WHERE WE FIGHT

This new map shows for the first time that the United States is now combating terrorism in 80 percent of the world’s nations.

by Stephanie Savell and SW Infographics
Research assistance by Rachel McMahon, Emily Reckwell, Deena Thompson

LESS THAN A MONTH after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, U.S. troops—with support from British, Canadian, French, German and Australian forces—invaded Afghanistan to fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban. More than 17 years later, the Global War on Terror initiated by President George W. Bush is truly global, with Americans actively engaged in countering terrorism in 80 nations on six continents.

This map is the most comprehensive depiction in civilian circles of U.S. military and government antiterrorist actions overseas in the past two years. To develop it, my colleagues and I at Brown University’s Costs of War Project at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, along with Smithsonian magazine, combed through U.S. and foreign government sources, published and unpublished reports, military websites and geographical databases, we contacted foreign embassies in the U.S. and the military’s United States Africa Command; and we conducted interviews with journalists, academics and others. We found that, contrary to what most Americans believe, the war on terror is not winding down—it has spread to more than 40 percent of the world’s countries.

The war isn’t being waged by the military alone, which has spent $1.9 trillion fighting terrorism since 2001. The State Department has spent $32.7 billion in the last 17 years to train police, military and border patrol agents in many countries and to develop antiterrorist education programs, among other activities.

Because we have been conservative in our selections, U.S. efforts to combat terrorism abroad are likely more extensive than this map shows. Even so, the vast reach evident here may prompt Americans to ask whether the war on terror has met its goal, and whether they are worth the human and financial costs.

U.S. Counterterrorism Activity, 2017–2018

U.S. Military Base or “Lily Pad”: This country hosted one or more U.S. military bases or smaller military outposts involved in counterterrorism activity.

Training/Assistance: The U.S. military and/or State Department trained or assisted this country’s security forces in counterterrorism.

U.S. Military Exercises: This country hosted U.S. military exercises intended to deter militants, train local forces and build strategic partnerships to combat terrorism.

Combat: U.S. service members were involved in combat and/or took direct action on the ground here against militants in cooperation with this country.

Air and Drone Strikes: The U.S. operated direct air and drone strikes against terrorist targets in this country.