



Security Assistance After September 11

By Tamar Gabelnick, Federation of American Scientists

Among the countless repercussions from September 11 is a new rationale for doling out security assistance: the war on terrorism. Not since anticommunism was used to excuse the arming and training of repressive governments during the cold war has there been such a broad, fail-safe rationale to provide military aid and arms to disreputable foreign militaries. Already the largest weapons supplier in the world, the U.S. government is now providing arms and military training to an even wider group of states in the name of "homeland security."

At first, the Bush administration cited the need to garner support for the fighting in Afghanistan, opening the door for renewed aid to Pakistan, given its critical geopolitical role. Then Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were lavished with excess U.S. military equipment and other security assistance as a reward for providing basing or overflight rights to U.S. planes for Operation Enduring Freedom. Seemingly unaffected countries like Azerbaijan, Armenia, and even Kenya were also given military aid, supposedly for their potential contributions to U.S. military operations.

But even after the first round of fighting in Afghanistan wound down, the administration continued enlarging the definition of the war on terrorism to justify military aid and training elsewhere. Countries faced with the threat of "terrorists" (formerly labeled "insurgents") are said to need American assistance to root them out. Hundreds of U.S. Special Operations Forces have been shipped off to the Philippines to train soldiers in active combat with the Abu Sayyaf, guerrilla forces with alleged ties to al Qaeda. U.S. Special Forces—along with excess helicopters and tens of millions of dollars worth of light weapons—are also being sent to the former Soviet republic of Georgia, where a small number of Arab fighters are supposedly hiding out in the northern Pankisi Gorge region.

And the Pentagon is itching to renew military aid to Indonesia, said to be the next breeding ground for terrorists. A new Defense Department counterterrorism training program created last fall would allow the Pentagon to circumvent most of the congressionally mandated limits on training for Indonesia, which are primarily tied to the State Department's foreign aid

budget. The administration is also trying to justify a greater role in Colombia's war with leftist rebels by linking the conflict to antiterrorism efforts.

Overall, the Bush administration has increased military aid and training by significant amounts relative to past levels. Foreign Military Financing (FMF), which provides grants for countries to buy U.S. military equipment and services, rose from \$3.57 billion in FY 2001 to a requested \$4.12 billion for FY 2003. The administration's FY 2002 supplemental appropriation request included another \$372.5 million in counterterrorism-related FMF for a wide range of countries including Oman, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Funding for International Military Education and Training (IMET), one of many foreign military training programs, rose from \$58 million in FY 2001 to a requested \$80 million for FY 2003, a jump of 38%.

Often these allocations of new security assistance can only be made after legal restrictions are brushed aside. Sanctions against both Pakistan and India—imposed because of their nuclear tests in 1998—were dropped immediately after September 11. The State Department then tried to sneak a five-year moratorium on almost all arms transfers restrictions into the antiterrorism bill presented to Congress in September, but it ultimately failed to convince legislators to abandon congressional policies and oversight capacity. However, in late spring 2002 the administration was again trying to circumvent congressional intent by prefacing almost all requests for military aid in the FY 2002 supplemental appropriations bill with the clause "notwithstanding any other provision of the law," a virtual blank check to send aid regardless of legal restrictions.

While opposed to *carte blanche* waivers, Congress has been more willing to eliminate country-specific bans on arms transfers. A bill giving a two-year waiver of all remaining limits on security assistance to Pakistan—skirting the congressional ban on foreign aid to countries that have undergone a military coup—passed easily in October 2001. In addition, prohibitions on arms transfers to Azerbaijan—in response to a still-unresolved conflict with its neighbor Armenia—were waived for a year through an amendment to the FY 2002 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill last fall. Restrictions were permanently lifted for Azerbaijan in March, when the State Department exempted it from arms sanctions in its International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) list. Tajikistan and Armenia were also removed from the list to allow for counterterrorism aid.

Key Points

- Antiterrorism has replaced anticommunism as the 21st century's all-purpose rationale for providing U.S. military aid, weapons, and training to foreign militaries.
- U.S. security assistance is on the rise since 9/11, flowing to an ever-widening pool of states.
- Several key restrictions on arms sales and military aid have been waived or dismissed to make way for the new antiterrorism aid.

Problems with Current U.S. Policy

Having a new quasi-ideological theme to justify most security assistance is extremely convenient for the Bush administration. Policy objectives that could not have been pursued in the pre-September 11 security environment can now be repackaged and sold as part of the counterterrorism effort. In addition, wrapping new security assistance programs in a counterterrorism cloak allows the administration to provide support for repressive regimes and aid to states verging on, or currently involved in, armed conflict.

Although its emphasis on military aid is problematic, it is at least clear why the U.S. government felt the need to renew ties to Pakistan immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, given the role that Islamabad was to play in the Afghanistan operation. The same might be said about Washington's desire to reward Central Asian states for allowing U.S. forces to use their land and airspace.

But the connection with counterterrorism is less clear regarding many of the other new recipients of security assistance. For instance, the administration first tried to justify military aid to Azerbaijan by citing that country's offer of overflight rights, air bases, and intelligence. The Pentagon later admitted that the security assistance is largely designed to help Azerbaijan protect its maritime borders—that is, to protect U.S. access to oil in the Caspian Sea from possible Iranian threats.

Oil interests may also explain why the U.S. is sending Georgia hundreds of soldiers and millions of dollars worth of arms to chase out a couple dozen Arab fighters. The U.S. government wants a new oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to go through Georgia and Turkey, and propping up the Shevardnadze regime with military aid and training is an effort to boost security around the planned pipeline. This aid, along with U.S. bases springing up around Central Asia, may also help Washington gain an advantage in the U.S.-Russian-Chinese-Iranian competition for regional influence. Likewise, sending U.S. soldiers to the Philippines could help establish a U.S. presence in the strategically vital and resource-rich South China Sea.

Closer to home, both oil and old-fashioned anti-Marxism are playing their roles in the U.S. relationship with Colombia. The State Department's foreign aid request for FY2003 includes \$98 million to train local troops to protect the Caño Limón oil pipeline, which has been regularly attacked by rebels, especially the left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN). As noted above, the administration also wants permission from Congress to provide U.S. training and arms in military action against the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The official rationale is that the aid supports counterterrorism, since the FARC is on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. But if this were truly its principal concern, Washington would focus its efforts on the right-wing paramilitaries, which are closely tied to the Colombian military but are responsible for the vast majority of political assassinations in Colombia.

These new policies show the Bush administration's intention to pursue wide-ranging goals during a time of relatively weak foreign policy oversight. Using U.S. soldiers and tax dollars to protect access to oil is not likely

to have the same popular support as fighting terrorism. Many Americans would also balk at helping foreign militaries fight insurgencies, given the Pentagon's poor record with such interventions in the past. But by blurring foreign policy goals before a largely unquestioning American public still shaken by 9/11, the administration may win easy victories.

In the meantime, traditional American foreign policy goals such as promoting human rights, democracy, and nonproliferation are being cast aside in the haste to fight terrorism. President Bush dropped sanctions against India and Pakistan—triggered by their nuclear weapons testing—without receiving any pledge that these adversaries would refrain from future testing or weapons development. In effect, the president told the world that nuclear nonproliferation is not necessarily a top U.S. priority. The military coup that installed “President” (General) Musharraf in power in Pakistan should by law have led to a cutoff of U.S. aid. But in the post-9/11 world, aid flows again, and a popular referendum in May 2002 gave Musharraf five more years in office.

Since September 11, the U.S. government has also initiated or strengthened ties to many regimes with horrendous human rights records. The State Department's annual human rights report documents severe abuses committed by many of Washington's top military aid recipients. For example, the report notes that Uzbekistan “is an authoritarian state” that permits no political opposition, imprisoning, torturing, and even killing suspected activists. According to the State Department the Philippine military apparently engaged in “extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention,” which worsened “as the Government sought to intensify its campaign against the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group.”

In addition, U.S. military support to allies in the fight against terrorism risks triggering or intensifying conflict in several tense regions. Real risk of military confrontation exists in South Asia, as India and Pakistan simultaneously mass soldiers at their border and seek weapons from the United States. U.S. transfers to India of weapons with offensive capabilities (like the weapons-seeking radars, recently approved by Congress, that could help India find and destroy Pakistani forces or missiles) could trigger a preemptive strike by Pakistan. Likewise, Azerbaijan and Armenia's military stalemate over the Armenian-populated enclave in Azerbaijan could be upset by an influx of arms to either party, while in Georgia, the government is already talking about using U.S. arms and training to recommence war against the breakaway province of Abkhazia. Moreover, arms and training for Colombia and the Philippines are designed to intensify, not allay, the fighting in those countries.

Key Problems

- Other geostrategic policies that would have faced harsh criticism in the pre-9/11 world—such as counterinsurgency aid or protecting U.S. access to oil sources—are now being approved in the name of counterterrorism.
 - Antiterrorism is trumping all other foreign policy concerns, opening the way for new relations with repressive regimes.
 - U.S. aid, arms, and training related to counterterrorism may destabilize tense regions.
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Toward a New Foreign Policy

The Bush administration's post-9/11 actions regarding security assistance show a complete disregard for the role of Congress in crafting foreign policy by challenging the restrictions that Congress has placed on weapons transfers and circumventing the oversight role that legislators should play throughout the security assistance approval process. The administration has been seeking authorization from Congress to act outside the law and beyond further congressional scrutiny.

In the meantime, it has been dismantling state-specific regulations that are in the executive branch's jurisdiction or has asked allies in Congress to sponsor temporary waivers.

The legal barriers to security assistance that the administration is frantically trying to circumvent are actually few and far between. They have been cautiously erected only after certain members of Congress proved to their skeptical colleagues that the foreign policy goals to be protected were well worth the limits imposed on the administration's freedom of action. From human rights

conditions on aid to Indonesia and Colombia to a prohibition on aid to military units that have committed human rights abuses (the Leahy Law), these laws were designed to protect the security of civilians overseas from repressive governments and associated paramilitary groups. Since the antiterrorism campaign professes to be about protecting innocent lives, these laws must be retained and respected, if not strengthened further.

In addition, the president has not made a clear case that much of the proposed security assistance would actually help protect the U.S. from terrorist attacks. The administration needs to lay out a general antiterrorism strategy showing what role specific states will be playing and how military aid will help them do so. It also needs to be more transparent about exactly what type of aid is being given and to whom, rather than making blanket requests for military aid. Any new provisions of security assistance should include reporting requirements detailing how the aid is being used and how these activities are helping to reduce the terrorist threat to the United States. Such reports should also examine the impact that

aid is having on the physical security of civilians in the recipient states.

Until the administration is more open about its security assistance programs, the American public should be skeptical about their true objectives. Military aid that cannot clearly be justified on antiterrorism grounds should be separated out and debated on its own merits.

Having a clearer idea about the administration's strategic vision could also help determine the best mechanisms for achieving those goals. The accepted premise in the administration and within much of Congress is that security assistance is the best way to reward foreign governments for their help and to entice greater cooperation from reluctant states. This idea stems from increasing U.S. reliance on military diplomacy—a belief that U.S. foreign policy goals can best be achieved through military-to-military contacts and weapons sales as opposed to traditional economic and diplomatic ties. Washington also responds to the preferences of aid recipients, who often favor security assistance because they are more interested in boosting their power than in serving the interests of their populations.

But in many cases, economic or humanitarian aid would be much more effective tools for reducing threats to American interests than would military aid. The former would help foreign governments provide better education and greater economic opportunities for youth that might otherwise be tempted by the support of a terrorist network. U.S. military aid, on the other hand, often serves to prop up regimes that do not enjoy the support of their people, further increasing resentment and anger at the United States. Helping other states fight terrorism in their territory also requires building an effective, responsible judiciary that knows how to seek out and apprehend suspected terrorists without contravening human rights.

In the end, American policymakers need to remember that what comes around goes around. If the U.S. government continues to be blind to the possible ramifications of U.S. military aid on the lives of civilians overseas, it may find that it is constructing a new wave of antagonism toward the United States. If President Bush truly wants the world to be with us rather than against us, he needs to think of ways to win the support of foreign governments *and* their populations in a non-violent and constructive manner.

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Key Recommendations

- Current U.S. restrictions on military aid and arms should remain intact, if not be strengthened, to promote the security and human rights of civilians worldwide.
- The administration needs to be transparent and specific about its security assistance programs and their true objectives.
- Economic assistance should replace military aid in an effort to alleviate poverty and other factors that can create a breeding ground for anti-Americanism and terrorism.

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