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THE FUTURE OF SECURITY ASSISTANCE

Washington, D.C.

Monday, July 20, 2026

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FEATURED SPEAKER:

THE HON. SARA JACOBS (D-CALIF.)
Member, U.S. House of Representatives

DISCUSSANTS:

ALEXANDER NOYES
Fellow, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology
The Brookings Institution

DAFNA H. RAND
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

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NOYES: Great. Well, look at this. We got folks coming out in the middle of summer. That's dedication, I appreciate it. I'm Alex Noyes. I'm a fellow here in the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, and we are thrilled to have Congresswoman Jacobs and my colleague Dafna Rand here with us today to talk about the future of security assistance.

The congresswoman has a lot of experience in this space and she sits both on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and is also the ranking member for the Subcommittee on Africa, as well as the the House Armed Services Committee, which gives her a really unique perspective because she gets to see the State Department Title 22 piece of security assistance, as well as the Title 10 on the Pentagon side, which gives you a really unique seat.

More importantly, she is, I think the technical term is a security assistance nerd, along with the rest of us here. So we are thrilled to have her here. Dafna, my, my colleague here at Brookings also is a fellow security assistance nerd and has lots of experience both on the scholarship side and on the policy and implementation side. She has spent several years at the State Department in several very senior roles, including in the legislative branch. But most germane to this discussion is her time as the director of foreign assistance at State.

So we're thrilled to have the congresswoman here. We're gonna open with some opening remarks by both the congresswoman and Dafna, and then we'll go to a Q&A. So, congresswoman, over to you.

JACOBS: Yeah, sounds good. Well, hi, everyone. Thank you for being here. I'm from San Diego, so when we don't get this kind of weather, and we don't go outside if we ever did. So I'm impressed how many of you are here.

But I'm really excited to talk about this topic. I've been working on security assistance for a long time. Before Congress, I worked at the State Department and the UN, and what I saw working on it from kind of the inside is that we often provide security assistance with no real strategy around whether a partner security forces are well-governed, right? And so there's really only then sort of two ways that we have to engage, which is, we'll give you this stuff, maybe Congress will try and do some holds because they don't like the human rights records, or you don't qualify for assistance, then we'll give you nothing. So there's really only like an off and an on. Either you Leahy vet or you don't, right?

And what I have often thought and what I introduced a bill to do is that we need to make good governance part of how we think about security assistance. And we need to make it almost be a prerequisite for the advanced security assistance so that we can create a pathway for better partnerships, so there's not only this on-off toggle, but an actual graduated approach where we are investing in what we need to invest in to ensure that we're getting the outcomes that we need.

Because better governed partners are more reliable partners, they're more effective partners. Importantly, better governed partners are partners that are less likely to

have our weapons fall into the wrong hands or commit human rights abuses that then are going to actually negatively impact our national security because we get the blowback.

And this is really important, right? One of the things I did when I was at the State Department is that I looked at how we address violent extremism. And one of the things we know is that state-sponsored violence against you or someone you know is one of the key indicators of whether someone's likely to join a violent extremist group.

So if we, in the name of counterterrorism, are providing security assistance to these partner forces who are then committing human rights abuses and the state-sponsored violence against someone that is then driving them into violent extremism, we're actually in many ways funding the very problem we're trying to solve.

And so what we did with this bill the Security Assistance-- Security Sector Governance Compacts Act-- not an easy name, we gotta come up with a better acronym-- Security Sector Governance Compacts Act is that we tried to kind of reframe the way that we are thinking about security assistance instead of this like on-off toggle and this purely like tactical approach to actually creating an index that looks at all of the different things we know are important for security sector governance: how the human rights records are, how the corruption levels are, all of these things. And then using that index, create four tiers.

Now, at the lowest tier, at tier one, you get limited security assistance. IMET, some other things like that. At tier four, you're basically eligible for everything. And in the two tiers in the middle, we create compacts where we will actually create these multi-year compacts with the partner government in working together on how to get them to the next tier and investing in the kind of security sector governance we know is important. And with a separate pot of funding for that because we know that funding is incredibly important. And you know, we call it for shorthand like an MCC for the security sector.

And it really came out of my own experience working on this. I was part of SGI, I see some friends in the room who were also part of it, the Security Governance Initiative that came out of the 2014 African leader summit. And I think there were a lot of really good ideas in it, and we had trouble implementing it. And this is trying to solve for that, which is making sure that from the beginning, we're addressing the governance of the security sector, not as a technical exercise separate from the rest of our security assistance, but actually as a key part of our holistic security assistance.

So really looking forward to this conversation. Sorry for the very long opening remarks and looking forward to answering questions.

NOYES: Wonderful. That's fantastic. Thanks so much. Dafna, over to you.

RAND: Sure. Well, first of all, I just want to thank the congresswoman for coming here. We're really honored that you are sharing the details of the bill, and we can see your excitement about this.

I just thought quickly I would zoom out and really just share why this is so important at this moment in time in our national security framework. As everyone here knows, the US is engaged in major combat operations in Iran. The US is in a war right now. And we're not talking about that today necessarily.

But over the past twenty years, successive administrations have come to the decision that they would prefer not to use boots on the ground. So there has been a trend to prefer in previous administrations not to send the US to war itself, but instead to fight with and through and united with partners.

And that has been generally the trend since the mid two thousands with obvious exceptions, including the war that we're seeing today. So that has been the trend. And so because the national security paradigm, the sort of preferred national security paradigm of most US presidents in the past twenty years has been to rely on partners of all types to fight all kinds of threats, and we can go into the specifics in a second, this is really important because this will be the new way it seems of fighting wars, and it already has been tested on many different continents in many countries for many purposes.

So if this is the new way or new-ish way, because 2000s is not as long time ago at this point, it's really important that we get this right, and it is drawing upon financial resources of the American taxpayer. So that is why this is important, and that's why we're really lucky that the congresswoman and a few other colleagues have really gotten into the details in the House of Representatives to see how we can use our lessons learned over the past fifteen years to fine-tune this tool of statecraft.

NOYES: Great. Thanks, Dafna. Yeah, just to foot stomp that, I actually found in my – and warning for the book plug here – but I just found in my my recently published book, “War at Arm's Length,” that we have done some sort of military assistance with a hundred and seventy-nine countries around the world since the year 2000. So there's, what, a hundred and ninety-five countries, ten don't have militaries. So basically every country that's not a direct adversary, we are touching some way with our military and security assistance.

So, Congresswoman let's turn to you first. Thank you for outlining this bill. It seems like it's a really innovative approach. Can you tell us a little bit more, what are the implications of this bill? Let's say it becomes law. If I'm reading it correctly it looks like there's going to be a need to ramp up some of our security sector governance and institutional capacity-building programs.

As you know all too well, those are the programs that focus on the institutional level. So, how do we go about doing that? And then is there also a danger that we're gonna have to ramp down in certain countries, probably the tier ones? And what does that look like?

Dafna, you can speak to this as well. I know that's a difficult proposition to wind down security assistance, so maybe you can speak to that.

JACOBS: Yeah. I mean, so- In terms of building capacity, there is already or there had been really great work being done at DSCA, at State Department, Pol-Mil Bureau around some of these things. So it really is trying to build off some of the work that's been done.

Now, given the current atmosphere, a lot of that work is halted and paused. So that will need to be reinvigorated, but it is there, like the, the basis of it is there, and a lot of the sort of intellectual work around how you'd create an index, all these other things, it already exists there. And frankly, we're gonna have to do a lot of work to reinvigorate and rebuild the institutional capacity of the State Department and other entities because of what we're seeing right now.

And so I do think that will be a component of it. Yeah. And you know, this is really only one... This is one bill in a larger package of bills that we're working on. Right. We also have a bipartisan bill with Representative Moylan that would, I'm trying to see if I have the exact name of it. I don't.

But the that would help ensure that we're having a real strategy around security assistance and making sure that s- the State Department has the sort of strategic resources necessary to be able to create those strategies and the capacity needed to do that. So we are trying to work on it at all levels.

And, you know, on, on the question of winding down I hope what this gives is our folks on the ground the ability to, instead of saying, "You are doing-- You are committing human rights abuses, we have to pull these things," to- ... "You are doing human rights abuses. At this time, we can't give you this assistance, but here's the framework for how to get to the next level where you can get it again, and we will help you do that."

Right. And so instead of it being punitive, it is actually the opposite. It is about sort of a proactive approach. Now, we do have a national security waiver for countries that the administration would feel like don't meet the right tier but need assistance. We have some protections around it to try and ensure it won't be abused.

There... But, you know, we do know there are instances where you need those kinds of national security waivers. But in general, the whole point of this is instead of the really tough conversations our embassies have to have right now, which is like, "I'm sorry, we can't give you this. You don't... Congress won't let us," or, "You don't pass vet" or whatever.

It is a more proactive, positive approach, which is here's the things you can get. Here's what you need to do, and this is the assistance we'll give you to get you to the next level."

NOYES: Right. So it's about incentivizing the partner to get there as, as opposed to a slap on the wrist.

JACOBS: Exactly.

NOYES: Interesting.

Yeah, Dafna, let me ask you a variant on that question. And one of the ways that we we're pretty bad about ramping down assistance, let's be honest. But one thing that forces us to do that is the coup provision.

JACOBS: Yeah.

NOYES: What is referred to technically as Section zero 7008. I'm sure you both have dealt with this in your careers extensively.

Dafna what's your take on the coup provision for security assistance which forces us to if there... a duly elected partner is overthrown by a military regime, we are forced by this section to cut off assistance. Is this a, an outdated provision that, you know, binds the hands of senior policymakers such as yourself?

Or is it, is it a good thing that forces conversations about levels of democracy in our security assistance partners?

RAND: Sure. So first, I should step back and say the tools in our laws have had this socialization effect that the congresswoman is talking about for the past 30 years. So I completely agree that you passed a law, and then over the years, it socializes, it's internalized by the partner because they begin to know if you do X, then we won't get Y.

So that theory is right from my experience. The 7008 provision is probably our bluntest punitive tool that we have, the coup provision, as it's known as compared to some of our other human rights provisions such as Leahy Law 6201 and others. This one cuts off all non-humanitarian assistance when there's been a coup, and again, it's blunt because it has to be a military coup against a democratically elected government.

Many times there's a forceful takeover of regimes where one of those two cases isn't the case. So that's point number one, is there's many cases when a you know, a democratically elected or non-military leader would take over from a democratically elected or a military would take over from a non-democratic.

So we've had the experience in government where actually the regime types don't match the law. So that's blunt problem number one. Blunt problem number two is that often when this happens, we have real questions about how we want to sustain the reformers in the government and how do we go about enabling those voices for reform amid a coup.

So then we get cut off, and then there's arguments within the US government about how we can be a voice for good, enabling the reformers inside to strategically change the nature of the government. So those... So the bluntness has been a problem. It's b- and it's really one of our only laws that really talks about regime type.

A lot of our laws talk about individual unit level abuses or military level abuses. This is really a law that talks about the type of regime. So for all those reasons, this has caused, as you can imagine, many hours or days or weeks of internal debates when this happens, particularly when it's a very important security partnership where the United States and this country's military or security services are engaged, for example, in important ongoing CT operations or other important national security endeavors together.

So I think there are a lot of areas to reform, and I've mentioned a few of them, this type of revision to make it more of a scalpel approach. And I think the spirit of your bill here could lead to discussions of reforming 7008 so that it has more of this kind of nuanced approach for all of these ex-exceptions or nuances.

NOYES: Thanks, Dafna. And Congresswoman, I'll give you a chance to respond to that question if you'd like, but let me couch it in a broader question about Africa. You're obviously the ranking member on the subcommittee for Africa, so I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you an Africa question. I'm wondering if you can speak again maybe a little bit more to my first question, which what are the implications of this bill for Africa particularly?

I haven't done the analysis yet, but I would imagine there's going to be a lot of tier one countries there and only a handful of maybe second, third, or fourth tier. So, so maybe you can speak about the implications for Africa.

JACOBS: Yeah, absolutely. So I actually think a- like the continent of Africa and how we engage in security assistance there is, like, in many ways, the clearest case for this bill because it is where we can see so clearly the problems in how we've done security assistance before and why a new approach would be necessary.

So like right now, almost all, if not all of our security assistance follows this old CT approach, right? We provide security assistance. Often we find a special forces unit, maybe we even create a clean unit that can Leahy vet. We give a bunch of assistance to train them up, have them go kill the bad guys for us.

We don't do any real mechanism around how they're governed beyond that, whether there's, you know, issues in the government writ large, civilian-military relations, et cetera. Then you have an instance like in the Sahel, where a number of US-trained coup-- US-trained military leaders commit coups, and we have to turn off all of our assistance because of it.

And Some of that makes a lot of sense, right? We are basically exporting our own disjointed foreign policy, the fact that th- the Department of Defense has way more

money and capacity than the State Department and our other foreign assistance entities to another government without any of the protections we have.

We are funding and training these militaries without looking at the governance, and then we're surprised when they think that they are the only competent institution in a country and commit a coup. So what we're trying to do is this bill learns from that, right? It learns from the lessons, and it says that w- we need to flip the model in order to have more sustainable partnerships.

Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how great this one unit is, and truthfully, there's mixed results on how great those units end up being anyways, if we're gonna have to cut off all assistance and we're gonna get kicked out of the country and all these other things because there's a coup.

So this is about giving us a new way of engaging with these countries. Now, it does mean-- it doesn't mean there's not gonna be tough calls. There are always gonna be tough calls. Sure. I mean, when I was at the State Department, I was working on Nigeria policy, and it was the height of Bring Back Our Girls.

You all remember the hashtag and the, the movement. And we, with our partners at DRL, had to make some really tough decisions about how much support do you try and give to a Nigerian military that has real civilian casualty and human rights concerns, and also are the ones who are going to bring back our girls if anyone is going to.

And right now, we just don't have a lot of tools to be able to sort through those really tough decisions. And this helps give us a framework for how to think about that. Now, there are going to be countries that, you know- maybe are not gonna get the assistance that they're currently getting.

I would argue that's a benefit of this bill, not a drawback, because that means that we are giving assistance in a way that is probably not actually serving our broader national security interests. And at least this way, with an index with the way we're looking at the tiers, we're able to identify the specific weaknesses that we need to give support to so that we can help them get to the next tier, and then provide assistance so that will actually help serve our national security needs.

NOYES: Right. Yeah, certainly in my experience at the State Department and the Pentagon working on these issues tracks, I don't think we're, we've been as strategic as, as we could be, and the 179 countries suggest that. If we're working with 179 countries and we're all... and many times we're giving them the same packages that-that's a problem.

JACOBS: Right. It might not- Yeah ... actually be what they need.

NOYES: Right. Okay, Dafna let's turn to earmarks. Security cooperation and security assistance is notoriously earmarked meaning that Congress or other actors say that

this type of assistance must go to this partner or this amount of assistance must go to this partner.

Is this a problem? And if it is, how do we fix it?

RAND: So this is one where it traditionally, until a couple of years ago, this was the manifestation of the tussle between the Congress, who constitutionally has the powers of the purse, right? And the executive branch, who, as we've learned, has a lot of powers of apportionment, obligation, decision-making when it comes to assistance.

So the earmarks were a tussle, and they grew over time in the past twenty-five years for long and boring reasons that we don't need to get into. What's interesting is that we've had a dramatic experiment in the past two years with the Trump second Trump administration's budgets really killing most of the earmarks on both of the security assistance side, but also particularly on economic assistance, civilian assistance, and Congress trying to bring back in some of the earmarks.

So we will see, frankly, what happens in a world with many fewer earmarks. I do think based on my experience as the director of foreign assistance, the executive branch, in some cases, listened too concretely, frankly, with all due respect to the earmarks, because a lot of them were recommendation levels, and they became really an easy way to apportion money in a food fight, that is the executive branch.

So I do believe there was an over-reliance when they were received from Congress because really they were, you know, it was like a Jenga block puzzle, if people are familiar with that childhood game. So both countries and sectors were earmarked. So country X had to get this much amount of money, but education assistance had to get this much amount of money.

So if you imagine that there were four hundred and twenty-five earmarks when I was the director of foreign assistance, so imagine around a third of them are country-specific and two-thirds are about topics. But you're trying to layer them all on the same, at least in the State Department, fifty billion dollars.

It was really a puzzle that led to some strange decision-making, frankly. So there was an over-earmarked process. There was too much listening to Congress or, you know, and then not enough sort of interpretation going back to Congress and consult- consultation about the spirit of the earmark. And then in the past two years, in the recent two budgets, there's been sort of blowing up of the earmarks.

So much so that there's gonna be a bit... There's, there is a very transactional approach to the State Department bill, where money is being pooled in these American First Opportunity Acts, which is the \$5 billion economic assistance. The sec- the FMF is being taken down, so the request for FY2027 was really significantly cut by the Trump administration.

The the INCL, the INL, so police training assistance as opposed to military assistance was cut by \$200 million, this most re- most recent request. So the Trump administration is experimenting with the both reshaping, cutting, pooling funds, and just basically doing what they want with some exceptions, which are the big FMF commitments to major US partners, which have been really the top 10 FMF recipients for some 25, 30 years.

And those have stayed with some notable ones that were number one and number two going off the list. So Iran- Iraq and Afghanistan for 20 years- Sure ... were number one and number two, and they have gone off the list. And for the past three years during the Biden administration, when I was in charge, Ukraine was the top one even over Israel for a while.

So, so anyway, so the numbers will obviously reflect what partner is at war. But essentially the same 10 recipients have been the top 10 for some period of time. So that in the security assistance domain is really the effects of the earmarks. But then in the onesies and twosies, as, as we used to call them, in the sort of under \$100 million levels- that's where you get up to the dozens of countries that will get a little bit of this, a little bit of that. Right. And frankly, part of the problem is not just spreading the peanut butter too thinly, it's also the partners asking for certain items that are not necessarily what our own military and defense officials would prescribe as what they need for their threat.

Right. There's a envy of certain US-made toys, 'cause remember, FMF and the security assistance is US taxpayer dollars, but often it is then given to our partners to buy US manufactured defense items. And so in that sense, even small countries really envy our defense industrial power and production, and often want FMF to purchase some of these things.

NOYES: Right. Congresswoman, I wanted to give you a chance if you wanted to jump in on the earmarks. Earmarks. The

JACOBS: proverbial question. Yeah. Well, first of all, Dafna, I couldn't agree with you more that sometimes State Department overinterprets Congress. I have gotten a few provisions into some of these bills, but then when we try, like, then when we ask why something's happening, the State Department lawyers are like, "Well, we're following Congress's intent."

And I'm like, "No, I wrote it. That's not my intent." So yes, I think that is very real. But look, earmarks have long been an issue, and I think they come from a very- they come from a very real place, which is trying to protect certain funds, right? Trying to protect and ensure that even with everything going on in the world, we're still doing this kind of global health funding.

Even with everything going on in the world, this country isn't getting left behind, even though maybe they're not that strategically important. So they come from a good place. Unfortunately, what we've seen is that earmarks didn't actually protect the funding. So the thing they were designed to do, they didn't do.

And so now we have to ask, h- is there a better way to do it? And the answer is yes. Because while they came from a good place, they also hamstrung our folks to having to do specific things that in some cases actually made no sense unless you're playing the Jenga game. And that, I would argue, contributed to the feeling that our foreign aid doesn't actually do anything and why we should not be doing it, right?

So like, in some ways, because we made it so burdensome to do it, we were part of creating the cycle of why people felt like our foreign assistance wasn't needed and wh- ... and then this administration could come in and cut all of it off. So- What I think we need to figure out a way to do is figure out how to protect Congress's prerogative, because I do think it is important for many reasons, but especially because we are the people's representative, and we want the people to have buy-in on what we're doing.

But also combine that with flexibility so that we can actually give our partners what they need, and our folks who are actually implementing actually have the flexibility they need to be strategic so that strategy is what leads funding instead of funding leading strategy- ... which is what happens right now.

I found the name of my other bill. The US Security Assistance Effectiveness Act is a bipartisan bill I have with Representative Moylan that I mentioned before, and it would help do some of these things, right? It would help create a more robust strategic planning process with priority countries and create a two-way feedback loop between Congress and the administration so that we are-- we have a mechanism to do it that isn't earmarks, that is like a, a mechanism in statute about how Congress needs to be involved but isn't specific earmarks.

And so I do think there are creative ways we need to be thinking about earmarks. And I also think that, you know, I think there are a lot of lessons we can learn from this moment that we're in, that a lot of the things we were doing in the name of trying to protect things that mattered didn't actually protect them.

And so now we have to figure out what will.

NOYES: Okay, great. So a- as you know, security assistance is just one part of a- Yeah ... broader foreign assistance puzzle. I think historically it's been about 30% of the spending annually. Dafna and I have been doing a lot of thinking about the future of foreign assistance writ large.

Yeah. And to put it diplomatically, you could say we're in a bit of a reimagining moment- Yes ... where we can think about how to do this more effectively moving forward. So I'm wondering if this is to both of you, but let's start with the congresswoman. How do you see this bill and your reform efforts fitting into the broader picture of foreign assistance?

JACOBS: Yeah, look, I think there is a trap that it would be easy for us to fall into, which is we need to protect what was taken away, and we need to rebuild it exactly as it was. And I think it's really important that all of us who care about this hold both

truths at the same time. That what the Trump administration did was bad and hurt a lot of people and is not good for our national security, and that the way things were working before really needed reform.

And both those things can be true, and we have to hold both of those things true. And as we're in this moment where we're gonna be asked to rebuild functionally our entire foreign assistance, let's actually recognize the things that so many of us in this room were working together on to try and reform about the system before.

And so I think obviously security assistance is only one piece of it, but I hope that this bill is actually helps show that we can do things differently and we can learn some of those lessons. And I think some of the lessons we tried to learn in this security assistance piece are also lessons we need to learn about broader foreign assistance.

So for instance Government-to-government assistance can be some of the most effective assistance you can do, right? Because what we're actually trying to do is build systems. And to build systems that aren't parallel systems, but the real systems, you need to work with the government. But government-to-government assistance also tends to be the most vulnerable to corruption and misuse and all these other things that we're really worried about in our foreign assistance.

So let's take this lesson, security assistance is one of our biggest examples of government-to-government assistance, and build in the governance and oversight apparatus we need from the beginning to make sure that when we're doing this kind of assistance, it's actually doing what we want it to do, and we're not at risk of, or we're not increasing the risk of corruption and all of these other things that we're trying to prevent.

I also think, you know, broadly in our foreign assistance and what we try and do here is a real graduation or transition process. No country wants to be on foreign assistance forever. Now, there are gonna be some countries that, you know, have lower per capita GDP that have security concerns that maybe are always gonna need FMF, right?

Let-- That's maybe like a different bucket. But by and large, on foreign aid generally, most countries don't want to be on it forever, and that's actually what we heard from a lot of these governments. I mean, I was kind of shocked, truthfully, but when the Trump administration gutted USAID, the calls I was getting from African countries were one like, "Oh shit, what are we gonna do?"

But then we're also like, "Well, I guess this is our opportunity because we actually didn't want to be on foreign aid forever."

And so how do we build in from the beginning what the transition's gonna look like? How do we build in from the beginning what metrics we're looking for? How we're gonna help ensure we're investing not only in the specific assistance, but what we need to do so that they can graduate, right?

I think there's a lot We need to do to actually make our foreign assistance writ large work better. And I think some of those lessons are some of the lessons we tried to put in this bill on security assistance.

NOYES: Great. Thanks. Yeah, Dafna same question to you.

RAND: Well, security assistance nerds clearly think alike.

Because I I commend the way you've been thinking about this, and I do think that the... You know, if the Trump administration, if DOGE had just asked anyone at USAID, "How can we reform the institution?" They would've got hundreds of ideas to come right at them. There were so many people in the institution itself and then across the government who had really good ideas for reform, and that is just the way this was done was so cruel and wrong and expensive and inefficient, frankly.

So, so that, that's important to recognize. So a couple things in terms of where we go from here. There has to be sort of a country, all-of-country, all-of-post perspective on this, and this is where looking at the security assistance next to the civilian assistance really matters. In Central America, for example, we found when we started collecting data not just metrics, but data, we can talk about the difference, analytics, on some of our impacts.

And we, 'cause-- And we found that in the regions of places in Central America where we had layered both the economic development and some of the security assistance, the police training, the anti-gang and anti-cartel activities that we did through our police training program and the INL, we were seeing the best results as compared to those parts of the countries where we had one intervention versus the other.

And again, this is not to say that the US intervention was the sole vector or variable causing impacts, and that's another important thing for us to recognize. The attribution problem in foreign assistance is real. But this is on-only something you see when you look at regions of a country from the perspective of the US levers of statecraft and how they're layered on t-top of each other.

So that's number one, is we need to look at both the civilian and security sector assistance at one, and that's how you get proactively ahead of the seven zero zero eight and the, the coup problems that we found in Niger and other places in Sahel. You know, this kind of disconnection between what we were doing militarily and the sort of atrophy and and you know, fragmentation of the governance system.

So that's number one. And then the second issue in terms of reform is we need to start thinking about where we have a comparative advantage, especially going forward, where US credibility is gonna have been, you know, cut and more in half, m- you know, is gonna be depleted, significantly depleted, and where other Entities, countries, universities, private sector actors, NGOs, foundations will have an even better leverage or influence.

And so we can still be strategic conveners in places in Africa, for example, we care a lot about pandemic preparedness or global health economic development, job opportunities, but it doesn't always have to be US overseen programs that does all of the heavy lifting. And in fact, one of the United States greatest, or used to be greatest strengths, was our ability for people to come to our meetings in a country.

Frankly, as a State Department official and diplomat, I can say that when the United States Embassy hosted events, other entities came. And again, not just other embassies, but private sector, the World Bank NGOs, et cetera. And so this type of leadership on the foreign assistance portfolio will be key, key and will require very skilled officials to do it and also to be empowered to do it.

And then again, I think the third we've already talked about, which is the prioritization. Really figuring out which countries in the world we really wanna go deep and invest in this kind of whole of government foreign assistance approach.

NOYES: Thanks, Dafna. Yeah, so that was a, a real high level question.

Before we go to the Q&A and so start thinking about your really succinct and sharp questions as we'll go there after this, this last two questions. But I'm wondering if we can go to the country level.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

NOYES: So what does this all mean? Dafna, I'm gonna start with you and then we'll end with the congresswoman.

Dafna, you are a regional expert on the Middle East. You're also a security assistance nerd, as we've established. I couldn't leave this conversation without talking about Syria. What's your take on whether or not we should be involved in helping to rebuild the security forces of Syria?

If we should be, how do we go about doing that?

RAND: Sure. A year and a half ago, you know, I think I, along with other Middle East policy nerds, were very excited about the prospects in Syria for this transition. President Trump took a leap of faith by recognizing and trying to establish relationships again with this new president and trying to persuade and succeeding in persuasively convincing Congress to roll back sanctions.

So it was really pot- had the potential in Syria to be a successful or a beginning of a successful transition away from authoritarianism, away from bloody civil war. The time is not right for the US to begin to deploy security assistance levers, but that does not mean that it should not be working diplomatically to be concerned about the security assistance stabilization network.

Primarily, geopolitically, there's a, you know, a regional contest between Israel and Turkey right now for control of the Syria, Syrian. And then it's playing out, in fact, in actual territory in parts of the country. So US diplomacy is critical because it has relationships with both of these regional powers to navigate it and make sure that there's no deleterious or negative repercussions of this great game that's going on in Syria.

So that's number one. And number two, there are partners of the United States who have become specialized in some of the transitional security sector tools that are necessary in a post-conflict situation, like, for example, demining and police and rebuilding police training. The UK is one of them, Italy is another, and the US can use or should be using its influence and friendship and alliance with some of these countries to do so.

I say that with a bit of a smirk because right now the European-US relationships are at an all-time low. But that's the kind of division of labor, comparative advantage type work that is entirely a diplomatic approach that the US can be using in these kind of post-conflict situations where the stakes really matter for the United States.

This is not just a nice to have and, you know, a, a purely humanitarian concern. The stabilization of Syria could be a real geopolitical and security win for the United States and the Middle East.

NOYES: Thanks, Dafna. Yeah, Congresswoman, I'll put the same question to you. I'll let you choose a country, maybe in Africa or outside.

I was thinking about Nigeria, just because I've also worked there, and you mentioned it previously. Yeah. I would imagine they would be, again, off the top of my head, maybe a tier two, maybe on the cusp of a tier one, tier two or I'm not quite sure. But maybe you can just tell us a little bit more about what this would look like at the country level and use an example.

JACOBS: Yeah, for sure. Well, I actually... I'll do Nigeria, but first I want to hold on Syria- Yeah, please ... because I think, like, what Dafna said is so important, and we can look at why certain things are happening the way they are, right? Like, the army was stood up really fast. They didn't real- they weren't really able to do vetting.

They put units that had been militias with just, like, whole hawk in as a unit, right? And then when there were command and control issues and human rights abuses, while there were hundreds of suspects referred, only a few dozen were actually held accountable, and none of them were senior. Which actually, in my mind, lends itself perfectly to the kind of security assistance we would be giving in a Tier one country.

Assistance like how you do vetting and personnel systems, how you work to create real civilian oversight- ... how you do real command and control, what kind of, what does military justice look like and how do you do it? How do you create the kind of like real military structures? And then when you get those right, you can, and you can demonstrate governance, and you have real accountability for what happened

on the coast and in Suwayda, and you have real vetting and minority inclusion and, you know, real implementation of the SDF deal and all of the things, then you have this graduated approach.

And so actually to me, in many ways, the exact question we're facing in Syria- ... lends itself to what we're talking about here, which is how do you actually figure out what the real weaknesses are that need to be addressed, give assistance that can help with that in a way to scale up into the more lethal and other forms of assistance once you have those fixed and you have demonstrated governance.

Right. So that's so that's on that. On a country like, you know, Nigeria is always a tricky one, but on Nigeria, it would, my guess would be it would be Tier one or two, I'm not sure. Let's go with two. They have been trying to do a lot. Two

NOYES: and a half.

JACOBS: Two and a... Yeah, sure. They've been trying to do a lot on civilian casualties, and I've talked to them a lot about it.

Yeah. They would be a really great country to have a compact, because what happens so often in the US-Nigeria relationship is they're like, "We are drowning in terrorism threats. We're getting them from the north, we're getting them from the east, we're getting them from the west, and you guys are just here lecturing us, and you're not lecturing other countries that I see you give money and weapons to."

This, a compact would enable us to say like, "Here's specific money to help address these specific concerns we have." And we will help you graduate to the next level so that we can give you more assistance that we know you so desperately need to address this counterterrorism threat. And so I think Nigeria would be really benefited from this- where there isn't just an on/off toggle, where it's not just, oh, no, we're worried about giving these things, and Congress puts a hold on them and you know. But actually a real strategy around, we have real concerns about your civilian casualties. We have real security ab- se- concerns about your human rights.

We have real concerns about oversight of the military, and we want to work with you on a five-year, 10-year compact where we agree on what we're trying to get to. We have specific funding to help with those concerns in addition to the security, other security assistance we'll give you as part of this tier to help you get to the next level where we can give you more assistance instead of the same conversations we've been having with them for 20 years where they need more help, and we feel like we're sort of tussling back and forth on whether we give it.

And it kind of like swings back and forth whether there's like a threat that's in the news that the US feels like they need to engage on, right? It's like a real actual strategy.

NOYES: Right. Great. Thanks. Well, let's let's turn to the, the audience Q&A portion of the event. Please stand up and affiliate yourself.

And keep it to 30 seconds if possible. The mics will cut off after 30 seconds. I'm kidding, but- But I'm joking, but please do be succinct. Maureen

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thanks very much for being here, Congresswoman. Pleasure to see you again. So, I'm Maureen Farrell. I'm with Valor, a Nairobi-based implementer of foreign assistance, and previously worked in the foreign assistance world in State and in the Pentagon. I have so many comments and questions about your bill. A fellow

JACOBS: person with SGI scars.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Indeed. Indeed. In the last administration, we tried to do something that was based on incentives and this idea. In some ways, some of the feedback we got from African partners was that it sounded a little patronizing, like you get to graduate in our program to the next level of thing. But my bigger question about the implementation of your bill is around the authorities with State and DOD.

The framing that you're articulating makes a ton of sense to me. I can see people in the Pentagon sweating as we're framing this because they're thinking about, well, in order to do a capability build around X, you need a three to five-year horizon, and if they can change tiers at a policy whim in the middle of my program, we won't be able to deliver that platform.

So how... Like, who gets to be in charge in your vision of the tiering, and what's that process look like? And if there's strategies, which I really like the sound of that are five and 10 year in horizon, how do you sort of guardrail against the policy process derailing that such that you haven't invested three years towards a 10-year thing and then you fall off the track?

JACOBS: It's a good question. So the, the tiering gets... The index gets redone every year, and based on the index is where the tiers fall. So presumably it would try and separate it from the policy process. Now, there are waivers for things like if they had been in tier three and they moved to tier two, that you can continue the money that y- has already been obligated but not yet expended, for instance.

So we do give those kinds of flexibilities for this exact thing, right? And to try and ensure that it's, we're not like swaying back and forth, but like really trying to get people on a path. And so for instance, if a country's in a tier three and they're working... and DoD is working with them on something that's a three to five-year horizon, and then, you know, hopefully they're in a pack, a compact, where we're working on getting them to be moving up.

But let's say something happens and they move down to tier two, s- most of what DoD had been working on could continue because we have those waivers for, like,

things that were obligated when it was in one tier, even if it moves down a year. So it's a yearly process for the tiers. And then the other thing, and, you know, we went back and forth on this a lot, and frankly, Maureen, I want to connect you to Sophie on my team who wrote this bill, 'cause I want to get your feedback and, you know, make...

Part of this is we're doing this now so that we have it ready to actually become law. So there, there are obviously tweaks that may be needed, but we went back and forth on this, but we decided to keep the tiers private. So there won't be a list that comes out every year of the tiers to the public.

Now, Congress will get the list, but the public won't. And we did that for this very reason of, like, it becomes super political then which tier you put certain countries in, and we had this with the Global Fragility Act. No country wants to be considered fragile. And so we decided to keep it private for that and to make this about...

so that it's more about capacity building. Like, once you have this capacities, we'll be able to give you the support rather than sort of like a finger-wagging lecture. But we're very open to your feedback on how to make this even better.

NOYES: Dafna, you've been in many a bureaucratic fight on this. Do you wanna weigh in on this as well, on, on Maureen's good question?

RAND: I mean, you're identifying two consistent challenges when a political strategy cuts across DOD and State, which is frankly the timeline and the culture of planning. State Department is not does not have a strategic planning approach that-

JACOBS: I have a bill that would fix that, too.

RAND: Oh, great. But I was gonna say, as I was leaving as assistant secretary a year and a half ago, I found that the integrated country strategies, which are-- were actually piloted recently, so 10 years earlier, around 2015, 2016, had begun to take hold.

So cultural change in bureaucracy takes time. But by 2025, there was more buy-in for these integrated country strategies. Around 50% of the posts were beginning to take them really seriously and using them as a management tool with the DOD components in their country to make sure that there was a synthesis and synchronization between DOD plans for the country and the integrated country strategy.

But however, that is challenging because then that's a country strategy, not a regional strategy. It's not a COCOM strategy. So you know all the bureaucratic problems with challenges with that. So, but I do think a culture of State Department strategic planning that's what should, could be increased here to make this work.

And then the second issue is neither bureaucracy really likes delivering tough news to partners. And that's something that both buildings have tried to work on in their own different ways. So for example, on Leahy, 10 years ago, DOD had its own Leahy Law that mirrored through the NDAA what the State Department had to adhere to.

And in our discussions of implementation, and there's individuals in this room who were officials with me at the State Department, we really talked about this duty to inform provision in the Leahy Law, which was essentially, you are required to have the tough conversation with the partner about the fact that certain units are have some bad apples or have committed gross violations of human rights.

Because at the time, some of p-people in both buildings were saying, "Well, let's just figure out through our intelligence which units are, we don't, we can't work with 'cause of U.S. law, and then never tell them. Just don't plan to ever work with them," and nev-therby trying to avoid the tough conversations. So this part, which is by the way, what diplomacy is, having tough conversations with a partner, even your friends, right?

That is essentially what diplomacy requires is going to be necessary for any of these bills and is already necessary in a lot of laws. So it's this two cultures that need help advancing. One, strategic planning, particularly in the State Department and this sort of synthesis, and then two, this culture of mil-mil diplomacy, but even civilian diplomacy that is-- makes it more normal to have really tough conversations with partners, particularly friends.

JACOBS: And just to add to this, like, one of the things we've really tried to learn for this bill is that what we often heard from partner governments is like, "Okay, you told us this unit doesn't vet, like, doesn't pass Leahy." But you don't give us a process for how to fix that. And so, like, there'll be some units where, like, 30 years on, it's not even the same people, but the unit is still flagged.

And so what we really try to do is make it so that, okay, maybe you do move down one or you are rated lower tiered, but here's the process. Here's exactly what you need to do to get off it.

RAND: And on that, we also, 10 years ago, tried to do remediation. There's individuals in this room who are part of this.

Remediation was, it came from actually some COCOM commanders who raised this point in public hearings in 2014, 2015, 2016. Their antipathy to the Leahy Law was exactly this point, that there's no off-ramp. And so we introduced a, a remediation provision in 2015, and it became really hard for folks to ensure that their military justice system would sort of ha- get up to speed enough and sufficiently to create the mechanisms of accountability that would meet the law.

So this was a whole area of rule of law reform, both on the military and civilian side, that in my view, had a lot of promise because again, it's a proactive positive lever of

change. It's not the punitive- ... you know, t- tapping on your finger and taking things away. It's saying, "Let's help you build military justice so that you can try this bad guy from 30 years ago who's even just retired, and everyone knows he was a bad guy.

By the way, he was bad at fighting anyway." So there were ways we could have worked positively on some of the military justice to ensure accountability could reach the remediation standard, which remained high. And also, we had the challenge of consistency across regions and partners, which became really hard and would be relevant learning for your bill- Absolutely

given how hard we worked on that.

JACOBS: Yeah. Absolutely. Would you say 30% of the compact has to go to institutional capacity? So that, and there's a separate pot of money specifically for the compact so that we can also do some- ... of this work that is really hard to do- ... in the current way that the funding is set up.

NOYES: Excellent. Really good question, really great answers. Let's get some more folks in the mix here. Gentleman in the gray bla- tan blazer back there.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes. My name is Roger Cocchetti. I'm a retired high tech executive, Comsat, IBM, VeriSign. But long ago, spent a chunk of my career working on the interagency executive branch effort to coordinate various foreign aid related programs between agencies.

So my question really has to do with that. You've all touched on it and its importance, and I think everyone knows that there are humanitarian programs, there are economic development programs, there are food assistance programs, there are security assistance programs, there are multilateral development banks, there are UN programs.

The question I have is the coordination among these programs. Number one, how tightly coordinated do you think it should be among these diverse programs, or how much should each program march to its own tune? And number two, how is that working today, and is there coordination today? And if so, since you all have recent experience, h-h does it work or are any programs actually excluded from interagency coordination?

Thank

NOYES: you. Let's let's double up and get one more question 'cause we're getting towards time, and then we'll let both the congresswoman and Dafna have some closing remarks. Right here the white shirt

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, my name is Jefferson. Thank you so much. I was actually a legal intern for HVAC spring of 2025, so it's good to see you again. My question is just about the waiver. I'd love for you to talk more about it. Oftentimes a

waiver is just kind of a magic phrase the president can say to not comply with the law, right?

So you could say Ukraine is very corrupt, but there is, like, a legitimate need to give them security assistance. But you could also say the president ideologically likes right-wing countries in Latin America, we'll just do a waiver for all of them, or, you know, there's a foreign lobbyist for some African country, gets the president to do a waiver.

So I'd love to hear about some of the protections you mentioned regarding the waivers.

JACOBS: Yeah. On the broader... So I am a big fan of the Global Fragility Act, and I do think that it is a good model for how we try and get in priority countries all of the assistance from all of the buckets to be pulling in the same direction and rec-- and working towards a common goal.

And I do think that is the direction we need all of our foreign assistance to be going in, and Dafna can tell you all the reasons why that's incredibly hard to do. But I do think that is what we need, right? What is our foreign policy in this country, and how is everything we're doing helping us achieve those goals?

And that's actually part of what we're trying to do here because what-- so often what happens is we will go to a country and we will say, "Our foreign policy for your country is that we want you to have better human rights and good governance." And then another part of our government will go and be like, "Okay, as long as you'll c-do counter-terrorism with us, we don't really care about all that."

And so this is about trying to have it be so that we have one holistic goal and we're all moving towards that. Now, is that how it is currently happening? No. Is that how it was happening even before Trump decimated all of our assistance mechanisms? No. But I think that, you know, the Global Fragility Act was one attempt to try and do that.

I think we've had other attempts to try and figure out how to do that from a congressional side. Frankly, it's also a bit that we need to figure out how we can do a better job of providing that incentive because, you know, I sit on both the House Foreign Affairs and the House Armed Services Committee, but there are very few of us who actually sit on both.

And so we don't-- There's never a time when we're like, "What's our policy here, and how is everything we're doing contributing to that?" And that's something we need to figure out o-on our end as well. On the waiver, this is a piece that Sophie and I went back and forth on quite a bit. So if you are i- if you are receiving a national security waiver, you can only receive it for five years before it shuts off unless Congress proactively passes a bill To address it.

So in other words, if you want to give Ukraine a waiver for four or five years, once you hit the five-year mark, you would need Congress to proactively pass something to be able to continue the waiver. That's how we try and get around just the like... And the waivers have to be notified to Congress. And there's a specific-- Like, we put in reasons why you can have a waiver.

It's n-not just a broad national security waiver.

NOYES: Great. Thanks. Dafna, any, any you wanna take a stab at any of those or any closing thoughts?

RAND: So I was just gonna say, just really commend you, Congresswoman, first for sitting on both committees and thinking about how they look at each other, because I do think this is what is needed, is legislators who really understand and care about how the institution works.

So thank you for caring about the nerdy stuff and not just the sort of in-the-news glamorous. And that-- And I'm hopeful. I'm not, you know, a naysayer. I think we have a chance for reform in the future. Not at this moment where our institutions have been really decimated and where our experts have been marginalized, really.

But in the future, there is a moment to take this really challenging time and turn it into sort of a greater policy strategic thinking. And I do think these same issues between State and DoD is a good place to start. Foreign assistance is almost an easier one than some of the diplomatic and policy, other policy issues just because you can concretely look at a map of, for s- for, you know, a map, a chart of Ukraine and see all the spigots of foreign assistance, for example.

And you can look at the different ways we train, the different ways we train the border guards in Ukraine, the different ways we train the different units and assist, train, and equip, and then the ways in which we fund and support the government of Ukraine, et cetera. So you could take country by country and really do a deep dive.

And again, as I said, there was some progress going on in the past ten years until twenty twenty-five in these integrated country strategies to introduce into the State Department a culture of strategic thinking and learning. Part of the challenge was it was in every four-year strategy that was mandated by OMB.

Part of the challenge was the rotation system of the DCM and the ambassador didn't match the OMB schedule, so you might have a wonderful ambassador and DCM team that submitted a four-year plan and then halfway through you'd have a new leader who rightly wanted to, you know, change it up a little bit or...

Of course, then we have a-- we've had such vacillations in the policies in the past three obvious White Houses that it's really undercut strategic planning. But that is the way of the future and we need all the champions in Congress that we can get. So thank you so much.

JACOBS: And I just wanna say, I mean, I know for everyone who works in this field, this has been a really difficult year and a half.

And I actually feel really hopeful because I do think this is the moment where we can actually fundamentally rethink and reimagine how we do all of these things that so many of us have been frustrated by for so long. So let's make sure we're actually taking that opportunity and using this time now to prepare and be ready so that we can do all these amazing reforms we know are needed and we're ready to go.

And I feel very confident that with all the amazing nerds in the room and up here that we'll be able to do that.

NOYES: Well, thanks so much, Congresswoman for coming to join us and nerd out with us. It was a, a real joy. And thanks to a great audience coming out in midsummer. Let's let's hold tight in your seats if you can for a couple minutes while the congresswoman leaves so she can get to her next meeting.

But please join me in a, a round of applause for for a great event.