Hillary Clinton’s Hawkish Legacy

To the surprise of some, the U.S. State Department has emerged as the Obama administration’s most hawkish branch, out-toughing the Pentagon which has urged restraint at times as State pushes for war. This shift dates back to Hillary Clinton’s tenure as Secretary, reports JP Sottile.

JP Sottile

On May 23, 2012, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went to the Special Operations Forces Industry Conference (SOFIC) trade show in Tampa, Florida, to share her vision of “smart power” and to explain the State Department’s crucial role in extending the reach and efficacy of America’s growing “international counterterrorism network.”

First, there is such a thing as a “Special Operations Forces Industry Conference trade show.” Without some keen reporting by David Axe of Wired, that peculiar get-together might’ve flown completely under the radar, much like the shadowy “industry” it both supports and feeds off of like a sleek, camouflaged lamprey attached to a taxpayer-fattened shark.

Second, “special operations” have officially metastasized into a full-fledged industry. United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is located at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa and, therefore, conveniently located near the special operations trade show, which happened again this year at the Tampa Convention Center. The theme was “Strengthening the Global SOF Network” and the 600,000-square-foot facility was filled with targets of opportunity for well-connected and well-heeled defense contractors.

According to the SOFIC website, this year’s conference afforded attendees “the opportunity to engage with USSOCOM Program Executive Officers, Science and Technology Managers, Office of Small Business Programs and Technology & Industry Liaison Office representatives, and other acquisition experts who will identify top priorities, business opportunities, and interests as they relate to USSOCOM acquisition programs.”

Third, Hillary’s widely-ignored speech marked a radical departure from the widely-held perception that the State Department’s diplomatic mission endures as an institutional alternative to the Pentagon’s military planning. Instead, Secretary Clinton celebrated the transformation of Foggy Bottom into a full partner with the Pentagon’s ever-widening efforts around the globe, touting both the role of diplomats in paving the way for shadowy special ops in so-called “hot spots” and the State Department’s “hand-in-glove” coordination with Special Forces in places like Pakistan and Yemen.
Finally, with little fanfare or coverage, America's lead diplomat stood before the shadow war industry and itemized the integration of the State Department's planning and personnel with the Pentagon’s global counter-terrorism campaign which, she told the special operations industry, happen “in one form or another in more than 100 countries around the world.”

If this isn’t entirely unexpected, consider the fact that under then-Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, the State Department fought attempts by the Pentagon to trump its authority around the globe and, as reported by Washington Post, “repeatedly blocked Pentagon efforts to send Special Operations forces into countries surreptitiously and without ambassadors’ formal approval.”

But that was before Hillary Clinton brought her “fast and flexible” doctrine of “smart power” to Foggy Bottom and, according to her remarks, before she applied lessons learned from her time on the Senate Armed Services Committee to launch the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, which she modeled on the Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defense Review. That Pentagon-style review spurred the creation of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations to “advance the U.S. government’s foreign policy goals in conflict areas.”

According to a Congressional Research Service analysis, the initial intent of the Conflict Bureau was to replace the ineffectual Office of the Coordinator of Reconstruction and Stabilization, which was created in 2004 to help manage “stabilization” efforts in two nations the U.S. was actively destabilizing, Afghanistan and Iraq.

But the new, improved bureau does more than just react to messes made by unlawful invasions or direct costly remediation efforts in war zones, it also collaborates with “relevant partners” in the Department of Defense and NATO “to harmonize civilian and military plans and operations pertaining to conflict prevention, crisis response, and stabilization.”

This integrated relationship between State and Defense was confirmed by U.S. Special Operations chief Admiral William McRaven shortly after Secretary Clinton’s speech. When asked about the “unlikely partnership,” McRaven assured DefenseNews that SOCOM has “an absolutely magnificent relationship with the State Department” and that SOCOM doesn’t “do anything that isn’t absolutely fully coordinated and approved by the U.S. ambassador and the geographic combatant commander.”

As David Axe aptly described it in Wired, “Together, Special Operations Forces and State’s new Conflict Bureau are the twin arms of an expanding institution for waging small, low-intensity shadow wars all over the world.”
In fact, during Clinton’s time as America’s chief diplomat, the State Department embraced the shadowy edge of U.S. foreign policy where decision-makers engage in activities that look like war, sound like war and, if you were to ask civilians in places like Yemen and Pakistan, feel a lot like war, but never quite have to meet the Constitutional requirement of being officially declared as war.

The Whole-of-Government Shift

Once upon a time, “low-intensity shadow wars” were the congressionally-regulated bailiwick of the Central Intelligence Agency. But 9/11 changed everything. However, the excesses of the Bush Administration led many to hope that President Barack Obama could and would change everything back or, at least, relax America’s tense embrace of “the dark side.”

Although the new administration did officially re-brand “The War on Terror” as “Overseas Contingency Operations,” Team Obama employed an increasingly elastic interpretation of the 9/11-inspired Authorization for Use of Military Force and expanded covert ops, special ops, drone strikes and regime change to peoples and places well-beyond the law’s original intent, and certainly beyond the limited scope of CIA covert action.

Obama’s growing counter-terrorism campaign, involving, as Secretary Clinton said, “more than 100 countries”, took flight with a new, ecumenical approach called the “Whole-of-Government” strategy. Advanced by then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and quickly adopted by the new administration in early 2009, this strategy catalyzed an institutional shift toward interagency cooperation, particularly in the case of “state-building” (a.k.a. “nation building”).

During remarks to the Brookings Institution in 2010, Secretary Clinton explained the shift: “One of our goals coming into the administration was to begin to make the case that defense, diplomacy and development were not separate entities, either in substance or process, but that indeed they had to be viewed as part of an integrated whole and that the whole of government then had to be enlisted in their pursuit.”

Essentially, the Whole-of-Government approach is a re-branded and expanded version of Pentagon’s doctrine of “Full-Spectrum Dominance.” Coincidentally, that strategy was featured in the Clinton Administration’s final Annual Report to the President and Congress in 2001. It defined “Full-Spectrum Dominance” as “an ability to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronized operations with forces tailored to specific situations and possessing freedom to operate in all domains, space, sea, land, air, and information.”

In 2001, Full-Spectrum Dominance referred specifically to 20th Century notions of
battlefield-style conflicts. But the “dark side” of the War on Terror stretched the idea of the battlefield well-beyond symmetrical military engagements. “Irregular warfare” became the catchphrase du jour, particularly as grinding campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq exposed the reality that the full spectrum still wasn’t enough.

An assessment by the Congressional Research Service identified the primary impetus for the Whole-of-Government “reforms” embraced by Team Obama as the “perceived deficiencies of previous interagency missions” during the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those missions failed to address a myriad of problems created, culturally, economically and politically, by the wholesale bombing and occupation of those countries. The Full-Spectrum was half-baked. Lesson learned.

But the lesson wasn’t that the U.S. should avoid intervention, regime change or unleashing nascent civil, ethnic or religious conflicts. Instead, the lesson was that the “Whole-of-Government” must be marshaled to fight a worldwide array of Overseas Contingency Operations in “more than 100 countries.”

This Whole-of-Government shift signaled a renewed willingness to engage on a variety of new fronts, particularly in Africa, but in a “fast and flexible” way. With other agencies, like the State Department, integrated and, in effect, fronting the counter-terrorism campaign, the military footprint becomes smaller and, therefore, easier to manage locally, domestically and internationally.

In some ways, the Whole-of-Government national security strategy is plausible deniability writ-large through the cover of interagency integration. By merging harder-to-justify military and covert actions into a larger, civilian-themed command structure, the impact of the national security policy overseas is hidden, or at least obfuscated, by the diplomatic “stabilization” efforts run through the State Department, whether it’s the Conflict Bureau working against Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army in Central Africa, “stabilizing” post-Gaddafi Libya or spending $27 million to organize the opposition to Bashar al-Assad’s Syrian regime.

The Pass Key

The cover of diplomacy has traditionally been an effective way to slip covert operators into countries and the State Department’s vast network of embassies and consulates still offers an unparalleled “pass-key” into sovereign nations, emerging hot spots and potential targets for regime change.

In 2001, the Annual Report to the President and Congress foresaw the need for more access: “Given the global nature of our interests and obligations, the
United States must maintain the ability to rapidly project power worldwide in order to achieve full-spectrum dominance.”

Having the way “pre-paved” is, based on Hillary Clinton’s doctrinal shift at State, a key part of the new, fuller-spectrum, Whole-of-Government, mission-integrated version of diplomacy. At the SOFIC’s Special Operations Gala Dinner in 2012, Secretary Clinton celebrated the integration of diplomatic personnel and Special Operations military units at the State Department’s recently created Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, a “nerve center in Washington” that coordinates “military and civilian teams around the world” and serves “as a force multiplier for our embassies’ communications efforts.”

As with most doors in Washington, that relationship swings both ways and mission-integrated embassies have served as an effective force multiplier for the Pentagon’s full spectrum of activities, particularly around Africa.

In his 2011 testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Don Yamamoto noted the “significantly expanded the number of DoD personnel who are integrated into embassies across the continent over the past three years,” and read a surprisingly long laundry list of collaborative efforts between State and the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), including: “reduction of excess and poorly secured man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS); Defense Sector Reform in Liberia, DRC, and South Sudan; counterpiracy activities off the Somali coast; maritime safety and security capacity building; and civil-military cooperation.”

It seems that “civil-military cooperation” is a primary focus of the State Department in Africa. Most notably, Yamamoto told Congress that “embassies implement Department of State-funded Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, which further U.S. interests in Africa by helping to professionalize African militaries, while also assisting our African partners to be more equipped and trained to work toward common security goals.”

As the ever-vigilant Nick Turse recently reported, U.S. presence on the continent has only grown since that testimony was given in 2011. On TomDispatch.com, Turse identified the infamous attack on Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, as the catalyst for “Operation New Normal”, the continent-wide response to, quite ironically, the political potboiler still simmering around Secretary Clinton.

Whether or not congressional Republicans find anything more than incompetence at the root of Benghazi, the U.S. military certainly finds itself in a “new normal”
of increased activity in response to the forces, and the weaponry, unleashed by U.S.-led regime change in Libya. **According to Turse**, the U.S. is “now **conducting** operations alongside almost every African military in almost every African country and **averaging** more than a mission a day.”

Those missions are, of course, integrated with and augmented by the State Department’s Conflict Bureau which has used a variety of state-building programs and its diplomatic “pass key” in places like **Libya, Nigeria, Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo** and six other African nations, all to develop a growing roster of “**host country partners**.”

Establishing “host country partners” is the nexus where the State Department, its Conflict Bureau and the AFRICOM meet, implementing the Whole-of-Government strategy in emerging or current conflict zones to fuse a **mounting counter-terrorism campaign** with stabilization, modernization and state-building initiatives, particularly in oil and resource-rich areas like the Niger River Delta, Central Africa and around AFRICOM’s military foothold on the Horn of Africa.

As **Richard J. Wilhelm**, a Senior Vice President with **defense and intelligence contracting giant Booz Allen Hamilton**, pointed out in a video talk about “mission integration,” AFRICOM’s coordination with the Departments of State and Commerce, USAID is the “most striking example of the Whole-of-Government approach.”

And this is exactly the type of “hand-in-glove” relationship **Secretary Clinton** **fostered** throughout her tenure at State, leveraging the resources of the department in a growing list of conflict areas where insurgents, terrorists, al-Qaeda affiliates, suspected militants or uncooperative regimes threaten to run afoul of so-called “U.S. interests.”

Ultimately, it became a hand-in-pocket relationship when Clinton and Defense Secretary Gates developed the **Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF)** to “**incentivize joint planning and to pool the resources of the Departments of State and Defense, along with the expertise of other departments, to provide security sector assistance for partner countries so they can address emergent challenges and opportunities important to U.S. national security.”

Although he’s been **criticized as feckless** and **deemed less hawkish** than Secretary Clinton, President Obama’s newly-proposed **Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF)** is the logical extension of the Clinton-Gates Global Security Contingency Fund and epitomizes the Whole-of-Government shift.

The **$5 billion Obama wants** will dwarf the $250 million pooled into the GSCF and
will, the President said at West Point, “give us flexibility 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.”

That “flexibility” is exactly what Hillary Clinton instituted at State and touted at the SOFIC conference in 2012. It also portends a long-term shift to less invasive forms of regime change like those in Yemen, Libya, Syria and Ukraine, and an increased mission flexibility that will make the Authorization for the Use of Military Force functionally irrelevant.

**Normalizing the War on Terror**

The ultimate outcome of this shift is, to borrow from Nick Turse, yet another “new normal”, the new normalization of the War on Terror. What the adoption of the Whole-of-Government/mission integration approach has done is to normalize the implementation of the re-branded War on Terror (a.k.a. Overseas Contingency Operations) across key agencies of the government and masked it, for lack of the better term, under the rubric of stabilization, development and democracy building.

It is, in effect, the return of a key Cold War policy of “regime support” for clients and “regime change” for non-client states, particularly in strategically-located areas and resource-rich regions. Regimes, whether or not they actually “reflect American values”, can count on U.S. financial, military and mission-integrated diplomatic support so long as they can claim to be endangered not by communists, but by terrorists.

And because terrorism is a tactic, not a political system or a regime, the shadowy, State Department-assisted Special Ops industry that fights the tactic will, unlike the sullen enthusiasts of the Cold War, never be bereft of an enemy.

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