

How Defense Dollars Are Wasted on Security Assistance

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The House and Senate versions of the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act would give the Pentagon greater control over security assistance to other countries — oversight now generally reserved to the State Department. A larger issue than the administration of funds, however, is that current security assistance programs are ineffective and often undermine American security.



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In July 2016, the president announced that 8,400 American troops would remain in Afghanistan. A few days later, he announced the deployment of an additional 560 U.S. troops to Iraq.¹ House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) reminded the president that the added deployments were not funded under the current budget.² Defense dollars channeled to ineffective security assistance programs — a centerpiece of Obama administration defense policy — could instead be used to fund these deployments.³

Indeed, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded that “it remains unclear whether building the capacity of foreign security forces is an effective way to accomplish U.S. strategic objectives.”⁴

The Costs of Security Assistance. Financial support for security assistance across the U.S. government includes 100 different legislative authorities and amounted to around \$20 billion in 2015.⁵ The Defense Department alone administers over 60 different programs totaling anywhere from \$1 billion to \$10 billion in the proposed FY2017 NDAA.⁶ The range of proposed outlays is so large because, as the CRS argued, the current system makes identifying Defense Department spending on security assistance “nearly impossible.”⁷

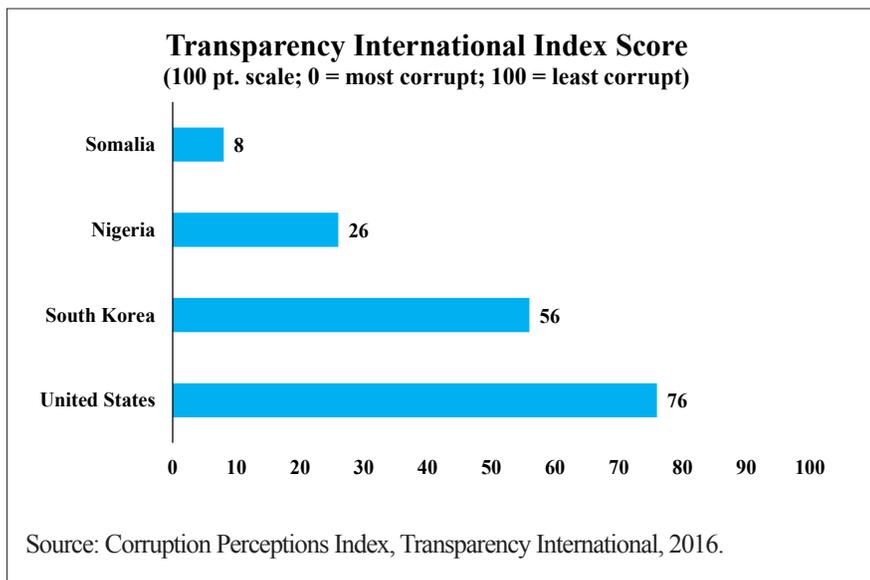
Giving the Pentagon greater control might add clarity to an otherwise murky disbursement process shared between the State and Defense departments. But the more pressing issue remains that U.S. defense spending should not be concentrated in areas where the costs outweigh the benefits, especially given the growing threats and financial constraints.

Nigeria and Somalia are just two examples of the failure of these costly security assistance programs.

Aid to Nigeria. The United States has cut aid to the Nigerian government due to rampant human rights abuses and corruption. In fact, the U.S. government discontinued arms sales to Nigeria in 2014 for these reasons.

The Nigerian government garnered attention in 2015 after an internal investigation led to the arrest of former National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki and former Minister of State for Finance Bashir Yuguda for allegedly embezzling nearly \$2 billion through fake arms deals.⁸ Separately,

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investigators tallied hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians arbitrarily executed by security forces.⁹

The new president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari — a former military officer and graduate of the U.S. Army War College — has shown few signs of improving the situation. An International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation found the military massacred over 300 Shia Muslim minority civilians in a town four hours north of the capital in December 2015.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the government cannot account for some \$2.1 billion in U.S. aid to fight Boko Haram, or explain how the terrorist organization has grown stronger despite the funding.¹¹ One American official called it a “scandal in the making,” arguing that the growth of Boko Haram has much to do with the Nigerian president’s interest in “settling scores with political opponents,” rather than defeating terrorism.¹²

Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Nigeria 136 out of 168, placing it on par with war-torn Ukraine.¹³ British Prime Minister David Cameron called Nigeria’s government “fantastically corrupt” during an anticorruption summit in May 2016.¹⁴

Unexpectedly, Nigeria is slated to receive more security aid to strengthen its military under the NDAA, increasing from \$1.3 million in FY2016 to 2017’s requested \$5.1 million.¹⁵ In addition, pending arms sales to Nigeria include 24 Mine-resistant Armored Personnel Carriers (MRAPs) and 12 Super Tucano attack aircraft.¹⁶

Aid to Somalia. Like Nigeria, Somalia receives U.S. security aid because it is threatened by militarized

terrorists, namely Al-Shabaab.

Somalia received over \$1.4 billion in American security aid from 2007 to 2015, including the “Train and Equip” Program under section 1216 of the NDAA.¹⁷ During that period, for example:

- The Somali National Army received approximately \$220 million.
- The African Union Mission in Somalia — originally a cooperative African military program to support the transitional government — received \$1.2 billion from the United States.¹⁸
- Aid for Somalia represents nearly 40 percent of all State and Defense Department aid to Africa in 2016.¹⁹

Somalia has a poor record of tracking and managing aid. A 2012 World Bank Report found that, from 2009 to 2010, \$130 million of global aid to the Somali government was stolen or missing, amounting to two-thirds of all aid during the period.²⁰ In 2014, U.N. investigators determined the Somali military persistently sold weapons provided by foreign sources on the open market, and confirmed that Al-Shabaab militants purchased some of the weapons.²¹ Indeed, Somalia ranked worse than Nigeria on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index. [See the figure.]

Conclusion. Money must and can be spent more wisely. Congress could consider using the money elsewhere in the cash-strapped U.S. military by:²²

- Trimming money given directly to Somali and Nigerian forces;
- Encouraging greater reliance on U.N. Peacekeeping Operations — of which the United States funds nearly 30 percent, or \$8.27 billion in 2015-2016; and
- Conducting an audit of existing programs.

The latest iteration of the NDAA is a welcome change and a step in the right direction. Ultimately, however, congressional action should involve reallocating the billions of dollars for training and equipping other countries to mission-critical areas within the U.S. military.

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Notes available online [HERE](#).