

A New Era for U.S. Security Assistance

As the United States transitions from a decade of war, it is clear that the task of maintaining global stability and addressing global challenges must be a shared responsibility. Working with allies and partners to address common security challenges has been a critical part of U.S. policy for decades. But the increased interconnectedness associated with global economic advances, while bringing prosperity to more countries and regions, has also meant that the security of the United States can be affected by events in more places, more countries, and more regions. This has led to an increased demand to expand our partnerships and deepen our security relationships. As Secretary Clinton noted recently, “building coalitions for common action is becoming both more complicated and more crucial.”¹

With the United States seeking to grow and strengthen its network of partnerships and enhance existing alliances, U.S. security cooperation has become an increasingly critical component of U.S. engagement. When the United States—through its security cooperation and, more specifically, security assistance efforts—enhances the military capabilities of its allies and partners, it also strengthens their ability to handle their own security. This assistance also 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. Additionally, cooperating in the security sector—perhaps the most sensitive area for any country—serves to strengthen our broader diplomatic relationships.

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U.S. security assistance therefore can help strengthen global and regional security, while at the same time alleviating some of the demands on U.S. forces.

When evaluating the current geopolitical position of the United States, some have pointed to the rise of new powers, the economic downturn,

and the challenges faced during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to argue that the central position of the United States in global affairs is slipping. This claim, however, overlooks a crucial trend: countries around the world increasingly want to partner with the United States, particularly in the security sector. More and more countries seek to establish more robust security ties, to engage and interact with U.S. forces, and to acquire U.S. defense

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systems. This not only demonstrates the continued centrality of the United States, but it also represents a significant strategic opportunity.

Over the coming decade, building new partnerships will be increasingly critical to U.S. national security. As Secretary of Defense Panetta explained recently, “the United States must place even greater strategic emphasis on building the security capabilities of others, and adopting a more collaborative approach to security both within the United States government and among allies, partners, and multilateral organizations.”² When the U.S. government is looking for cost-effective ways to achieve its strategic objectives at home and around the world, security assistance with allies and partners is an increasingly important national security priority. However, the ability of the United States to provide security assistance may come under strain; the State Department’s budget is often a target for cuts in fiscally difficult times, and an underestimation of the strategic importance of these programs could limit the ability of the United States to partner in the years ahead.

Security Partners in an Interconnected World

The United States, as the world’s pre-eminent military power, has long served as a guarantor of global security. Together with a robust global network of alliances and partners, American military, economic, and diplomatic leadership has served to deter outliers and assist countries in need. While the intense superpower rivalry and large-scale geopolitical competition that characterized the Cold War and previous eras may be absent today, the challenges to maintaining international peace and stability are still many, and in some ways have become more complex.

Secretary Clinton has observed that “the geometry of global power is becoming more distributed and diffuse even as the challenges we face become more complex and cross-cutting.”³ States today often worry more about the potential weakness or instability of a neighbor, rather than its strength. For many countries and regions, their most direct security challenges are rooted in the gaps of governance and authority that allow refuge to nefarious actors. These ungoverned spaces can spawn terrorism, illicit trafficking, piracy, and rebel groups. They can also become exporters of instability, impacting entire regions. Take the example of Somalia, which as a failed state has given rise to a new wave of piracy, posing a challenge to global shipping—the life-blood of the global economy—and causing significant instability in the broader region.

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While inter-state conflict has declined, state-based threats also remain. Global outliers, such as countries like Iran and North Korea, continue to threaten neighbors, stoke regional tension, and endanger U.S. security, requiring the United States and its allies to remain vigilant. In a world so interconnected, with global supply chains, highly developed global financial systems, and unprecedented global travel and connectivity, the potential impact of these threats has become magnified. Today, with greater global interconnectedness, there are more and more places that can impact the security of the United States.

Furthermore, the speed at which change can occur has increased. For example, the Arab Spring helped bring about sweeping change to the Middle East, creating tremendous uncertainty as well as significant opportunity. Rapid economic growth has also lifted millions out of poverty and increased the geopolitical clout of rising powers like Brazil, India, and China, as well as made the Asia–Pacific a region of growing importance to the United States.

This creates new challenges for U.S. global leadership. Secretary Panetta recently explained that “[i]n the past, the United States often assumed the primary role of defending others. We built permanent bases. We deployed large forces across the globe to fixed positions. We often assumed that others were not willing or capable of defending themselves.”⁴ This meant the United States spread out wherever it thought it needed to. Today’s interconnected world, however, is simply too large a playing field—the United States cannot be everywhere. As former Secretary of Defense Gates argued in 2009, “the United States cannot expect to eliminate national security risks through higher defense budgets, to do everything and buy everything.”⁵ A growing multitude of

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demands means that it is in the interests of the United States to encourage others to shoulder more of the costs and responsibilities of global security.

All countries benefit from a global environment that is stable and prosperous, and many could do more to take an active role in supporting it. However, as Secretary Gates argued, the United States itself could do more to expand the capabilities of its partners.

He concluded that “strategic reality demands that the U.S. government get better at building partner capacity.”⁶

Empowering Allies and Partners

Security assistance has long been an important tool in sustaining and advancing U.S. global leadership. However, the nature of security assistance has changed compared to decades past. Once a tool viewed through the prism of the Cold War, security assistance is now more about enabling the capabilities of partner states so they can contribute to internal and regional security.

Security assistance includes a broad array of tools, including direct military grant assistance, the sale or transfer of military items and equipment, and training peacekeepers or supporting de-mining efforts. One of the most direct ways the United States can help is through the sale or transfer of U.S. defense equipment. The United States can sell or transfer weapon systems and military items through its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, which are government-to-government sales. The United States also helps build the capacity of partners through its Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, which provides funding assistance to countries to buy U.S. defense items. Indeed, U.S. assistance gives countries the tools to confront security challenges in several different areas, including increasing the interoperability between forces, confronting transnational threats, addressing maritime security, professionalizing a military, training international peacekeepers, and combating weapons proliferation.

When allies and partners acquire U.S. defense systems, it can provide a foundation for increasing collaboration between forces. The use of similar military platforms helps streamline operations and reduce the potential for problems when coordinating between highly advanced and complicated defense systems. For example, Japan’s recent decision to purchase the F-35 to replace their aging F-4 fighters will help ensure compatibility with U.S. forces. Therefore, the sales of transport aircraft, vehicles, communication equipment, precision munitions, fighter aircraft, naval vessels, as well as systems to defend against missiles and

rockets not only help U.S. allies and partners become more secure, they better enable forces to fight side by side in places like Afghanistan.

Over the last two decades, U.S. security assistance has also greatly increased its focus on empowering states to deal with transnational threats such as drug traffickers, terrorists, and criminal networks and smugglers. These non-state actors often operate in the shadows, threaten communities, and undermine state authority and the rule of law. U.S. assistance helps address these challenges. Last year, as part of a larger assistance effort, the United States provided security assistance to Mexico under the Merida Initiative, which included the transfer of three Blackhawk helicopters to the Mexican military. These helicopters provide the Mexican government with greater mobility and will increase their ability to reach remote mountainous locations—a capability of crucial importance in the fight against drug cartels and traffickers.

The United States itself could do more to expand the capabilities of its partners.

The United States also works with countries to enhance maritime security. This is critical to securing vital trade routes, preventing trafficking, criminality at sea, and piracy. In Indonesia, the United States is supporting the construction of an Improved Maritime Domain Awareness radar array that will allow the government to track transiting ships in the same way that aircraft controllers track planes. This will further enhance the capabilities of the Indonesian government in their efforts to counter the threat of piracy and criminality at sea. In another example, since first receiving U.S. security assistance in 2005, Bangladesh has focused on building patrol boat fleets for its Coast Guard—a project that will improve both coastline security and Bangladesh’s ability to respond to natural disasters, as well as strengthen the government’s presence in isolated areas. By equipping our allies and partners with the necessary systems to secure their territories and patrol and police their borders, U.S. security assistance plays an important role in furthering the stability of these countries.

Our security cooperation and assistance efforts go beyond providing equipment. The United States works directly with many allies and partners to professionalize their military forces through training and joint military exercises. Countries with weak, poorly trained, and poorly resourced militaries are often unable to control their territories, protect human rights, or create a stable and safe environment for their citizens. This endangers neighbors and threatens the stability of nascent democratic states. Conducting training and joint exercises not only helps countries, but working side-by-side with partners can help

improve the capabilities of the U.S. military by improving professional and cultural awareness that cannot be gained except through direct contact.

To help professionalize the militaries of our partners and improve their ability to contribute to global security, the United States has become a leader in training and supporting international peacekeepers. This has helped build the capacity of troop and police forces in the United Nations and other multilateral peacekeeping missions. The principal mechanism used here is a security assistance program called the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). This program has contributed to the training of more than 206,000 peacekeepers since 2005 and has facilitated the deployment of more than 162,000 peacekeepers from 38 countries to 21 operations around the world. To put this in context, roughly 78 percent of the peacekeepers the United States trains have deployed to serve in peacekeeping operations, and others are serving as trainers or administrators overseeing their own country's peacekeeping deployments. GPOI helps the world meet the demand for international peacekeepers. It also has an ancillary benefit: many of the skills involved in peacekeeper training—population protection, human rights training, logistics support, and medical and engineering training—all have a broader application. Thus, when the United States trains Bangladeshi peacekeepers, it also teaches valuable skills that can help professionalize and modernize Bangladesh's military.

Additionally, through the International Military Education Training program (IMET), the United States is helping to train the military forces of partner countries. This program brings foreign military personnel to the United States to see the practices of our military first-hand. The training that is provided can be a critical tool for professionalizing partner militaries and teaching about core U.S. values, like respect for human rights and civilian control of the military. IMET also helps build military-to-military connections among countries by building personal relationships—a connection which can prove valuable down the road. For example, India benefits from one of the largest and longest-standing IMET programs. In fiscal year 2011, more than 51 Indian officers came to the United States to attend courses through the IMET program—including at prestigious military institutions such as the Army War College, National War College, and the Naval Command College.

The United States also provides assistance to countries to combat the proliferation of conventional weapons. This is critical to advancing regional security. For instance, in response to the uprising in Libya, the United States deployed teams of experts to help the new Libyan government combat the proliferation of Man-Portable Air Defense Systems, or shoulder-launched anti-aircraft weapons, by securing stockpiles and disabling unsecure munitions. Additionally, in many countries around the world, landmines and unexploded ordnance inhibit development, disrupt markets and production, prevent the

delivery of goods and services, and generally obstruct reconstruction, stabilization, and humanitarian efforts. Since the inception of U.S. Conventional Weapons Destruction programs in 1993, the United States has delivered nearly \$2 billion in assistance to help more than 80 countries overcome these threats.

All of these efforts help make states more capable, more professional, and more able to deal with challenges, respond to threats, and contribute to stability. When the United States provides an ally with vessels to patrol and monitor its coastal waters, when it trains peacekeepers to deploy to places like Somalia, and when it sells advanced defense systems to its partners, the United States is not just helping its partners handle their own security. It is also empowering them to contribute to global security. As such, our security assistance potentially reduces the burden that would fall on our shoulders.

Undergirding U.S. Diplomacy

In addition to empowering allies and partners, U.S. security assistance has an added strategic benefit: it helps solidify diplomatic ties between these countries and the United States. It helps solidify partnerships and ensure their durability. The reason the State Department—as the lead diplomatic agency—also directs security assistance and regulates exports of military hardware is because these programs have broad foreign policy implications. Security assistance and the export of military systems, either as a government-to-government transfer or commercial transfer, is fundamentally a foreign policy act.

Reaching out a hand to assist and secure a partner country can immediately and directly advance diplomatic relationships. If a country is willing to cooperate in the sensitive area of national defense, they are more likely to cooperate in other areas as well. When a country acquires an advanced U.S. defense system, they are not simply buying a product to enhance their security, they are also seeking a relationship with the United States. The United States promotes a total package approach to Foreign Military Sales where we provide not just the weapons platform, but the spare parts and training required to operate and maintain the weapons system. When the U.S. transfers a weapon system, it is not just providing a country with military hardware, it is both reinforcing diplomatic relations and establishing a long-term security partnership. The complex and technical nature of advanced defense systems frequently requires collaboration and interaction between countries. This may include training and support in the use of the system, assistance in maintenance, and help to update and modernize the system throughout its life-cycle. This engagement helps build bilateral ties and creates strong incentives for recipient countries to maintain good relations with the United States. Security assistance therefore helps undergird these diplomatic relationships.

One way to conceptualize the transfer of an advanced defense system, such as a fighter aircraft, is to think about the sale of a new smart-phone. When someone buys a smart-phone, they are not simply buying a piece of hardware; they are buying a system that includes the operating system; the system's software for email, photos, and music; as well as access to many other available applications. Therefore, an individual is in fact entering into a relationship with a particular smart-phone company over the life of that phone. Similarly, when a country buys a fighter jet or other advanced defense system from a U.S. company, they are not just getting the hardware; they are buying a larger system, one that will need to be updated and repaired throughout its lifespan, which in the case of a fighter jet can be as long as 40 years. This means that in purchasing the hardware, the buyer is actually committing to a broader long-term relationship with the United States. Should a country decide to break with the United States, they would potentially endanger their access to all the technology, parts, and components which make that piece of hardware work as intended. Defense trade decisions are therefore often intensely political decisions that steer the diplomatic strategic course of a country for decades. Expanding the defense trade is therefore a critical component of our engagement with both longstanding allies and new potential partners.

Making arms transfer decisions requires a significant focus on human rights and democracy. These have never been more central to U.S. foreign policy, and as a result they play a crucial role in determining the manner of our security assistance. Sometimes, however, values have to be reconciled with other interests. When this occurs, decisions on how to proceed are guided by the Conventional Arms Transfer Policy, which requires a careful examination of issues like human rights, regional security, and nonproliferation concerns to determine if a sale is in the best foreign policy and national security interests of the United States. As Secretary Clinton said in June at an event marking the 35th Anniversary of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "a world that is more democratic is a world with fewer adversaries and more partners. Now, creating this world is not easy, and it's not always clear how we get there. And yes, there are the inevitable tradeoffs. There, by necessity, always will be. But the mission remains the same."⁷ Issues of human rights and democracy therefore are major factors in shaping whom the United States will partner with and the manner of that assistance.

It is also important to note that security assistance gives the United States leverage and influence, which can be used to press for support for U.S. values and interests. Indeed, U.S. security assistance regularly promotes such universal values as good governance, civilian oversight of security forces, rule of law, and respect for human rights. Security assistance helps tie a country's security sector to the United States, and creates strong incentives for the recipient countries to

maintain close relations, both in times of stability and in crisis. This does not guarantee a country will listen. But clearly, where the United States has limited relations and no history of security assistance, U.S. influence to push countries to respect democracy and human rights will be similarly limited.

This is also why the State Department carefully scrutinizes all arms transfers. When we partner with a country or sell a defense article, that engagement must be deemed to advance broader U.S. foreign policy. In accordance with the Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, the Secretary of State oversees and authorizes all arms sales to ensure they meet this goal. The Bureau of Political–Military Affairs also ensures that all sales and arms transfers are reviewed and assessed. Every item transferred must meet with U.S. legal obligations, foreign policy goals, and values. If an export license or transfer is approved, foreign recipients are bound by end-use restrictions and conditions. This grants U.S. government officials access to monitor how a country will use that defense article throughout its lifetime. The United States also investigates potential violations and takes appropriate action depending on the nature and scope of the infraction. Importantly, the transfer of items above a certain value also requires the approval of Congress, which helps ensure a generally broad support for all significant arms transfers.

This arms transfer process sometimes causes consternation among our international partners, who gripe about onerous rules and procedures. For example, countries often complain about limitations on technology transfer and uncertainty caused by bureaucratic and legislative processes. At times, it makes countries reluctant to partner with the United States. However, these safeguards are critical to U.S. foreign policy and are aggressively enforced.

Growing Demand to Partner

Despite the high bar for approving transfers and the aggressive monitoring, more and more countries want to partner with the United States. This year, the State Department released the 655 Report—an annual report of defense articles and services that were authorized for export. Part of this report focused on Direct Commercial Sales (DCS), which involve foreign entities purchasing directly from U.S. companies, and it showed that FY2011 items authorized for transfer increased by \$10 billion. Additionally, in 2011, the State Department’s Directorate for Defense Trade Controls, regulator of commercial export of defense items, processed more than 83,000 licenses—the most ever. FY2012 is also a record-breaking year for Foreign Military Sales, as they have already surpassed \$60 billion. This represents about a \$30 billion increase over FY11. This is also a significant increase over the last decade, when Foreign Military Sales averaged \$12 billion.

This demonstrates that countries want to partner with the United States. The explosion of economic growth in certain areas has brought newfound prosperity to a number of countries, countries which now seek to modernize their security sectors or acquire new capabilities. Frequently, these countries turn to the United States and to the U.S. defense industry because of the United States' undeniable military strength, both in equipment and training. This is of tremendous importance to U.S. national security. Sales abroad help maintain the defense industrial base. Today, exports support roughly one-third of defense industry output.⁸ These sales therefore support tens of thousands of American jobs and help the U.S. defense industry maintain the capabilities and expertise needed to meet the defense needs of the United States.

The growth in sales also signals that the diplomatic efforts to strengthen America's image abroad, build new partnerships, and bolster longstanding ones, has been effective. If countries view the United States unfavorably, they will be less willing to cooperate on security matters. This is why the current U.S. administration has sought to revitalize U.S. diplomatic engagement, especially relating to security assistance and defense trade. This spring, I was in India for the first political–military talks in six years. These talks were an opportunity to strengthen our security relationship with New Delhi, a relationship that includes a broad range of exercises that our militaries conduct together. One of the major goals during these talks was to advance the defense trade and better familiarize the Indian government with U.S. systems and processes. Engagement with India is making a difference, as cumulative defense sales have grown from almost nothing to more than \$8 billion since 2008. Security assistance and defense trade has been a critical part in strengthening the bilateral relationship.

The Obama administration has also actively engaged Brazil, since Brazil is seeking to modernize and expand its military capabilities. Last year, I travelled to Brasilia to restart political–military talks, and this past February a Brazilian delegation travelled to Washington, as we hope to make this an annual dialogue. Security assistance is also an essential part of our outreach to the Asia–Pacific, strengthening the web of security relationships. In addition, we are building new partnerships with emerging powers, which will be crucial to sustaining the regional stability that has facilitated rapid economic growth in the Asia–Pacific region.

Improving Our Ability to Partner

Demand to cooperate with the United States will grow, as will our eagerness to cooperate with others. However, there is more we can do to improve and enhance our security assistance. Several suggestions present themselves.

First, there is a need to maintain U.S. security assistance budgets to meet the partnering demands of resource-constrained partners. Resources are tight, and the simple fact remains that the United States, as it stands, cannot meet all the demands of the number of countries seeking to partner with us. Too often, we must turn down assistance requests from allies and partners. Nevertheless, we must continue to devote resources to building security partnerships. Foreign Military Financing amounts to approximately \$6 billion per year on average, and is an absolutely critical tool for U.S. foreign policy. This will especially be true in the years ahead, as we focus more on developing relationships in Asia and reach out to new partners in Latin America and Africa. During these tough economic times there are few better investments than the assistance the U.S. provides to help allies and partners better handle their own security.

Second, the United States is taking steps to become more flexible and responsive with existing security assistance funds. Currently, many existing programs are planned and budgeted years in advance, and are not always able to respond quickly to emerging events or urgent needs. In response to this problem, the State Department worked with the Defense Department and other agencies to help design a new security assistance tool, called the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF). This innovative fund is pooling resources from the departments of State and Defense and brings together the inter-agency expertise necessary for rapid crisis response. The GSCF is designed to provide security sector assistance to partner countries in response to emergent challenges and opportunities impacting U.S. national security. GSCF is unprecedented in its ability to pool resources and leverage expertise from both State and Defense, as well as other relevant agencies. It is also intended to be different from existing funding tools, both in terms of the broad scope of assistance it can provide and in the processes determining how it will be used.

Third, it is critical that the Departments of State and Defense continue to strengthen their own relationship. There has been a sea-change in the relationship between the departments under the leadership of Secretary Clinton and Secretaries Gates and Panetta. Today the relationship has never been better. This is critical to ensuring that the United States is able to sync its diplomatic and military engagements, something required for us to effectively partner with others. State and DoD have engaged in an unprecedented level of cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan with State Department civilians working side-by-side with their military counterparts on a daily basis. We are working to build on the existing level of cooperation and deepen it across a wide variety of other essential areas. For instance, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the departments this year to increase the number of personnel exchanged between agencies. State Department participation and input into DoD planning has also increased dramatically.

Lastly, it is essential that the United States improve its ability to partner with allies through defense trade, while at the same time protecting sensitive technologies. While there has been significant growth in defense trade during this administration, particularly with emerging powers like India, there is room to do more. The United States must continue to expand defense trade with new partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as with longstanding partners. However, U.S. ability to partner with countries and protect sensitive U.S. technologies, is put at risk by our antiquated and unnecessarily complicated system of export controls and regulations.

The U.S. ability to partner is put at risk by our antiquated system of export controls and regulations.

Spread across seven primary departments, the current export control system operates under laws written in the 1970s and is designed to address the challenges of the Cold War. It causes significant ambiguity and confusion for U.S. companies and leads to jurisdictional disputes between departments, delaying clear license decisions for months and even years. This is bad for U.S. business, it is bad for enforcing U.S. export control requirements, and it is bad for the ability to prosecute those who violate U.S. export control laws.

Upon coming to office in 2009, President Obama recognized that this system needed fundamental reform. Efforts are ongoing and considerable progress has been made. The goals of reform are ultimately to make sure that our system protects what it needs to—this will allow the U.S. government to focus its limited resources on safeguarding and monitoring the most sensitive items. Reforms will also allow us to streamline access to export-controlled items for our close allies. This will help improve interoperability with them, as well as bolster our defense industrial base. Significant steps have already been taken to expand the defense trade with some of the United States' closest allies. For example, in 2010, the United States ratified the UK and Australia defense trade treaties, which will improve collaboration in the defense sector and will decrease barriers to the defense trade.

Providing Security Under Constraints

As U.S. forces begin to come home after years at war, the United States has a chance to look ahead to the security challenges and opportunities of the future. At the same time, putting our fiscal house in order is a matter of national security. Even as we undertake responsible reductions in federal spending, it is critical that the United States continue to empower its allies and partners to

address common security challenges. More and more countries are seeking to partner with the United States, especially in the security sector, providing the United States with a strategic opportunity to build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones. Security assistance programs—from direct military grants to arms transfers—will be critical tools to seize these opportunities, advance U.S. global leadership and stability.

Investments in these areas can pay long-term dividends. Via security assistance, the United States can transform cautious partners into long-term allies and make existing allies more capable. This will be critical in the years ahead.

Security assistance programs will be critical tools to advance stability and U.S. global leadership.

Notes

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