, but for the role of the military as well. Dr. Deni skillfully draws out these implications, connecting broad strategic trends with the most likely, most compelling consequences for the Department of Defense and the U.S. Army specifically. By drawing these inferences effectively, Dr. Deni is able to offer implementable recommendations to senior policymakers. For these reasons, the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College is pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the unfolding national security debate about the role of the U.S. military in the implementation of American foreign policy.



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SUMMARY

American security policy rests on a three-legged stool consisting of defense, diplomacy, and development. As President Barack Obama implied in his May 2014 speech at West Point, New York, the United States is in the midst of a resurgence of diplomacy and development, as it seeks to leverage diplomatic influence, foreign aid, and multilateral institutions to solve the most vexing international security challenges. However, the dramatic rebalance toward diplomacy and development over the last several years has largely failed. Rhetoric, official strategies, and actual policies have all aimed at rebalancing the three legs of the foreign policy stool. However, several factors point to a continued militarization of U.S. foreign policy, including funding levels, legal authorities, and the growing body of evidence that civilian agencies of the U.S. Government lack the resources, skills, and capabilities to achieve foreign policy objectives. Continued reliance by senior decisionmakers at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue on the U.S. military in the development, planning, and implementation of U.S. foreign policy has significant implications. Foremost among them is the fact that the military itself must prepare for a future not terribly unlike the very recent past.

THE REAL REBALANCING: AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND THE TRAGEDY OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world's many challenges.

President Barack Obama, March 28, 2011

The policy of pivoting—or rather, the rebalancing—to the Asia-Pacific has been described regularly as President Obama's "signature foreign policy initiative," over the last 6 years. Launched in 2009 during his first year in office and then refined through policy pronouncements such as the January 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance*, the rebalance initiative has received much attention from academics, practitioners, think tanks, and the media. In reality though, the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific has been more evolutionary than revolutionary, a shift in focus and grand strategy that began well before President Obama's first inauguration in January 2009.

If there has been a revolutionary rebalancing underway during the Obama presidency, it has been his effort to rebalance American foreign policy generally from over-reliance on the military and toward greater reliance on diplomacy and development. In rhetoric, official strategies, and policy implementation, the Obama administration has strongly and repeatedly favored diplomatic solutions over military ones during the last 6 years.

One of the primary hurdles in relying on diplomatic solutions is that they typically take longer to bear fruit. In contrast, wielding military force often yields results more quickly, even if the apparent success is

illusory in the long run. Critics of the Obama approach conflate the emphasis on diplomacy with indecision, and hence weakness. According to Danielle Pletka of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, “This president’s strategy has been retreat. Iraq: Retreat. Afghanistan: Retreat. Total disengagement from the world.”¹

However, the tragedy of President Obama’s rebalance toward diplomacy and development is not that it represents an America in retreat, but rather that the rebalance has not succeeded. Despite unambiguous rhetoric, official pronouncements, and policies all aimed at rebalancing toward diplomacy and development and away from defense, in fact, there is much evidence to indicate that U.S. foreign and national security policy remains militarized, perhaps overly so.²

Regardless of whether militarization is good or bad, the fact that U.S. foreign policy is likely to **remain** militarized, even beyond the Obama years, carries major implications for the U.S. military as well as for those in the executive and legislative branches that would seek to wield it. Facing the reality of an American foreign policy still out of balance is merely the first step in navigating the way forward. For its part, the U.S. military must more firmly embrace its role in shaping the security environment and preventing conflict by building security capacity and capability among allies and partners.

The Resurgence of U.S. Diplomacy.

In the wake of two expensive, draining wars, American diplomacy is resurgent. Since his election in November 2008, President Obama has sought to rebalance the three-legged stool of national security policy by

reducing the role of defense and strengthening the role of diplomacy, as well as development.³

When President Obama entered office, reportedly there were more musicians in the military bands than there were U.S. diplomats.⁴ Given what appeared to be an obvious imbalance toward the military dimension of American foreign policy, the Obama administration began a concerted effort to *rebalance* toward diplomacy and development. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Candidate Obama promised to increase the size of the Foreign Service, among other steps. After assuming office, the new administration launched an effort known as Diplomacy 3.0, the centerpiece of which was the President's hiring initiative, aimed at expanding the Foreign Service by 25 percent by 2014.⁵

Nonetheless, the rhetoric on rebalancing the emphasis in American foreign policy has become particularly strong since the beginning of the President's second term and the end of major American involvement in Iraq.⁶ During the 2014 U.S. Military Academy commencement ceremony in West Point, New York, the President acknowledged American interests in a world at peace, with greater freedom and tolerance, but he firmly expressed his view that, "to say that we have an interest in pursuing peace and freedom beyond our borders is not to say that every problem has a military solution."⁷ The President went on to note that, "U.S. military action cannot be the only – or even primary – component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail."⁸

The President's most senior defense advisor – the Secretary of Defense – has been equally clear on the need to balance toward diplomacy and development, at the expense of relying routinely on military "solu-

tions." At the February 2014 Munich Security Conference, then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel spoke about his efforts with Secretary of State John Kerry to restore "balance to the relationship between American defense and diplomacy" over the preceding year.⁹ A senior defense official traveling with Hagel in Munich noted that the latter had come to believe, "that foreign policy had become too militarized over the last decade or so and that it's time for [the Department of Defense, DoD] to be [in] a supporting role when it comes to the execution of this country's foreign policy."¹⁰

Of course, Kerry has been vocal as well on the need to rebalance toward diplomacy and development. During his confirmation hearing, he noted, "American foreign policy is not defined by drones and deployments alone."¹¹ His predecessor, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, also pushed for a rebalancing toward diplomacy and development. The first State Department budget request submitted to Congress under her tenure—for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010—featured a 7 percent increase over 2009 levels. In testifying before Congress on the request, Clinton noted that 2009—the height of the Great Recession—was an inopportune time to ask for an increase in funding, but she argued that it was necessary to have a "robust State Department and [U.S. Agency for International Development] working side-by-side with a strong military in furtherance of our three Ds—diplomacy, development, and defense."¹²

Even though most of the rhetoric on rebalancing from defense toward diplomacy and development has seemed strongest since the beginning of President Obama's second term as president, the administration has consistently promoted the rebalance through major policy pronouncements. For instance, in the 2010

National Security Strategy (NSS), the administration called repeatedly for all elements of American power to be “balanced and integrated,”¹³ an implicit but obvious acknowledgement that the elements of power were significantly out of balance. Additionally, the 2010 NSS called for diplomacy and development to be “modernized,” on par with defense capabilities.

Within the State Department, Clinton initiated the first ever *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (QDDR) report, modeled on the Pentagon’s *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR). The 2010 QDDR was written to express broad functional and administrative objectives and strategies, and to help the State Department translate those things into budget priorities. In the opening pages of the QDDR, Clinton was clear in comparing the document to the QDR, and expressing her admiration of its ability to set a strategic course, force prioritization, and capture those priorities in budget requests.¹⁴ In her view, the QDDR forms a critical tool in helping to “build up our civilian power.”¹⁵

Most recently, the 2015 NSS echoed the 2010 NSS in calling for a more balanced approach to American national security, arguing that military force was not the only tool available in the pursuit of U.S. interests. “Rather,” states the 2015 NSS, “our first line of action is principled and clear-eyed diplomacy, combined with the central role of development.”¹⁶ Indeed, the strategy is clear that when it comes to conflict prevention, defense plays a supporting role to diplomacy.¹⁷

In addition to policy pronouncements, there are several practical examples that embody this shift in emphasis and approach as well. First, President Obama has been particularly keen on ending direct American involvement in Iraq, and more recently Afghanistan.

One of then-Senator Obama's key campaign themes in 2008 was ending the war in Iraq. After becoming President in January 2009, he fulfilled that commitment in relatively short order, removing major combat forces from Iraq by December 2011. Failed negotiations over a status of forces agreement (SOFA) are ostensibly the reason why a residual U.S. force did not remain in Iraq after 2011. However, a former senior administration official – as well as the President's political opponents on Capitol Hill – argued that the White House did not pressure Iraqi leadership enough and favored ending American involvement above all else.¹⁸

The administration has been equally resolute in bringing the war in Afghanistan to a close. Although President Obama initiated a troop surge in Afghanistan in December 2009, less than a year after entering office, he was keen to limit that surge in both scope and duration.¹⁹ A year and a half after initiating the surge, the President again spoke to the American people, announcing the beginning of the surge's drawdown and the planned withdrawal of all remaining major American combat forces by December 2014.²⁰ Some critics charged that the President's announcement of a specific end date would enable the Taliban to simply wait out U.S. involvement.²¹ Nonetheless, the President was resolute in pursuing his preferred timeline, rejecting advice from even some of his top civilian and military advisors on the issue.²²

The President also rejected the advice of some senior U.S. civilian and military advisors with regard to American involvement in the Libyan civil war – but in this situation, those top advisors, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed U.S. military involvement in any form.²³ Instead, with a United Nations

(UN) mandate and strong leadership from American allies and partners in Europe and the Middle East, President Obama agreed to provide U.S. military forces in support. Initially led by France and the United Kingdom (UK), the United States briefly held strategic command – from March 19-31, 2011 – before passing leadership to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and taking up a supporting role. The administration was said to have been “leading from behind,” taking a back seat to European and allied efforts in Libya. In fact, America’s NATO allies flew 85 percent of the sorties in which munitions were dropped; provided the bases in France, Spain, Italy, and Greece from which the attacks occurred; provided key command personnel; and supplied nearly all of the ships that participated in the arms embargo on the regime of Libyan Dictator Muammar Qaddafi.²⁴

More recently, the United States has only reluctantly gotten involved in the Syrian civil war, despite the huge number of civilian casualties and the massive refugee flows from Syria.²⁵ President Obama repeatedly has evinced a very clear preference for diplomacy over military action in this instance, particularly when it came to responding to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons: “I do not believe that military action by those within Syria or by external powers can achieve a lasting peace.”²⁶ Separately, the President noted that a diplomatic solution, “is overwhelmingly my preference.”²⁷ Speaking more broadly about how the United States would pursue and protect its interests in the Middle East, the President also noted, “We can rarely achieve [U.S. national security goals] through unilateral American action, particularly through military action. Iraq shows us that democracy cannot simply be imposed by force.”²⁸

With regard to Iran's interest in developing a nuclear weapon, the United States has also preferred diplomatic means over military action. Starting in 2009, the Obama administration began an intensive diplomatic effort to increase sanctions on Iran in concert with the European Union (EU) and other partners such as South Korea, Japan, and Australia. Eventually, the sanctions grew to include an EU ban on oil from Iran and a freeze on the assets of Iran's central bank, amounting to the most stringent macroeconomic measures against Iran to date.²⁹ While the administration never took the threat of force off the table, its strategy clearly favored diplomatic measures. Although such measures arguably took significant time to pay dividends, they ultimately led to the first serious negotiations between senior U.S. and Iranian officials about the disposition of existing nuclear infrastructure, materiel, and capability within Iran. Diplomatic efforts intensified in 2013 when Kerry met with Iran's foreign minister in late September. In July 2015, negotiations resulted in a historic agreement to end decades of economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program.

In contrast to the two examples mentioned previously, the United States has obviously been wielding military force in Iraq—indeed, this would appear to be a case that contrasts with the notion of the Obama administration favoring diplomacy over military force in recent years. However, American involvement came only well after the security situation there deteriorated significantly, as Islamic State (IS) extremists took over Mosul (Iraq's second largest city) and threatened the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan as well as Baghdad itself. Even as the United States began attacking IS targets in Iraq, there was reportedly "deep unease" within the White House over essentially bailing out the Iraqi

leadership in Baghdad.³⁰ The administration's strategy in Iraq — relying as it does on precision air strikes — will certainly take longer to achieve significant results to even come close to the President's stated objective of destroying IS.³¹ Nevertheless, such a strategy clearly precludes a lengthy ground war involving tens or even hundreds of thousands of troops since the administration has been quite firm in its determination to avoid the commitment of ground forces.

In some ways, the Obama administration's use of unmanned aerial vehicles — or drones — would also appear to be an example of a preference for military solutions to foreign policy problems. Indeed, the Obama administration has made the use of unmanned platforms in the prosecution of counterterrorism operations a signature aspect of its security policy.³² However, the expansive use of drones over the last 6 years does not evince a preference for military action per se. Instead, it seems motivated at least in part by a desire to avoid costlier, potentially bloodier, forms of intervention and military involvement.³³

Meanwhile, with regard to Ukraine, the administration has been careful to avoid overly militarizing its response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its invasion of the Donbas region.³⁴ Since Ukraine is not a treaty ally, the American response with regard to the new government in Kyiv has been limited to providing nonlethal aid, technical assistance to improve governance and energy security, and strong diplomatic support. At the same time, the United States and the EU together have imposed an array of economic sanctions on Russia. The only military dimension of Washington's policy has been to reassure treaty allies Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania with relatively small-scale deployments of American troops — roughly 100-120 soldiers in each — and increased exercises in

the same countries conducted by U.S. forces based in Europe as well as some rotationally deployed forces from the continental United States. Throughout the crisis though, President Obama has been clear in his intention of avoiding a military confrontation with Russia. “I will look at all additional options that are available to us short of military confrontation,” the President said during a news conference in January 2015, as the fighting between the Ukrainian army and Russian-supported separatists flared anew.³⁵

More broadly with regard to Russia, the Obama administration began pursuing a diplomatic “reset” shortly after entering office in January 2009 in an attempt to move beyond the East-West confrontation over Moscow’s invasion and occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia in August 2008. The administration hoped to restore diplomatic cooperation with Russia along a number of avenues where there appeared to be common interests, including nuclear arms reductions, counterterrorism, and Iran’s nuclear program.³⁶ The reset achieved only limited success,³⁷ in part because Moscow has chosen to employ military force as a means of restoring Russian prestige, often at the expense of Western interests. Meanwhile, the United States has pursued a positive-sum game based on cooperative diplomacy, a strategy that is only effective as long as both sides believe that a rising tide lifts all boats.

Shortly after his reelection in November 2012, the President initiated another reset of sorts, this time with Israel.³⁸ In March 2013, President Obama traveled to Israel with the new Secretary of State, John Kerry, in an effort to spur negotiations toward an agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Their efforts represented the latest in a string of presidential attempts—mostly unsuccessful—stretching back

decades to build a durable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The odds of achieving success were again stacked against the United States and the Obama administration, and yet the President committed Secretary Kerry to an exhausting shuttle diplomacy mission that seemingly consumed the first year of Kerry's tenure at Foggy Bottom. For a variety of reasons, some far beyond the control of Washington, the entire effort collapsed by April 2014.

Obviously, based on this example as well as several of those noted previously, a resurgence of diplomacy does not necessarily mean a resurgence of **successful** diplomacy. Nevertheless, the evidence seems clear that the Obama administration has labored through word and deed to rebalance the U.S. Government's approach toward achieving national security. National security strategies, speeches by the most senior political leaders, and actual U.S. policies—many of which were summarized previously—all point to an American administration less inclined to view every foreign policy challenge as requiring a military response.

Have the Three Legs Been Rebalanced?

Aside from whether the renewed emphasis on diplomacy has improved American national security—and the evidence there appears mixed, at least judging from the examples of policy implementation discussed earlier—the question of whether the administration has, in fact, succeeded in its goal of rebalancing the three legs of the national security stool remains. Ironically, it seems the resurgence in diplomacy has not resulted in an equal balance between the three legs of the national security stool. Just as a renewed emphasis on diplomacy does not necessarily mean successful diplomacy, it also does not mean that the three legs of

the stool are yet equal or in relative balance. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that U.S. foreign policy remains very – perhaps overly – militarized, despite the best efforts of the last 6 to 7 years to shift strategies, rhetoric, and policies.

The most obvious indicator of whether the national security stool is still out of balance is federal spending. It is nearly conventional wisdom these days that the U.S. defense budget dwarfs that of every other discretionary federal function. Figure 1 shows the comparison between national defense and international affairs expenditures in constant 2009 dollars dating back to 1977, the year the federal government moved to a fiscal year starting on October 1.³⁹ Clearly, although defense expenditures appear to be heading downward following a peak of nearly \$700 billion in the middle of the last decade, international affairs expenditures have remained merely a fraction of national defense.

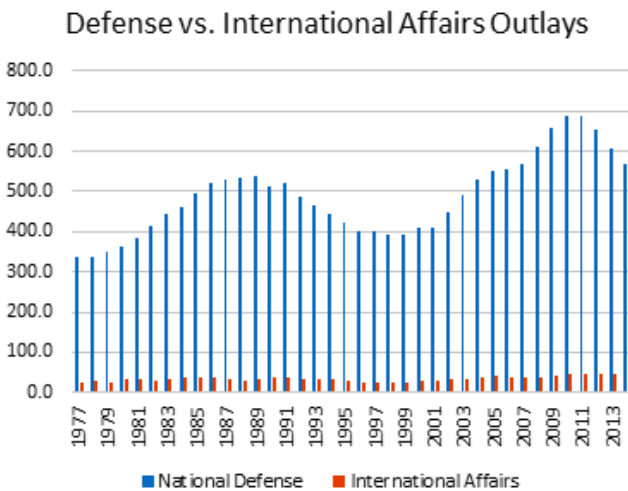


Figure 1. Comparison between National Defense and International Affairs Expenditures in 2009 Dollars.

Some argue that the national security stool has been out of balance for some time, certainly before the wars of the early-21st century.⁴⁰ Because of this, and the massive disparity that has built up over time, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect more than incremental or limited change over the last 6 years in the broader, overall trend. When viewed in isolation, national defense expenditures appear indeed to be dropping significantly since 2010, as the administration was still trying to end the war in Iraq and surging in Afghanistan, but nonetheless on a trajectory to fall by hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming years. Given enough time, and commensurate **increases** in international affairs funding, perhaps the legs of the stool might achieve a greater degree of equality.

It seems though that the precipitous decline in defense spending witnessed over the last couple of years is unlikely to continue. Figure 2, on the succeeding page, includes not simply historical data but projected future estimates as well.⁴¹ At least as far as the Pentagon and White House are concerned, the defense budget is expected to end its decline from wartime highs and level off over the next several years.

Of course, figures for future years are obviously just estimates drawn from DoD budget planning documents, subject to change depending on various factors, including and especially Congress's will. Historically though, Congress rarely makes more than marginal changes in the defense budget request submitted by any administration. Even if Congress and the President were to force DoD to live within the more limited confines of the 2011 Budget Control Act—hence sequestration—this would reduce the total Pentagon budget by an additional 4.3 percent over the period FY 16-19.⁴²

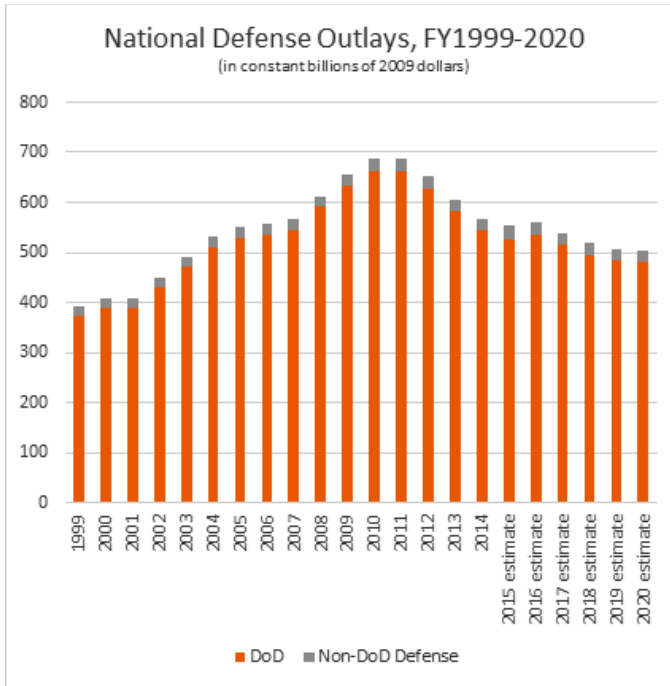


Figure 2. Historical Data and Projected Future Estimates.

On the heels of what might be perceived as a significant drawdown in military power following wartime highs, that 4.3 percent (or roughly \$115 billion) would represent significant lost defense investment, manpower, capability, infrastructure, and capacity. This further downsizing of American military capability would come at a time when many on both sides of the political aisle believe the array of threats to U.S. national security is growing, not diminishing.⁴³ Nevertheless, even sequestration-level cuts would not represent a revolutionary change in how the United States achieves national security.

Meanwhile, the future years estimate for the international affairs budget shows a slight increase in 2015 but then falls steadily thereafter.⁴⁴ (See Figure 3.) In sum, the available fiscal data paints a rather clear picture—namely, that spending on diplomacy and development **combined** amount to merely a fraction of what the United States spends on national defense. Even under sequestration scenarios, risk would surely increase with decreased defense spending, but defense would just as surely still dominate relative to diplomacy and development.

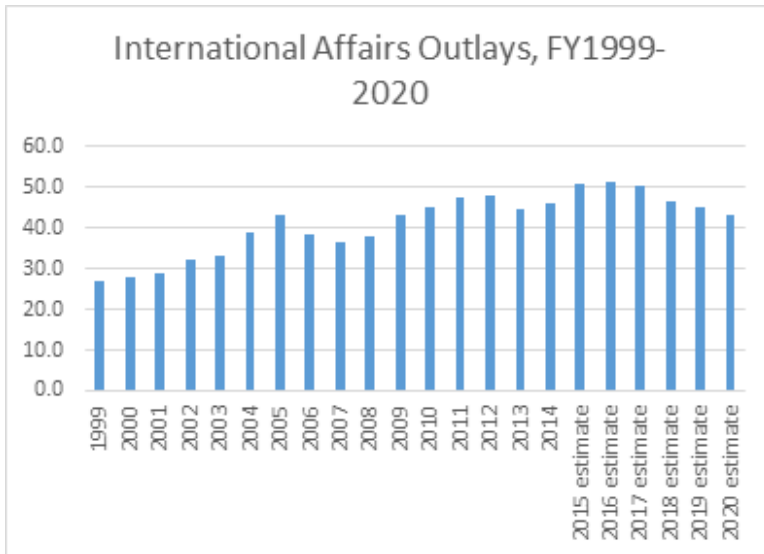


Figure 3. International Affairs Outlays, FY 1999-2020.

In addition to federal budget appropriations, another important set of indicators of the ongoing militarization of U.S. national security policy are the various authorities granted to federal agencies. Take, for

example, the case of train-and-equip military assistance programs. Over the last 10 years, DoD has seen its authority in the area of military assistance programs, which are viewed as a subset of broader foreign assistance efforts, grow substantially.

Since the enactment of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, and with the notable exception of the period during the Vietnam War, the State Department has had lead authority for providing oversight and guidance for foreign military assistance program implementation, most of which has been carried out by DoD.⁴⁵ This division of labor made sense insofar as it kept the State Department in the lead for directing the thrust and scope of foreign military assistance, while having most of the detailed work on the ground implemented by the federal department most skilled in military affairs: DoD.

Over the last 10-12 years, DoD has chipped away somewhat at that division of labor. In the early-2000s, and especially in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States became increasingly concerned with so-called “ungoverned spaces.” Perhaps more accurately conceived of as “poorly governed spaces,” the phrase describes areas of the world where legitimate political authorities have little to no influence, giving nonstate actors—including violent extremists—the room to operate and grow. In the 1990s, most of Afghanistan consisted of ungoverned space, giving rise to al-Qaeda. In more recent years, the Pan-Sahel region of Africa, parts of Yemen, and the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan have all been considered ungoverned spaces. Today, much of Syria and large parts of Iraq can also be considered ungoverned spaces.

At about the same time that concern developed over ungoverned spaces, DoD came to see (once again) that military means alone would not provide lasting solutions to the security challenges facing the United States in weak, failed, or defeated states such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. military's performance in ousting the government and military of Saddam Hussein in 2003 was extraordinary – however, securing the peace required more than columns of Abrams tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles. Specifically, developing a stable, secure post-conflict environment required significant indigenous security sector capabilities and capacity, among other important governmental functions.⁴⁶

Although building security sector capabilities and capacity takes time, DoD officials, as well as some members of Congress, perceived State Department planning and implementation procedures under extant authorities as too slow and cumbersome.⁴⁷ As a result, in the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) proposed by then-President George W. Bush, DoD asked for a new security cooperation authority that would enable it to train and equip foreign security forces without having to rely on State Department processes and procedures. Congress subsequently modified that request significantly in the final version of the FY 2006 NDAA that Bush ultimately signed into law, but the result was to grant DoD the authority to initiate train-and-equip security cooperation programs with foreign military forces. Nevertheless, in the conference report that accompanied the FY 2006 NDAA, Congress expressed its concern over the risks in granting DoD authority in this way:

The conferees believe it is important that any changes in statutory authorities for foreign military assistance do not have unintended consequences for the effec-

tive coordination of U.S. foreign policy writ large, nor should they detract from [DoD's] focus on its core responsibilities, particularly the warfighting tasks for which it is uniquely suited.⁴⁸

Because of its concern, Congress kept the funding for this authority—known as “Section 1206 authority,” for the section of the FY 2006 NDAA in which it appeared—initially capped at \$200 million and valid for just 2 years. A year later, Congress sought to modify the authority slightly, by requiring the concurrence of the Secretary of State for any programs undertaken by DoD under Section 1206 auspices.

Since then, though, Section 1206 authority has been consistently and regularly extended, in 1 or 2-year increments. To date, funding for Section 1206 programs has amounted to roughly \$2.2 billion, supporting security sector capabilities and capacity development in over 40 countries.⁴⁹ Senior military leaders have repeatedly testified before Congress as to their assessment that Section 1206 authority has been one of the most effective tools at the disposal of policymakers.⁵⁰ Most recently, DoD requested, and the Congress enacted, a provision to make Section 1206 authority permanent as part of the FY 2015 NDAA. Although the FY 2015 NDAA established a series of audits to be conducted by the Government Accountability Office, the legislation essentially increased DoD's Section 1206 authority by expanding the types of support DoD can provide, by expanding the ways in which recipient states may use U.S.-provided assistance, and by essentially eliminating the annual funding cap.⁵¹

DoD has never received a separate appropriation for Section 1206 activities. Instead, it has had to pull money from its Operations and Maintenance appropriation to fund any activities under Section 1206 authorities. Moreover, Section 1206 is only one

element of a much broader military and foreign assistance program. However, the case of Section 1206 is highly significant insofar as it represents one of the first instances in half a century in which DoD has had a leading role—admittedly with State Department concurrence—in shaping security cooperation and ultimately foreign assistance. Rather than fading away with the end of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the expanded role of DoD in security and foreign assistance seems here to stay.

Finally, aside from more objective measures such as the funding levels and authorities discussed earlier, there is a more subjective sense that the civilian instruments of American foreign policy—particularly the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), but also other civilian federal agencies and departments that play smaller roles in foreign policy formulation and implementation—simply lack the capacity, as well as perhaps the skills and knowledge, for the kinds of large scale, complex challenges that have confronted U.S. foreign policy in recent years. The most salient of these challenges, particularly since the end of the Cold War, has been the threat that failed, failing, or fragile states pose to the international community generally and U.S. interests specifically.

Since the turn of the 21st century, and arguably since the early-1990s, the United States has recognized that some of the greatest security challenges of the post-Cold War era would stem not from conquering states, but rather from failing ones.⁵² Such states typically suffer from a host of security, governance, fiscal, managerial, and organizational challenges, requiring a multifaceted solution. For this reason, the United States and other developed countries have pursued so-called “whole of government” approaches

to failed, failing, or fragile states. A whole of government approach involves all relevant federal agencies working across their respective bureaucratic boundaries in planning, coordinating, and implementing U.S. foreign policy under the broad direction and guidance of the State Department.

Despite the intuitive appeal of such a broad-based approach, the U.S. record when it comes to implementing whole of government approaches has been less than stellar.⁵³ One prominent scholar has labeled American reconstruction and stability efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, and Kosovo as “difficult, frustrating, and costly.”⁵⁴ Another notes it, “is not – and will never be – a panacea.”⁵⁵

Whole of government solutions received a particularly poor reputation following accounts of the inexperienced, largely untrained American civilians sent to help bring governance, order, and stability to post-war Iraq.⁵⁶ According to one observer:

They were astonishingly young. Many had never worked abroad, few knew anything about the Middle East. . . . Some were simply unqualified for their responsibilities. . . . Most of them didn’t even know what they didn’t know.⁵⁷

The same challenge existed in Afghanistan. Gates observed:

Too little attention was paid to the shortage of civilian advisers and experts: to determining how many people with the right skills were needed, to finding such people, and to addressing the imbalance between the number of U.S. civilians in Kabul and elsewhere in the country.⁵⁸

These war time experiences have fueled perceptions in the White House and in Congress that the military may be more competent than civilian counterpart agencies in fulfilling any number of national security missions beyond purely military ones.⁵⁹ However, this problem is not new. Ironically, it was Gates who testified that, “Congress has not been willing, decade in and decade out, to provide the kind of resources, people, and authority that it needs to play its proper role in American foreign policy.”⁶⁰

Part of the problem certainly stems from what Gates cited—that is, chronic underfunding of the State Department, and specifically a lack of sufficient funding to operationalize fully State’s capability to respond effectively and efficiently to major crises.⁶¹ Additionally, personnel practices have hindered the effectiveness of the State Department and whole of government solutions. For example, personnel turnover among U.S. civilians working in post-war Iraq was extremely high, far higher than for the military units sent there, which themselves were only on the ground for 7 to 12 months. More broadly, according to one former ambassador, the State Department simply lacked enough personnel to accomplish their complex missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the personnel that the State Department **did** have on hand lacked the skills and training to do their jobs.⁶² When civilian agencies lack the resources—such as enough trained personnel—or otherwise have little ability to contribute to a whole of government solution, U.S. leaders have often turned to the military to fill the gap.

The Military Reaction.

Regardless of whether one views the continuing militarization of U.S. foreign and national security policy as good or bad, the reality for the Pentagon is that this phenomenon is unlikely to change any time soon. The fact that the Obama administration, which has attempted mightily to engineer a rebalancing of the three legs of the national security stool, has less than 2 years remaining in office seems largely irrelevant to the situation facing the U.S. military today. Given cuts in federal government spending in recent years – with or without additional sequestration-level cuts in the coming years – it seems unlikely that agencies such as the State Department will fill the gap any time soon, that whole of government capabilities will dramatically improve in the short to medium term, or that DoD will see its appropriations and its authorities altered in any major, significant way.

This reality carries several implications not just for the U.S. military, but also for those that would seek to wield it. With regard to the former, the U.S. military services must embrace the security cooperation mission as a core task. To some degree, the U.S. Army has taken preliminary steps in this direction. In 2014, the Army added “engagement” to its list of warfighting functions, along with mission command, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection.⁶³ This was a significant step forward, considering that the Army has long displayed ambivalence at best and disdain at worst for security cooperation missions, believing they distract from troops’ preparedness for major combat operations.⁶⁴

Additionally, the Army’s *Strategic Guidance for Security Cooperation*, also published in 2014, accurately

conceptualizes security cooperation as a key tool for the Army in terms of training, interoperability, and military readiness. It recognizes that security cooperation helps in shaping, preventing, **and** winning conflicts—that it helps assure allies, build interoperability for coalition operations, build partner capacity and capability, and improve military readiness and leader development. The military’s embrace of this at an institutional level is relatively new, and continues to evolve.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, progress even at this level of strategic guidance—or in military parlance, the level of doctrine—is inconsistent at best within DoD. On the one hand, the Department acknowledged in 2005 that military engagement missions were comparable with combat missions.⁶⁶ On the other, though, doctrine to guide engagement and security cooperation is inconsistent across DoD.⁶⁷ Moreover, some defense strategies and planning documents, as well as acquisition programs on the books, indicate that the U.S. military is still devoting most of its effort toward great power conflict, rather than on shaping the security environment through security cooperation, security assistance, and military engagement.⁶⁸

Where doctrine does exist and as the Army’s *Strategic Guidance for Security Cooperation* notes, the key task ahead is to refine the concepts and institutionalize security cooperation across the military. This more comprehensive embrace needs to happen in terms of organizational structures, training, personnel policies, acquisition, budgeting, and so forth. For example, military personnel need to develop a more detailed understanding of interagency partner contributions as well as cultural or historical factors that may affect mission success in particular countries or regions.⁶⁹

Unfortunately, a unit within the U.S. Army—the 162nd Training Brigade, based at Ft. Polk, LA—that was created to train other Army units in just this sort of knowledge was disestablished in 2014.

With regard to those that seek to wield the military and its security cooperation capabilities, it would behoove policymakers to have a better sense of where and when the application of military-led security cooperation in support of U.S. foreign policy makes sense and will be most effective. The recent collapse of Iraqi army units facing IS militants north and west of Baghdad, and the resulting fall of Mosul—a major city in northern Iraq—raised serious questions about the utility of having spent billions of dollars to train a force that ultimately proved incapable and/or unwilling to safeguard Iraqi citizens and property.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the \$8 billion spent by the United States on security cooperation in Colombia, as part of the “Plan Colombia” aid initiative, is largely viewed as money well-spent.⁷¹ Colombia is not free of violence, but it is far from the near-failed narco-state that some feared it would become over a decade ago. These and other examples of major security cooperation initiatives and programs can provide valuable cases from which policymakers can gauge whether employing the U.S. military in a security cooperation role is likely to yield success, failure, or something in between. Judging from just the two cases cited here, a key independent variable is the unmistakable existence of parallel interests and policy preferences on the part of the recipient state’s government and the vast majority of its citizens.

Some studies dealing with security cooperation have examined larger sets of cases, concluding that the most important factors include not just parallel

interests and policy preferences on the part of recipient governments and their citizens, but also consistent, long-term funding by donors; recipient capacity and ability to absorb and utilize assistance; and donor and recipient goal alignment.⁷² Indeed, the problem does **not** appear to be a lack of recent scholarly focus on and analysis of when and where DoD-led security cooperation can be most effective.

Rather, what unfortunately seems to be the case is that senior policymakers within both the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. Government have not yet internalized these lessons, or they are perhaps unwilling to apply the lessons given other, more pressing imperatives.⁷³ If this is the case – that is, if civilian policymakers ultimately make poor policy choices that fly in the face of existing evidence – the Pentagon is likely to be saddled with objectives that it has only a very small chance of achieving.

At least in theory, it is possible that senior military leaders, in providing their best military advice, could advise top civilian policymakers regarding the low odds of success in certain situations. However, the “can-do” U.S. military culture makes this seem unlikely – instead, it seems more likely that the U.S. military will accept the mission and attempt to muddle through.

Conclusion.

The dramatic rebalance toward diplomacy and development over the last 6 years has largely failed. Rhetoric, official strategies, and actual policies have all aimed at rebalancing the three legs of the foreign policy stool. However, several factors point to a continued militarization of U.S. foreign policy, includ-

ing funding levels, legal authorities, and the growing body of evidence that civilian agencies of the U.S. Government lack the resources, skills, and capabilities to achieve foreign policy objectives.

Continued reliance by senior decisionmakers at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue on the U.S. military to develop, plan, and implement U.S. foreign policy has significant implications. Foremost among them is the fact that the military itself must prepare for a future not terribly unlike the very recent past, characterized by messy stability operations, hybrid warfare, and disorder short of major interstate war. The military is often faulted for preparing to fight the last war. Currently, this is not the case, and the U.S. military seems intent on returning to what it knows and does best—handily vanquishing conventional military adversaries. However, it is far more likely in the coming years that civilian leaders will ask the military to become involved in messier, more nebulous conflicts, which may or may not involve state actors.

The risk in an approach that emphasizes state adversaries and countering conventional military power is that the U.S. military may be less ready, less capable, and/or poorly organized and structured to meet national security requirements and the demands of policymakers. In short, military power may not be as easily wielded as it was in the middle of the 2000s. To mitigate these risks, the military must further embrace its role—in terms of doctrine, organization, training, and so forth—in security cooperation, capacity building, security assistance, and stability operations so that it is equipped, trained, organized, and prepared for the most likely missions over the next decade.

ENDNOTES

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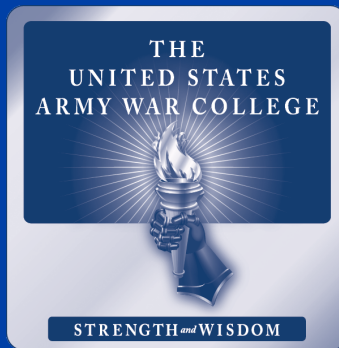
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