

# US Boosts Foreign Military Aid to Promote Global Clout

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The US return to Asia, boosting the number of exercises and military presence in the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East involvement and drone strikes, the gradual intensification of efforts to reinvigorate the African policy – all are the issues in focus. Training, assisting, and subsidizing armed forces of other countries is another significant aspect of US foreign policy, which is often overlooked or underestimated. But it is an important tool used to strengthen the country's global clout. The last Quadrennial Defense Review report, which saw light in 2010, puts great emphasis on military-to-military coordination...

The US has a vast number of military training and assistance missions globally; it is the largest world contributor of military aid to foreign countries, providing some form of assistance to over 150 countries in 2013. It was 134 in 2012, or 75 percent of the states on the planet Earth. There has been almost zero discussion of how military assistance is organized and how effective it is. The administration requested \$9.8 billion in security assistance funding for fiscal year 2013 against the background of sequester.

There are three main programs designed for foreign military aid:

- Foreign military financing for the acquisition of U.S. defense equipment, services, and training;
- Peacekeeping operations provide voluntary support for international peacekeeping activities;
- The International Military Education and Training program (IMET) offers military training on a grant basis to foreign military officials.

To avoid problems with Congress, inclined to blacklist the states with poor human rights record, the Department of Defense also uses other, less transparent, programs. For example, the Joint Combined Exercises and Training (JCET) program has allowed special operations forces to train Indonesian troops used to oppress the population of East Timor, as well as those of many other repressive states, under the pretext of providing U.S. soldiers with training in foreign terrain. They also train African soldiers in "peacekeeping" under the African Crisis Response Initiative. Today the U.S. Special Forces are operating in over 70 countries.

Officially the military aid is destined to train security forces, finance the purchase of military equipment, bolster the ability of law enforcement to tackle the illegal narcotics trade and shape cooperation on nonproliferation issues. U. S. strategic objectives are articulated in the National Security Strategy of the United States, a report prepared annually and presented to

Congress by the president. Its three core objectives are: to enhance U.S. security, to bolster the country's economic prosperity, to promote democracy abroad. The DOD has always insisted that spreading military assistance is all about building relationships with fellow militaries to support the US foreign policy goals. The defense and foreign policy establishment has always believed that enhanced relations between the U.S. and other countries are closely related to the training of leaders. There are countries where there are more top military's leaders with U.S. training than regular military personnel. Providing training courses to other countries' leaders translates into improved communication with the United States and improved interoperability with allied and friendly states. Weapons sales are also believed to serve the interests of foreign policy, because it entails exchange for base rights, ports of call, use of airspace during emergencies and other opportunities.

On April 5, 2013 the White House released a new policy on U.S. Security Sector Assistance (1). The goals are to *"help partner nations build the sustainable capacity to address common security challenges; promote partner support for the policies and interests of the United States; strengthen collective security and multinational defense arrangements and organizations; and promote universal values."* The document is released in the midst of heated controversy regarding the impact of training and assisting activities in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali. On April 7 the New York Times published an article "A Lesson in Futility for the Pentagon?" devoted to the controversial issue (2). It says the voices are raised saying large funds and resources are spent for ineffective foreign forces that in the end damage the US international standing.

## **Latin America**

In the days of the Cold War, the United States never spared funds for arming and training militaries in Central America to serve U.S. strategic goals - in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua (before the 1979 Sandinista revolution). Washington supported the armed forces of brutal authoritarian governments only because they were anti-communist. The regimes murdered tens of thousands of their own citizens. Hundreds of human rights abusers have graduated from the School of Americas (Fort Benning, Ga.). They also attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth Kan., the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., and the intelligence school at Fort Huachuca, Ariz. The servicemen were taught to fight internal enemy, which included civilian political opponents as well as armed guerrilla forces, no course on securing democratic institutions was offered. Nowadays, the U.S. policy called the Merida Initiative designed to *"help the region's militaries take on internal security roles"* is in force. Although the US denounced the 2009 military coup in Honduras, Wikileaks cables later revealed that the Obama administration had State Department officials meet with the illegitimate new Honduran "president" to help coordinate the implementation of the Merida Initiative.

## **Africa**

Early January 2013 the US top commander in Africa made an unusually candid admission saying the US military made mistakes in its training of Malian troops now trying to oust Islamist rebels from the north. Speaking at the forum at Washington's Howard University, General Carter Ham of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), said its forces had failed to train Malian troops on *"values, ethics and a military ethos"* (3). It is widely reported that Malian troops kill Arabs and ethnic Tuaregs as they establish control in the north of the country. According to General Ham, Malian troops were given plenty of tactical training, but not enough ethics training, *"We didn't spend probably the requisite time focusing on values,*

*ethics and a military ethos*”, he said. According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Mali’s army has carried out a *“series of summary executions”* as it fights to recapture the Islamist-controlled north. Some people were killed simply because they did not have identity documents. Meanwhile, the UN says 7,100 civilians have fled to neighboring states since 10 January to escape fighting. Many reports suggest that the mainly black African Malian army, drawn largely from the south, has targeted Arabs and ethnic Tuaregs from the north. It exposes a racial aspect to the war which has been largely highlighted as an operation of Western troops fighting Islamist insurgents (4). FIDH said there needed to be an independent investigation into alleged abuses committed by Malian soldiers and those responsible should be punished.

Mali’s purported democratic credentials supposedly made it one of the most valued partners in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. The result was the failure to resist jihadists who overran much of that country. The training did not prevent the military coup led by Captain Amadou H. Sanogo, who had gone through a number of training courses in the United States. Now the Malian army has been accused of gross human rights abuses against northern residents. Over the past three years, the funding has reached at least roughly \$400,000 annually. Here’s the result. At that, Mali is hardly an isolated case of U.S. military assistance programs.

The U.S. the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, known as the “Dagger Brigade”, is sending small teams into as many as 35 African nations this year. It’s all part of an intensifying effort to train countries to battle extremists and give the U.S. a ready and trained force to dispatch to Africa if crises requiring the U.S. military response emerge. The mission will begin in the spring and will pave the way for Army brigades to be assigned next to U.S. Pacific Command and then to U.S. European Command over the next year. Formally the teams will be limited to training and equipping efforts, and will not be permitted to conduct military operations without specific approvals from the Defense Secretary. The brigade is receiving its regular combat training first, and then will move on to the more specific instruction needed for the deployments, such as language skills, cultural information and other data about the African nations.

The sharper focus on the continent comes against a backdrop of widespread insurgent violence across North Africa, and as the African Union and other nations get ready for military intervention in northern Mali. It will target countries such as Libya, Sudan, Algeria and Niger, where al-Qaida-linked groups have been active. It will also assist nations like Kenya and Uganda that have been battling al-Shabaab militants on the front lines in Somalia. General Carter Ham noted that the brigade has a small drone capability that could be useful in Africa. But he also acknowledged that he would need special permission to tap it for that kind of mission. Already the U.S. military has plans for nearly 100 different exercises, training programs and other activities across the widely diverse continent.

## **Syria**

The US administration claims to be impartial in Syria, but the reports say it is involved in training and arming Syrian opposition, often the very same people who were killing U.S. Marines in Iraq a few years ago. Reportedly, the Syrian “rebels” have most likely already used chemical weapons and have a reputation for beheading prisoners. The U.S. support is prolonging the conflict in the region. According to AP, *“For months now, the United States has been training secular Syrian fighters in Jordan with the goal of bolstering the array of forces battling President Bashar Assad’s regime while at the same time strengthening the*

hand of moderates among the country's fractured opposition, American and foreign officials said. They said the effort is ongoing". It's worth to note "The training has been taking place since late last year at an unspecified location, concentrating largely on Sunnis and tribal Bedouins who formerly served as members of the Syrian army, officials"? told The Associated Press. "The forces aren't members of the leading rebel group, the Free Syrian Army, they said. The U.S. and others fear the growing role of extremist militia groups in the rebel ranks, including some linked to al-Qaida" (5). The administration has been vague on the subject of what exactly type of military training it may be providing, while insisting it is short of providing weapons.

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The US military training has long served as the cornerstone of important strategic relationships, enduring officer-to-officer connections and improved performance on the battlefield, but it has also produced future coup plotters, human rights abusers and presidents for life. The DOD argues that casting such a wide net of assistance, largely through training, is a relatively inexpensive way to create friends in defense establishments around the world. The examples of Pakistan and Afghanistan show it's not always the case. The policy of arming and subsidizing foreign governments, especially those with well-known and documented human rights abuses and commissions of war crimes, contribute to the spread of dictatorships, humanitarian crises and instability while the possibility of blowback is high (remember Bin Laden, who has received US training to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan). There are too many cases, when the U.S. boosted the ability of a government, an army or "rebels" to repress its own civilian population, engage in hostilities with neighbors, wage internal conflicts, like it is taking place in Syria. It would be propitious to recall training Indonesian troops that carried out atrocities in East Timor, Malian military unable to fight extremists, but involved in human rights abuses, the huge amounts of money poured into the Egyptian military, or the School of the Americas graduates that ran riot in Central America during the 1980s. If the US is a champion of human rights than it shouldn't support those who practice repression.

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