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Story Proposals

### **The Imperial Military**

As far back as Sun Tzu, governments, including that of the U.S., have understood that national security policy rests on five pillars: public diplomacy (the things leaders say), quiet diplomacy (the work of diplomats), economic policy, intelligence, and the military. Since 9/11, a weak dollar, bellicose proclamations, an underfunded State Department, CIA failures, and trade deficits have undermined the first four pillars, leaving American national security policy to lean almost entirely on the military. My story would focus on one country, probably Uzbekistan, in which American diplomacy derives almost entirely from the Pentagon.

There are three components to military diplomacy: hardware, training, and bases. By using the Special Forces (Green Berets) to train foreign militaries, and by turning foreign governments into customers for American weapons, the military does more than improve the fighting capacity of its allies. It also creates relationships

independent of the State Department. These relationships become useful in times like the present, when America's leaders have determined that we must deal with countries which we might, in other times, shun as abusive or undemocratic. The Army's Special Forces Command has agreed in principle to embed me with a unit that is training the armies and paramilitaries of a foreign country – if not Uzbekistan, probably Colombia or the Philippines.

Training foreign armies is not necessarily bad. As one person at Human Rights Watch put it, it's good that the Pakistani army has received American training in calibrating its artillery so it no longer drops shells willy-nilly around the countryside. But the Special Forces have a long history of training armies known for brutalizing their own people. The Leahy Amendments of 2000 gave the Secretary of State the power to deny military training to foreign military units with poor human rights records, but after 9/11 President Bush quietly ordered up a waiver. In the supplemental defense budget released Monday, for example, that waiver -- the phrase "notwithstanding any other provision of law" -- appears sixteen times in allowing the Pentagon to assist countries and conduct foreign operations "not otherwise authorized."

In whichever country the Special Forces agree to let me embed, I would also spend time with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency

officer in the embassy. Every embassy abroad has a DSCA officer, whose assignment is to get weapons and equipment into the hands of the host government by either arranging commercial sales, transferring old or captured hardware, making loans, or selling directly. This is a complicated political and commercial endeavor. A few days of observing one such officer would be instructive; DSCA says this is possible.

The Pentagon's forthcoming quadrennial defense review also envisions many ready-to-operate but largely unmanned bases positioned around the world. The idea is to secure basing rights in a host country, then build bases that will be staffed full time by a skeleton crew. When the need arises, the base will be filled quickly by a combat brigade. Proponents call this "base in a box:" several already exist, in Uzbekistan, Kuwait, and elsewhere. Such bases allow the military to operate in a time of crisis from a safe, well-provisioned haven, without enduring the economic, political, and public-relations headaches of keeping entire combat units stationed abroad. Because a base in a box is all but invisible, it is politically easier for host countries to tolerate than a full-blown American Army base. "Their function may be more political than actually military," Paul Wolfowitz said in the *Times* in January, 2002, because they "send a message to everybody, including important countries like Uzbekistan, that we have a capacity

to come back in and will come back in -- we're not just going to forget about them."

Such bases also come with lavish helpings of aid and coveted memberships in alliances. "Every country wants a good relationship now with the U.S., even the ones who hate us, because we're the big dog," Gordon Adams, director of security policy studies at George Washington University, told me. I visited a base in a box in Kuwait in the spring of 2003; it was remarkable. I would do likewise in whichever country I visit for this piece.

The rise of the military as the spearhead of American diplomacy in the past four years has astounded scholars. "I've been watching government for forty years, and this is the most unbalanced I've ever seen it," Adams told me, adding that the usurping of diplomacy by the military has gotten little media attention. A careful look at how such diplomacy is conducted in one country would shed new light on the shift. I expect this story to run about 7,000 words.