Defining Remote Warfare: Security Cooperation

Briefing Number 1
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Cover image: US Africa Command (US Army photo by Spc. Zayid Ballesteros)

About the Series

The *Remote Control Projec*t is a research and policy unit analysing the rise of remote warfare: the recent shift away from "boots on the ground" deployments towards light-footprint military interventions abroad.

Among other factors, austerity, budget cuts, war-weariness, and high political risk aversion in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan have all played their part in making large-scale UK military deployments less palatable to the UK Parliament and public.[1]

Alongside this, trends in military engagement such as the increasing use of drones and an increased focus on counterterrorism and building local capacity – evident in, for example, the addition of defence engagement as a core task of the Ministry of Defence – have allowed the UK to play a role in countering threats posed by groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab without deploying large numbers of its own troops.

The emergence of approaches that seek to counter threats at a distance, without the deployment of large military forces, is an umbrella definition of remote warfare. With local troops engaged in the bulk of the frontline fighting, the UK's role has, by and large, been a supporting one, providing training and equipment and, where necessary, providing air and intelligence support, and the assistance of UK Special Forces to bolster local troops.

The focus of the *Remote Control Project*'s work has been on a strategic level, asking what the implications of these changes in military engagement are for the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of UK military engagement abroad.[2]

However, to ask these strategic questions, we have often had to put to one side the fact that remote warfare is not an uncontested term, and our broad definitions and analysis often hinge on an assumption that "you know it

when you see it". Moreover, while we have been focusing on the use of remote warfare on today's battlefield, we are also aware that future changes in technology, especially the rising importance of cyber and autonomous weapons, will have an impact on how we should understand remote warfare.

This series brings together experts to discuss important aspects of remote warfare to provide some conceptual clarity. It will look at current practice, including reports on security cooperation, intelligence sharing, private security companies and drones, as well as looking to the future of warfare: addressing how offensive cyber operations and autonomous weapons could change the landscape of military engagement.

Over the course of the next year, we will release bi-monthly briefings on these subjects by experts in their field, with the eventual aim of exploring common themes, risks and opportunities presented by the evolving use of remote warfare.

About this briefing

This briefing paper provides an overview of a central, but often overlooked, instrument of US remote warfare: security cooperation. In the briefing, security cooperation is defined as Department of Defense-managed programmes to train, equip and advise foreign security forces to fight alongside, or as surrogates for, American 'boots on the ground'. Since the final years of the Bush administration, this feature of remote warfare has emerged as a central instrument in the US counterterrorism toolbox. In comparison to the kinetic face of remote warfare, however, it remains poorly understood. This briefing paper demonstrates the significance of security cooperation to remote warfare. It focuses on the use of security cooperation in US counterterrorism operations during the Obama presidency, with examples drawn from efforts to combat Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al-Shabaab. It concludes by briefly considering the future of security cooperation under the Trump administration.

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Introduction

Since 9/11, the United States (US) has engaged in a variety of efforts to build the capacity of foreign partners to address security-related threats. As a major facet of this endeavour, the Department of Defense (DOD) has developed a broad spectrum of bilateral and multilateral military activities under the rubric of 'security cooperation'. This became a central instrument in both the Bush and Obama administrations' counterterrorism toolbox. The US has engaged extensively on the frontline of conflict across the Global South to build the military capacity of partner states whose internal security was threatened by transnational terrorist groups. This, US policymakers hoped, would enable partnering security forces to fight alongside, and in some cases as surrogates for, American ground forces. As Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated in 2007, '[a]rguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern themselves'.[3]

Remote warfare constitutes a 'strategy of countering threats at a distance, without the deployment of large military forces'. It generally involves a 'combination of drone strikes and air strikes from above, knitted together by the deployment of special forces, intelligence operatives, private contractors, and military training teams on the ground'.[4] Much has been written on the kinetic face of remote warfare – particularly drone strikes and Special Operations Forces (SOF) kill-capture raids.[5] Attention has also been given to the growing use of private military and security companies (PMSCs) and intelligence sharing to indirectly support US counterterrorism operations in countries where it is not at war.[6]
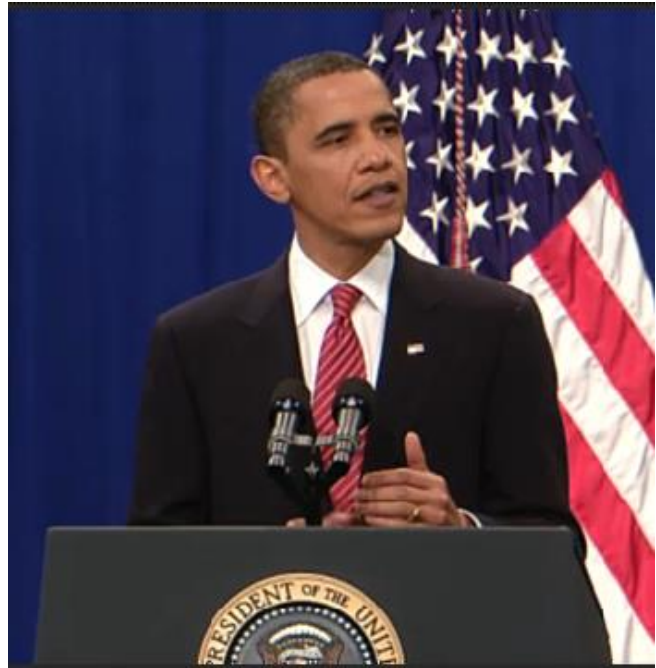
Security cooperation, in comparison, remains understudied as an instrument of remote warfare. Academics and policymakers have recently begun to address the topic in greater detail.[7] The focus of much of the recent debate has been on measuring its effectiveness in meeting stated security objectives. The utility of security cooperation in enabling successive administrations to strike at transnational terrorist groups without recourse to US 'boots on the ground' has not been subject to the same volume of critical discussion. This omission is important given that, on both sides of the Atlantic, the practices of remote warfare have raised serious questions about the accountability and legality of Western military intervention. In the case of security cooperation, US-trained military leaders have overthrown democratically elected governments (in Mali in 2012, for example).[8] Whilst a full accounting of these issues is beyond the scope of this briefing paper, effective, accountable and sustainable approaches to security cooperation are worthy of further investigation.

This briefing paper contributes to closing the security cooperation 'gap' in the existing debates on remote warfare by providing an introduction to this critical tool of US statecraft. It begins by situating security cooperation within the broader phenomenon of remote warfare. It distinguishes security cooperation from related practices of security assistance in the context of wider efforts to build the capacity of partners to address security threats. It also documents security cooperation's increased role within US counterterrorism - detailing key

programmes for non-battlefield theatres (namely, the Section 1206 Global Train and Equip Authority ['Section 1206'] and the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund [CTPF]). The paper then examines the role of security cooperation in the Obama administration's counterterrorism operations in countries where the US is not generally considered to be at war, but where it has played a role in the ongoing conflicts (such as Yemen and Somalia). Specifically, it looks at efforts to degrade, disrupt and dismantle al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Shabaab. The paper concludes by briefly considering the impact of the Trump administration on the future of US security cooperation.

Security Cooperation and Assistance to 'Build Partner Capacity'

Security cooperation is embedded in the institutional structures of foreign military assistance, as authorised under Titles 10 and 22 of the United States Code. Conceptually, 'security cooperation' (SC) overlaps with 'security assistance' (SA). They are distinct but closely-related tools of 'building partner capacity' (BPC), a term first coined in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review. BPC constitutes a 'broad set of missions, programs, activities, and authorities intended to improve the ability of other nations to achieve… security-oriented goals they share with the United States'.[9] In the fallout from the Iraq war, BPC became an urgent goal of US policy. It allowed the US to maintain a 'long-term, low-visibility presence in many areas of the world where US forces do not traditionally operate'.[10] In this respect, both SC and SA are tools to build the capacity of foreign partners to combat security threats with minimal (or no) involvement of US 'boots on the ground'.

Former President Barack Obama giving a speech at West Point (image: Wikimedia Commons, 2009)

SC encompasses all Department of Defense interactions, programmes and activities with foreign security forces to build relationships that promote US interests; enable partners to provide the US access to territory, infrastructure, information and resources; and/or to 'build and apply their capacity and capabilities consistent with US defense objectives'.[11] DOD-administered SA programmes are one element of this, which also includes combined exercises, information sharing and other types of military-to-military collaboration. SC has long been valued by Combatant Commanders as a tool for shaping the security landscape in their area of operations to favour American interests.[12] It has been extensively used to develop relationships and interoperability between the American military and its overseas partners.[13]

In general, SA is defined more narrowly than SC; it refers to the training and equipping of foreign forces, whether this assistance is gifted, sold or leased.

Traditionally, it was the State Department that oversaw SA efforts, although individual programmes were, at times, implemented by the Pentagon. In contrast to DOD-authorised programmes, the State Department has favoured a comprehensive, 'whole-of-government' approach to those SA initiatives under its remit. During the Obama administration, this (interagency) approach sought to link security sector reform to good governance and the rule of law in US foreign assistance practices.[14] Policy in this area has been characterised by 'turf wars' between State Department and DOD.

The totality of SC and SA efforts amounts to a 'patchwork' of programmes and initiatives rather than a coherent 'framework'.[15] The terminology is vague, reflecting the imprecision regarding the relationship between the various activities. (BPC, for example, is widely seen as a 'catchall' that means 'different things to different people'.[16] The term has 'evolved within and outside of DOD to include a number of meanings'.[17]) In recent years, officials have attempted to address the gaps and redundancies in this relatively unsynchronised set of processes, unveiling concerted attempts to streamline relevant authorities and funding procedures. Questions persist, however, on the rationale, effectiveness and consequences of their use.

In November 2016, Congress unveiled legislation to improve the oversight and analysis of relevant initiatives through a consolidation of legal authorities. The DOD continues to move forward with a new framework for the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of security cooperation programmes, with a focus on transparency, deliberative planning and more informed decision-making.[18] The sprawling details of Section 1206, CTPF and related programmes, which fall under multiple legal authorities and entail complex funding streams, suggest that a major restructuring of US security cooperation efforts is unlikely in the near term. As noted by one analyst, the topic is 'technocratic enough that the new [Trump] administration may not take up the issue, allowing it to remain staff and bureaucrat driven'.[19]

Security Cooperation as Remote Warfare

In recent years, security cooperation has become a central tenet of the US counterterrorism strategy. It has several purposes that dovetail with Washington's efforts to project military power 'remotely'. It develops partnerships that encourage allied militaries to 'act in support of aligned US strategic objectives'.[20]

According to Andrew J. Shapiro, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs during Obama's presidency, SC 'increases the combined capabilities which can be used to address common security challenges, enhances interoperability between forces, and enables more flexible burden-sharing arrangements in joint operations'.[21]

Beyond the strategic/military rationale lies a political logic. Washington employs SC to not only build relationships with foreign security forces, but also to distance its forces from the kinetic violence of the battlefield, ostensibly while retaining a degree of influence over resource allocation and outcomes. Broadly speaking, SC is thus recognised to have two overarching goals: firstly, helping local partners better address the security and governance challenges they

confront; and, secondly, incentivising changes in the behaviour of local partners to advance US security interests.[22]

Within the last decade, SC has been increasingly geared toward building the capacity of indigenous or regional security forces on the frontline of conflicts to tackle transnational terrorist organisations' safe-havens without a large US military footprint. Local partners, it has been assumed, are not only better placed to tackle transnational terrorist groups, but can relieve some of the strain on US ground forces.[23] Underpinning the growing use of SC, as examined in greater detail in the next section of this briefing paper, is the assumption that the practice can be a highly effective and sustainable tool of military power. In this respect, SC has become an essential means of burden-sharing.

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Used in this capacity, SC qualifies as remote warfare – 'the recent shift away from boots on the ground deployments towards light-footprint Western military interventions abroad'.[24] Remote warfare refers to the trend within many Western states towards countering security threats 'at a distance' with a minimal cost in 'blood and treasure'. It speaks to the reorientation of US counterterrorism policy away from the open-ended 'nation building' projects in Afghanistan and Iraq to the series of secretive military interventions fought in Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and, more recently, Libya and Syria.

Through SC programmes, US policymakers are (theoretically) able to stand-up surrogate forces to conduct counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations.[25] SOF could train, advise and embed with these forces, but generally did not lead raids against terrorist cells during Obama's presidency. By providing military equipment, training and advice to partners, host-nation and regional security forces can be trained to conduct operations to a standard/quantity that surpasses earlier capabilities. As with other instruments of remote warfare, this allows the US to strike at transnational terrorist groups from a distance without the need to deploy conventional ground forces.

The key difference is that, rather than relying on a technological or commercial solution, a third-nation surrogate is employed to conduct operations on the ground. These surrogates, as Andreas Krieg has argued, do not necessarily replace the entire military capability of the US, as proxies would. Rather, they 'may do so in respect of only infantry capability, in which case the surrogate acts as a simple force multiplier'.[26] This is consistent with the conceptualisation of remote warfare as an operational package of military intervention that encompasses the use of several different military tools, both kinetic and non-kinetic. It is also consistent with the use of SC as a mechanism of burden-sharing.

Security cooperation is not, however, a monolithic, 'one-size-fits-all' instrument of US statecraft. It is used to accomplish a series of different goals. As pointed out by Tommy Ross, former Deputy Assistant

Secretary of Defence for Security Cooperation, these have encompassed both 'preventing conflict' and 'setting theatre conditions necessary to ensure victory' in ongoing conflicts.[27] Since 9/11, SC has been used to:

(1) Build the military capacity of indigenous security forces to enable the withdrawal of US ground forces from ongoing counterinsurgency operations (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq);

(2) Build the military capacity of partners to fight alongside US ground forces in overseas counterinsurgency operations (e.g. European contributions to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan);

(3) Build the military capacity of indigenous security forces to conduct counterterrorism operations against insurgent terrorist groups (e.g. bilateral US military support to the Yemeni government to combat al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula);

(4) Build the military capacity of regional security forces to conduct peacekeeping operations in countries/states threatened by insurgent terrorist groups (e.g. US military support for African Union forces in Somalia).

SC programmes in the battlefield theatres of Afghanistan and Iraq departed in a number of respects from their use in non-battlefield theatres. Programmes in Afghanistan and Iraq were not only far larger in scale, funded to the tune of billions rather than millions of dollars, but operated under a different temporal logic than countries where the US was not at war. Afghan and Iraqi forces were trained and equipped so that American ground forces could be withdrawn from combat operations.

In non-battlefield theatres such as Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, security cooperation was employed to better enable indigenous security forces to strike at militant groups without the large-scale deployment of US troops. The deployment of ground forces was a political non-starter for the Obama administration, which sought to retrench the US military footprint in the greater Middle East, and for host governments, which were sensitive to anti-American sentiments within their countries.[28] As with the kinetic tools of remote warfare, SC was used to 'square the circle' of denying transnational terrorist groups safe-haven in fragile states in the global south 'at a distance', without the deployment of ground forces.

Security cooperation in US counterterrorism policy since 2006

The practices of remote warfare are not new. Their roots can be traced to British and American colonial policing operations in the early twentieth century.[29] The last decade or so has seen a shift from the peacetime, preventive use of SC to its institutionalisation as a core instrument of remote warfare. How did this unfold, and what specific SC programmes were used to build partner capacity in states where the US was not at war but supporting local troops on the frontlines?

In 2006, as the security situation in Iraq deteriorated, the Bush administration recalibrated its military response to transnational terrorist groups. This was to minimise the costs of the 'Global War on Terrorism' in American 'blood and treasure', placing it on a more sustainable

footing. The shift away from unilateralism and regime change was given impetus by two documents published that year: the 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) and the fiscal year (FY) 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The 2006 QDR institutionalised a series of step-changes in the DOD's 'long war' against transnational terrorism. Irregular warfare operations 'including long-duration unconventional warfare, counter-terrorism, counterinsurgency, and military support for stabilisation and reconstruction efforts' were prioritised.[30] Beyond the central battlefield of Iraq, this necessitated a shift from: (1) 'responding after a crisis starts (reactive) – to preventive actions so problems do not become crises'; (2) 'conducting war against nations – to conducting war in countries we are not at war with', and; (3) 'conducting activities ourselves to *enable partners to do more for themselves*'.[31]

The 2006 QDR institutionalised a series of step-changes in the DOD's 'long war' against transnational terrorism

The 2006 QDR highlighted the need to '[e]xpand the authorities of the Departments of State and Defense to train and equip foreign security forces best suited to internal counterterrorism and counter-insurgency operations'.[32] To this end, the FY 2006 NDAA was significant because it included the Section 1206 authority. The FY 2006 NDAA also authorised a separate Section 1207 Security and Stabilization Assistance fund which was intended to deepen 'US capacity and interagency coordination for immediate reconstruction, security or stabilization assistance to maintain peace and security in countries that are unstable'.[33] Between FY 2006 and FY 2010, $445.2 million was allocated for

stability operations in 28 partner states via this programme.[34]

Taken together, the 2006 QDR and NDAA provided a conceptual roadmap for remote warfare. The strong emphasis on security cooperation, initiated by the Bush administration, continued into the Obama presidency. This was borne out not only in DOD's strategic planning, as seen in key policy documents, but also in the sheer volume of security aid funding allocated from 2006 onwards.

The 2012 Defence Strategic Review, for example, placed programmes to train, equip and advise foreign security forces at the centre of the military response to transnational terrorist networks, alongside direct actions, such as drone strikes and SOF raids. 'As US forces draw down in Afghanistan', the document read, 'global counter terrorism efforts will become more widely distributed and will be characterized by a mix of direct action and security force assistance'.[35]

As explained by US Special Operations Command Chief Admiral Eric T. Olson in 2009, direct actions, like kinetic strikes, were used as a 'holding action' to buy time for indirect actions - like SC - to achieve 'decisive results'. In other words, '[w]hile the direct approach focuses on isolating and defeating the immediate threat, mostly through military actions, the indirect approach focuses on shaping and influencing the environment'.[36]

Security cooperation differs from other instruments of remote warfare in the degree of operational control maintained by American policymakers. Whilst drone

Former Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistan Army, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, meets with former Commander of NATO International Security Assistance Force and US, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal (image: United States Army, 2009)

strikes and SOF raids can be ordered, monitored and reviewed within the Oval Office, once partner capacity has been built in foreign security forces, the US cannot compel its recipients to employ it in a particular manner. Thus, there is no guarantee that this capacity will be used a way that is amicable to US interests.[37] In this respect, there are significant trade-offs in the use of SC and the indirect approach more broadly.

Speaking at MacDill Air Force Base in December 2016, Obama reflected on the larger shift from open-ended nation building projects to working with and through partners to contain transnational terrorist groups during his presidency:

> "It has been my conviction that even as we focus relentlessly on dismantling terrorist networks like al Qaeda and ISIL, we should ask allies to do their share in the fight, and we should strengthen local partners who can provide lasting security… [this

approach] has been sustainable. It has been multilateral. And it demonstrates a shift in how we've taken the fight to terrorists everywhere from South Asia to the Sahel. Instead of pushing all of the burden onto American ground troops, instead of trying to mount invasions wherever terrorists appear, we've built a network of partners."[38]

The Security Assistance Monitor estimates that the Obama administration allocated $162.2 billion in security aid globally between FY 2009 and FY 2016. Amongst the largest recipients of this assistance were Afghanistan ($56.7 billion), Iraq ($8.7 billion) and Pakistan ($13.6 billion): the three central battlefields of the 'Global War on Terrorism'.[39] Whilst only a small percentage of the overall costs of these wars, which by some accounts is nearing $5 trillion,[40] these sums are hardly insignificant. To put the figures into perspective, the United Kingdom's entire military expenditure was calculated at $48.3 billion in 2016.[41]

Significant sums of security aid were also spent outside of Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. This enabled the US to conduct 'war in countries [it was] not at war with', to borrow from the 2006 QDR. These programmes were informed by experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, where 'US forces learned valuable lessons about how to train, advise, and assist partner nation forces more effectively'.[42] From the earliest days of the War on Terror, US SOF were sent to Africa, the Caucuses and the Philippines to build partner capacity and conduct irregular warfare operations.[43] Beyond Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, major recipients of security aid during Obama's presidency included Colombia ($2.4 billion), Somalia ($1.6 billion) and Yemen ($0.67 billion).[44]

The Section 1206 Global Train and Equip Authority and the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund were the two of the most prominent security cooperation programmes employed by the Obama administration to build counterterrorism capacity beyond the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. Like all instruments of remote warfare, they were designed to allow the US to strike at transnational terrorist organisations from a distance without a reliance on uniformed ground forces. They were not the only programmes used in this fashion; amongst others, the Global Security Contingency Fund, the Coalition Support Fund and the Section 1208 initiative played a similar role. Nevertheless, given their scale and counterterrorism focus, Section 1206 and the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund warrant greater examination.

Section 1206 Global Train and Equip

The Section 1206 Global Train and Equip Authority was authorised in the FY 2006 NDAA. This authorisation marked a watershed in US military assistance. It broke with the division of labour institutionalised in the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act by placing the DOD, not State, as the lead agency.[45] The Section 1206 authority aimed to build the capacity of foreign military and maritime forces to conduct counterterrorism operations. It was also intended to enable partners to participate in overseas stability operations - namely the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan.

According to the DOD, Section 1206 was designed to pre-empt the deployment of US ground forces in countries where internal security was threatened by transnational terrorist groups. 'By building the capacity of partners to handle their

security problems, these effects reduce stress on US forces', it was noted, and the programme allowed the DOD to 'train and equip foreign military forces in response to urgent and emergent threats and opportunities to solve problems *before they become crises requiring major military interventions*'.[46] To this end, Section 1206 sought to build partner capacity in a series of key areas including airlift, border and maritime security, intelligence analysis and counterterrorism interdiction.

According to the Security Assistance Monitor, over $3 billion was allocated for Section 1206 between FY 2006 and FY 2016.[47] Yemen was the programme's single largest recipient, with $405 million in allocated funding. Other large recipients of Section 1206 assistance included Lebanon ($172 million), Kenya ($149 million) and the Philippines ($113 million).[48] In this respect, the distribution of Section 1206 funding speaks to the truly global character of American counterterrorism operations after 9/11.

The Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF)

President Obama first proposed the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) during a May 2014 speech at West Point military academy. This wide-ranging security cooperation authority would enable the administration to 'train, build capacity, and facilitate partner countries on the front lines'. It was needed, he claimed, 'to fulfill different missions, including training security forces in Yemen who have gone on the offensive against al Qaeda; supporting a multinational force to keep the peace in Somalia; working with European allies to train a functioning security force and

border patrol in Libya; and facilitating French operations in Mali'.[49]

The CTPF aimed to increase bilateral and multilateral efforts to build partner capacity in several key areas including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, border security, airlift, counter-improvised explosive device capabilities and peacekeeping. It focused on providing 'CT [counterterrorism] support to partner nations for capacity-building, augmenting US capability to support partners in CT operations, and enabling DoD to respond to unexpected crises'.[50] Like the Section 1206 authority, the CTPF worked to minimise the size of the US military footprint in its global campaign to degrade, and ultimately destroy, transnational terrorist organisations. In the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, the CTPF was transitioned into a broader authority which added a crisis response and security cooperation focus to its traditional counterterrorism remit.[51]

Between FY 2009 and FY 2016, Yemen was allocated $375.5 million in Section 1206 assistance and $112 million in Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority assistance

With an initial budget request of up to $5 billion, the CTFP was considerably larger than existing security cooperation programmes available for non-battlefield theatres. Its funding was nevertheless consistently cut, falling from $1.3 billion in FY 2015 to $750 million in FY 2016. According to reports, Donald Trump's budget proposals will slash CTPF funding to just $40 million in FY 2018.[52] However, slightly over $2 billion was allocated for the CTFP between FY 2015 and FY 2016. Amongst the programme's largest recipients were Jordan ($350 million) and partners in East Africa ($276 million), the

Levant ($254 million) and the Lake Chad region ($238 million).[53]

Security Cooperation in Practice: The Cases of AQAP and Al-Shabaab

Having conceptualised security cooperation as an instrument of remote warfare and traced its growing importance in US counterterrorism policy after 2006, we now turn our attention to the phenomenon's complex empirical realities. How was SC employed as an instrument of remote warfare in practice?

Two cases are examined here: the Obama administration's military campaigns against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen and Al-Shabaab in Somalia, both of which occupied a central place in US counterterrorism strategy after 2009. Obama ruled out the deployment of ground forces in both countries early in his presidency.[54] Speaking at the beginning of combat operations against the Islamic State in September 2014, Obama claimed that the 'strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines' had been '*successfully* pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years'.[55] The model of remote warfare pioneered in these two countries, in other words, would serve as a template for combating the Islamic State. The cases of Yemen and Somalia are also significant because they speak to different uses of security cooperation. Whilst the Obama administration would largely look to *bilaterally* build the capacity of Yemeni

forces to conduct counterterrorism operations against AQAP, in Somalia, the focus would instead be on *multilaterally* building the capacity of regional partners to conduct counterinsurgency and peacekeeping operations against Al-Shabaab.

AQAP

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was formed in January 2009 - the same month as Obama's inauguration. Beyond al-Qaeda's core leadership based in Pakistan, the group was framed by US officials as the most active and threatening branch of the entire al-Qaeda movement.[56] Unlike other al-Qaeda affiliates, which generally focused on attacking the 'near enemy', AQAP made repeated attempts to strike the continental US. These included Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's failed 'underwear bombing' of Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009 and the 2010 plot to down cargo aircraft headed to the US. Within Yemen, AQAP also acted to capture and govern territory. This was the case in both 2011, when it declared an Islamic Emirate in the southern province of Abyan, and during the ongoing Yemeni civil war, when it wrestled control of large swathes of southern Yemen.[57]

Much of the existing debate on the Obama administration's military campaign to 'degrade, disrupt and dismantle AQAP' has focused on the kinetic features of this effort. Over the course of Obama's presidency, approximately 150 drone strikes were reported in Yemen.[58] These strikes - conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) - aimed to decapitate AQAP's senior leadership and thus disrupt the affiliates' operations, planning and recruitment.

American SOF are also reported to have provided advice, operational support and intelligence to their Yemeni counterparts during Obama's first term.[59] As the security situation throughout the country collapsed, SOF were temporarily withdrawn from Yemen before later returning to support Saudi-coalition forces in the country.[60]

Important though they were, these kinetic features of remote warfare were one component of the Obama administration's larger counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. As the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy noted, the US was 'focused on building the capacity of Yemeni security services so they are able eventually to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat AQAP *with only limited US involvement*'.[61] The Section 1206 authority and the Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority were the two primary security cooperation programmes employed to build indigenous counterterrorism capacity.

Between FY 2009 and FY 2016, Yemen was allocated $375.5 million in Section 1206 assistance and $112 million in Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority assistance.[62] These funds were used to build partner capacity in the Yemeni Air Force, Ministry of Interior and Coast Guard. Enhancing airlift, border security, intelligence, maritime security and special force capacity were prioritised. Section 1206 assistance was used to purchase a range of military equipment to this end, including ammunition, tactical Global Position Systems, radios, surveillance cameras and night vision goggles and small-arms. It also funded the purchase of four Huey II helicopters, a CASA CN-235 transport aircraft, and tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for reconnaissance operations.[63] Section 1207(n) Transitional

Authority, similarly, was intended to 'help enhance the ability of Yemen's Ministry of Interior Counter Terrorism Forces to conduct counterterrorism operations by providing equipment, minor military construction, and training'.[64] This included ammunition, night vision googles, Raven drones and vehicles.

Alongside direct actions against AQAP, the Obama administration thus worked to build the capacity of Yemeni security forces to locate, track and then conduct counterterrorism raids against AQAP cells. As with all tools of remote warfare, this training and equipping of Yemeni security forces was designed to minimise the US military footprint in the country and strike at AQAP 'from a distance'. Measured against the benchmark established in the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy - 'building the capacity of Yemeni security services so they are able eventually to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat AQAP with only limited US involvement' - the effectiveness of remote warfare in Yemen is unclear. After a lull following the outbreak of the Yemeni civil war, US drone strikes spiked in the final year of Obama's presidency. This trend toward greater direct intervention in the country has further intensified under Trump.[65] Compounding matters, the DOD is reported to have lost track of more than $500 million in military equipment given to Yemen's security forces as the security situation in the country collapsed in the first year of the civil war. This included ammunition small arms, night-vision goggles and patrol boats.[66] Undermining the president's public presentation of U.S. counterterrorism operations in Yemen as a success', serious questions persist regarding the overall effectiveness of the model in this case.

Al-Shabaab

Since 9/11, Al-Shabaab has evolved from an offshoot of the Islamic Court Union to become the US's preeminent counterterrorism concern in the Horn of Africa. It claimed to be fighting 'all non-Somali and non-Muslim forces, ideas and influences in the country and beyond'.[67] In response, the group has taken up arms against the Federal Government of Somalia and its backers in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Whilst its influence has fluctuated, Al-Shabaab continues to control large swathes of territory in central and southern Somalia. Al-Shabaab has also expanded into neighbouring Kenya by exploiting the grievances of the country's marginalised Somali diaspora.

The Obama administration's military response to Al-Shabaab combined direct strikes against its leadership with security cooperation programmes intended to build the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capacity of partner states in the region. This approach was summarised in the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy. The administration pursued a 'strategy focused on dismantling al-Qa'ida elements *while building the capacity* of countries and local administrations to serve as countervailing forces to the supporters of al-Qa'ida.'[68] By working with and through regional surrogates, principally AMISOM, the US could strike at Al-Shabaab without the deployment of its own ground forces. The turn toward remote warfare in Somalia was consistent with the legacy of the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu - made famous in the 2001 movie Black Hawk Down - that had 'traumatized' US policymakers against large-scale military interventions in the country.[69]

Over the course of the Obama presidency, JSOC was estimated to have conducted approximately 32 drone strikes in Somalia.[70] These direct actions targeted key members of Al-Shabaab's leadership. As seen in the March 2016 strike on the 'Raso' training camp, which killed 150 militants, direct US military operations against the group were later expanded to target mid- and low-level operatives.[71] SOF were on the ground in Somalia from at least 2007, being employed in a variety of combat and non-combat roles. These included providing AMISOM and Somali troops training, advice, mission planning, communication support and medical expertise.[72] They were also employed to conduct covert kill-capture raids against Al-Shabaab's leadership.[73] However: 'Limited direct-action strikes such as these can only hope to disrupt senior leadership and planning for external attacks. American strategy for containing and ultimately defeating al Shabaab relie[d] on AMISOM and the Somali National Army'.[74]

Efforts to train and equip the Somali National Army were hindered by political instability, and Somalia was only made eligible for US 'defense articles and defense services' in April 2013. Whilst US SOF would train their Somali counterparts, reportedly also accompanying the Dannab (Alpha) brigade on raids against Al-Shabaab,[75] Somalia received less SC aid than AMISOM-contributing states. The Obama administration worked to build counterterrorism, counterinsurgency and peacekeeping capacity in AMISOM-contributing states through a patchwork of security cooperation programmes. These included Section 1206, the Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority, the CTFP and the Peacekeeping Operations Fund.

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. holds the American flag during a graduation ceremony for Somali National Army soldiers (image: Tech. Sgt Joe Harwood, CJTF-HOA PAO, 2017)

Section 1206 assistance to AMISOM partners was used to enhance the engineering and SOF capabilities of regional partners along with their intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and maritime and border security capacity. Kenya ($135.8 million) was the largest single recipient of this form of security cooperation during Obama's presidency, followed by Uganda ($63.3 million), Burundi ($34.7 million), Djibouti ($23.9 million) and Somalia ($13 million).[76]

As a region, East Africa was also allocated $112.2 million in Section 1207(n) Transitional Authority funds.[77] These were used '[t]o enhance the capacity of the national military forces, security agencies serving a similar defense function, and border security forces of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya to conduct counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda affiliates, and al Shabaab'.[78]

East Africa was also allocated $275.9 million in CTFP assistance between FYs 2015 and 2016. Separately, Somalia ($50 million), Kenya ($31.4 million), Ethiopia ($18.7 million) and Uganda ($9 million) were recipients of bilateral CTFP projects.[79] The DOD requested $518 million for FY 2016 to build the capacity of AMISOM in 'maneuver and border force, counter-IED, intelligence, and logistics to deny al-Shabaab (AS) safe haven, identify and target AS operatives, response to AS attacks, and sustain the political will of AMISOM'.[80] CTFP funding was requested to build capacity in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism interdiction; counter-improvised explosive device; counterterrorism mobility; and command and control.[81]

According to a 2014 White House factsheet, the US had committed $512 million in support of AMISOM 'to build capacity to counter al-Shabaab in Somalia and provide space for political progress'. An additional $455 million had been made in contributions to the UN Support Office for AMISOM.[82] These funds were used to 'provide support to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to build capacity to counter al-Shabaab in Somalia and provide space for political progress' and included 'pre-deployment training, provision of military equipment, and advisors on the ground'.[83]

As noted by analysts, US strategy in Somalia 'depends on the sustained military activities of some of the poorest countries in the world, which are facing their own internal social, political, and economic challenges and blowback from their involvement' in the country.[84] Despite more than a decade of US backed combat operations, Al-Shabaab continues to wage an effective guerrilla war against

AMISOM and Somali forces.[85] Speaking to the questionable success of the Obama administration's military response to Al-Shabaab, in March 2017, President Trump granted AFRICOM commanders greater freedom to conduct direct strikes against Al-Shabaab by declaring southern Somalia an active warzone.[86] This suggests that direct strikes will play an increasingly important role in the campaign against the group moving forward. Whilst it is not possible to provide a comprehensive analysis of the use of remote warfare against Al-Shabaab here, as with the Yemen case, the prudence and effectiveness of the strategy deserve close and critical scrutiny.

This is especially true following the truck bomb attack in Mogadishu in October 2017, which killed over 300 people.[87] It appears that al Shabaab were responsible for the attack – though the group has not claimed responsibility – raising important questions about the competency of Somali security services.[88] For example, one analyst said they were 'under great pressure' and have been dogged by infighting. In response to the attack, the US mission to Somalia emphasised 'the commitment of the United States to assist our Somali and African Union partners to combat the scourge of terrorism.'[89]

Conclusion: The Future of US Security Cooperation

The trends in US security cooperation identified in this briefing paper have been relatively consistent since 2006. A vital instrument in Washington's foreign policy toolbox, SC grew in prominence during the Bush and Obama administrations. Indeed, SC was a 'central component' of the latter's counterterrorism strategy.[90] The programmes and initiatives associated with the concept are focused on building partner capacity. This allows the US to augment surrogate forces and minimise the direct role of US 'boots on the ground'. Taken from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan to countries that the US is not technically at war with, such as Yemen and Somalia, SC has become a critical component of remote warfare.

The election of Donald Trump threatened to upend Washington's internationalist approach to global security issues, casting a shadow over the future of its security cooperation and assistance efforts. Trump campaigned as a nationalist outsider. Adopting an isolationist tone, he pledged to take on the 'globalist' foreign policy establishment and put 'America first'. The inconsistencies of his early tenure in office raised questions about the direction of US strategy. Although the trends outlined in the preceding sections have structural and institutional foundations, the executive branch of the US government enjoys considerable leeway to reorganise military resources over the longer term.

Trump has criticised the US's longstanding security commitments in Europe and Asia. He has routinely suggested that allies are 'taking advantage' of the US by not paying their 'fair share' on matters of common defence. Trump's budget proposals feature deep reductions in funding for the

CTPF. His administration is comprised of competing factions of advisors and officials who favour contrasting approaches to national security. In mid-2017, the internationalist cohort comprised of prominent generals (namely Defense Secretary James Mattis, national security advisor H. R. McMaster and chief of staff John Kelly) appeared to gain the upper hand. However, Trump's White House has been unusually chaotic, often subject to the impulsive Tweeting of the president, making forecasting difficult.[91] The release of the administration's national security strategy, expected by the end of 2017, will signpost possible changes to the United States' overall approach to national security and counterterrorism.

Notwithstanding Trump's isolationist rhetoric, his administration is committed to a more militarised foreign policy. The Trump administration plans to increase DOD spending by tens of billions of dollars per year. Meanwhile, it has proposed 30 percent cuts to the State Department, and although Congress is unlikely to consent to the full slate of cuts, the budget threatens 'the end of foreign aid' as presently understood, according to some observers.[92] The White House budget director referred to it as a 'hard power' blueprint, claiming it would 'send a message to our allies and to our potential adversaries that this is a strong-power administration'.[93] Trump's decision to provide weapons to Syrian Kurds, announced in May 2017, shows his administration's continued commitment to security assistance.[94] However, escalating tensions between Kurdistan and its neighbours may make this strategy much more difficult and, in fact, the US strategy has already shown signs of confusion – refusing to take sides but also

suggesting it will stop assistance to Iraq if it continues to attack the Kurds.[95]

In all likelihood, security cooperation will continue to be a key feature of US – and allied - remote warfare moving forward. As stated by Army chief of staff Gen. Mark Milley in October 2017: 'We are training, advising, and assisting indigenous armies all over the world, and I expect that will increase and not decrease'.[96] the *Remote Control Project*'s research has also shown that Defence Engagement (the British counterpart to Security Assistance) has become a key part of the UK's own approach to countering terrorism. Certainly, security cooperation is deserving of additional attention from scholars, analysts, practitioners and informed citizens.

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