



Should the United States Create an American Foreign Legion?

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The growing hostility and division between Islam and “the West” comes at a time when the United States and our allies need more than ever to secure vital national interests in the Middle East, to include energy resources, regional stability, and the suppression of terrorism. Our dilemma is that dispatching troops to the region has only increased hostility and fed the Islamist propaganda mill while confirming in the minds of many Americans and our allied populations that intervention in these regions is a counterproductive waste of blood and treasure. The United States needs to reduce its military footprint but at the same time maintain the ability to back its diplomacy with muscle. At present, our methods of securing our interests in the Middle East are confined to large Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) occupied by rotational units of U.S. Army Combat troops and Marines with little cultural knowledge and an operational focus. These large American forces are supplemented by Security Force Assistance (SFA) programs that are primarily conducted by U.S. Army Special Forces and counter-terrorist strategies focused on covert operations aimed at eliminating High Value Targets (HVTs)—that is, the leadership of Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist organizations. One partial solution to the problem of underperforming indigenous forces and an over emphasis on HVTs could be to create an American Foreign Legion. The establishment of a permanent force recruited among non-U.S. citizens and led by American officers might offer a flexible tool to allow the U.S. military to secure American interests in the Middle East, while establishing a smaller, more politically acceptable American security footprint. However, the obstacles to the creation of such a force are significant, not the least of which they go against American traditions of a society of equal opportunity, and those of the U.S. military where all soldiers serve on the basis of equality of treatment and status.

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