

# Foreign assistance and US power projection: an analysis of presidential drawdown authority

*Assistência externa e projeção de poder dos Estados Unidos: análise da autoridade presidencial de drawdown*

**Abstract:** The article investigates the projection of the USA in the international system through the provision of military and humanitarian assistance to countries and organizations based on the presidential drawdown authority. The aim is to analyze the utilization of this authority from 1961 to 2024. The research employs qualitative (documentary analysis) and quantitative (creation of a database with drawdown records) methodologies. The analysis revealed that over time the authority has been used as a means of projecting and influencing the United States abroad. Historical variations in drawdown utilization were also observed. The Ukraine conflict, from the 2020s, resulted in an unprecedented quantity in numerical terms and in resources in arms and military education. Finally, it was diagnosed that the USA has provided military assistance to countries and organizations with objectives including region stabilization, counterterrorism, military conflict assistance, humanitarian aid, and support for peacekeeping missions.

**Keywords:** Drawdown; Presidential Power; Military assistance; Qualitative-quantitative methodology; Ukraine War.

**Resumo:** Este artigo investiga a projeção dos Estados Unidos (EUA) no sistema internacional a partir do envio de assistência militar e humanitária a países e organizações e que está fundamentada na autoridade presidencial de *drawdown*. O objetivo é analisar a utilização dessa autoridade de 1961 a 2024. Esta pesquisa utiliza as metodologias qualitativa (análise documental) e quantitativa (confecção de um banco de dados com registros de *drawdowns*). A análise revelou que ao longo do tempo a autoridade foi utilizada como meio de projeção e influência dos Estados Unidos no exterior. Foi também possível observar a variação histórica da utilização dos *drawdowns*. A guerra da Ucrânia, a partir da década de 2020, resultou em uma quantidade sem precedentes em termos numéricos e em recursos em armas e educação militar. Por fim, diagnosticou-se que os EUA têm fornecido assistência militar a países e organizações com objetivos que incluem a estabilização de regiões, combate ao terrorismo, assistência militar a conflitos, ajuda humanitária e apoio a missões de paz.

**Palavras-chave:** Drawdown; Poder presidencial; Assistência militar; Metodologia qualitativa-quantitativa; Guerra da Ucrânia.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the projection of United States in the international system by sending military and humanitarian assistance to countries and organizations through the presidential drawdown authority approved by Congress in 1961. The main objective is to analyze the use of this authority by the President of the Republic over time, verifying its dynamics, basic characteristics, and reflexes for the promotion of US foreign policy.

The topic of drawdowns has received little attention in the specialized literature, whether North American or Brazilian, and is one of the least known, but no less relevant, presidential powers to intervene abroad. In this sense, this article also aims to carry out an initial analysis in Portuguese of their use in order to reduce the knowledge gap.

This research uses qualitative and quantitative methodologies to achieve its objectives. In qualitative terms, a documentary analysis of government reports, official documents and legislation was carried out and, from a quantitative point of view, a database was created containing all the records of drawdowns from their creation until 2024, providing a longitudinal analysis with statistical treatment.

This article works with two basic arguments, which we will focus on throughout the text. The first argues that drawdown authority, even though it has existed since the 1960s, has been used again and at an unprecedented intensity in the 2020s with the start of Russia's war against Ukraine. The second argument, in turn, states that over time drawdowns have been used as a tool for projecting the power and influence of the United States in the international system, favoring strategic allies in its foreign policy.

In addition to this introduction, the article is divided into three basic parts. The first discusses the 1960s reorganization of the United States' system of foreign assistance to countries and international organizations, focusing on the Foreign Assistance Act of John Kennedy's administration. The second section describes and analyzes drawdown, an authority created by Congress in 1961 that allowed the US president to transfer military items and services to nations and international organizations as a way of assisting them in times of need. The third part analyzes the practice of using drawdowns until 2024, based on the database constructed, seeking to understand their dynamics, reasons, beneficiaries, and values involved, as well as analyzing the two arguments proposed. Finally, there are brief comments on the findings and conclusions of the research.

## 2 INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AND POWER PROJECTION

With the defeat of Hitler's totalitarian regime and its allies, the United States emerged as the main power in what was then known as the "free world" (Fousek, 2000). On the other hand, it felt threatened by the influence exerted by the Soviet regime, particularly in Eastern Europe (Pecequilo, 2005). From this "Cold War" between the two powers—one capitalist and the other communist—came a scenario of permanent tension, of bipolarity, with the Americans and the

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) disputing, directly or indirectly, areas of influence in different regions of the world (Kagan, 2012).

Given this new context, US assistance to other nations and organizations in the international system became part of US foreign policy and was used as a way of projecting the country's power and influence abroad (Meyer, 1988).

From the military point of view, the Truman Doctrine was launched in 1947, with the aim of "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" (Truman, 1947). According to Pagliai (2006, p. 28), "the US ensured that its military forces would always be ready to intervene on a global scale, as long as it was necessary to defend an allied country from external aggression (from the USSR) or from internal subversion unleashed by the international communist movement".

The most significant milestone, constituting the first major foreign assistance program, was the Marshall Plan of 1948, under the administration of Harry Truman (1945-1953), which aimed to rebuild European countries devastated by the scourge of World War II (Radelet, 2003). It was a multifaceted program that aimed to provide humanitarian aid to post-war Europe and economic aid to the countries of the continent, as well as promoting peace and expanding US markets to avoid an economic crisis (Allen; Wala, 1993). According to Gimbel (1976, p. 1), the plan was a corollary of the Truman Doctrine, "a program to stop communism, to frustrate socialists and leftists, to attract the Soviet Union's satellites, and to contain or roll back the Russians."

There was an effort by successive presidents since Truman to provide monetary and military aid to nations allied to the United States in order to move away from the pendulum represented by Soviet totalitarianism. One of the administrations that stood out most in this regard was that of Democrat John Kennedy (1961-1963), marked by initiatives such as the Peace Corps, the creation of the United States Agency for International Development and the Alliance for Progress, the latter focusing on Latin American countries (May, 1989; Essex, 2013; Taffet, 2007).

Essex (2013) points out that one of the central themes of the 1960 US presidential campaign was precisely the reorganization of foreign assistance programs. Kennedy, in particular, committed himself to reforms and changes in this area, making it one of his administration's priorities. One of his most important legacies was the discussion and approval, in September 1961, of the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA), the origin of the presidential drawdown authorization, the subject of this article.

In his special message sent to Congress on March 22, 1961, in which he presented the guidelines for his foreign aid plan, Kennedy pointed out three main facts for a national discussion on the subject (Kennedy, 1961).

First of all, the president criticized the "existing foreign aid programs and concepts," classifying them as "bureaucratically fragmented, awkward and slow" and with management based on "a haphazard and irrational structure covering at least four departments and several other agencies" (Kennedy, 1961, p. 1). In the government's view, they were completely unsuited for the new configuration of the international system that was taking place in the 1960s, in particular for the needs of the so-called "underdeveloped world."

Secondly, the Democrat recognized that the “economic collapse” of “free but less developed nations” would be “disastrous to our national security, harmful to our comparative prosperity and offensive to our conscience,” hence the need to provide assistance to these countries (Kennedy, 1961, p. 1). And, finally, that at the beginning of the decade, there exists “an historic opportunity for a major economic assistance effort by the free industrialized nations” with the goal of moving “more than half the people of the less-developed nations into self-sustained economic growth” (Kennedy, 1961, p. 1). It should be noted that the point here is expressed in relation to economic aid and not exactly military aid.

Aid from the industrialized North would be directed to the Southern Hemisphere, specifically Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The challenge for the countries in these regions was economic modernization in order to reduce levels of social inequality and increase the standard of living in these societies. At the same time, there was a “special reason” for economic assistance to “underdeveloped” countries from the point of view of the capitalist production system: “Without exception they are under Communist pressure. In many cases, that pressure is direct and military. In others, it takes the form of intense subversive activity...” wrote John Kennedy (1961, p. 2).

It can be said that Kennedy was successful in his effort to pass legislation that would modernize US foreign aid. His most important product, as already mentioned, was the Foreign Assistance Act, passed at the height of the Cold War and considered by Rennack and Chesser (2011) to be the “cornerstone” of US aid policy to other countries in the international system. As defined by the Department of Defense, it is “an act to promote the foreign policy, security, and general welfare of the United States by assisting peoples of the world in their efforts toward economic development and internal and external security, and for other purposes” (DSCA, 2024).

It should be noted that its scope is broad, reflecting the varied content included in the legislation, which encompasses many possibilities, ways, forms, programs, and capacities for the United States to intervene in other countries in order to assist them. The very definition of foreign assistance, contained in article 634(b)(1) of the Act, gives rise to many possibilities for aid:

“Foreign assistance” means any tangible or intangible item provided by the United States Government to a foreign country or international organization under this any other Act, including but not limited to any training, service, or technical advice, any item of real, personal, or mixed property, any agricultural commodity, United States dollars, and any currencies of any foreign country which are owned by the United States Government (FAA, 1961, p. 238).

From the terms of this admittedly broad definition, Meyer (1988) points out that US aid to countries or international organizations can be classified into two basic categories: (I) economic and humanitarian development; and (II) military. In view of this, and according to the content of the legislation, the President of the Republic, as head of the Executive Branch,

would be delegated the means, authorities, and powers for the United States to expand its presence at international level, in compliance with its national interests. One of these mechanisms will be precisely the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), used by US presidents to project influence and power and which has been used repeatedly by Joe Biden to provide military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine in its war effort against Russia.

### 3 DRAWDOWN AND PRESIDENTIAL POWER

The Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) innovated by establishing various special powers for the President of the Republic with the aim of undertaking economic, humanitarian, and military assistance to countries and international organizations (GAO/NSIAD-85-79, 1985). One of these executive authorities is the PDA.

Inscribed in article 506 of the FAA, the drawdown authority establishes that the president can “draw down articles and services from the inventory and resources of any agency of the United States Government and military education and training from the Department of Defense” (FAA, 1961, p. 171). This is a direct transfer of military equipment and services from the United States to countries and international organizations receiving assistance.

The main requirement for the application of this legal clause is a presidential determination, i.e. a statement by the head of state on the need for its application. According to the legal text, it is up to the president to determine that:

- (A) an unforeseen emergency exists which requires immediate military assistance to a foreign country or international organization; and (B) the emergency requirement cannot be met under the authority of the Arms Export Control Act [22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.] or any other law except this section (FAA, 1961, p. 171).

The president exercises the role of sovereign in deciding whether or not an emergency requiring US aid exists. A drawdown, in this sense, is an emergency power concentrated in the hands of the president, giving him greater flexibility and agility to mobilize foreign aid, military or otherwise. From the perspective of the US State Department, in a recent document, the function of the drawdown over time has been to “support Allies and partners in crisis all over the world”, while still remaining “the U.S. government’s most responsive tool to rapidly transfer U.S. military and other equipment in an unanticipated emergency that cannot be addressed by other means” (State, 2024). The emergency situation declared by the president, at the same time, must be very special and “cannot be addressed by other means,” that is, by other legislation such as arms exports, with the only possible option being to send materials from the stocks of the Department of Defense and other US government agencies.

Nor does the president need any kind of congressional authorization to carry out a drawdown, but he must communicate his decision to the members of Congress (GAO-17-26, 2016). According to article 652 of the FAA, he must “notify the Speaker of the House of Representatives

and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate in writing of each such intended exercise,” indicating the section of this Act under which such authority is to be exercised, and the justification for, and the extent of, the exercise of such authority (FAA, 1961, p. 251).

The United States president, in order to carry out a drawdown, has at his disposal three basic special authorities found in articles 506 and 552 of the FAA (FAA, 1961). The first, known as 506(a)(1), refers to situations declared to be emergencies. The second, 506(a)(2), is intended for non-emergency situations nominally including combating international drug trafficking, natural disaster and humanitarian assistance, anti-nuclear weapons proliferation, aid to migrants and refugees, and military training to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos during the former conflict in Southwest Asia. The third, 552(c)(2), is usually used for peacekeeping operations led by the United Nations (UN) or other multilateral organizations, including regional security organizations such as the African Union.

The presidential drawdown power is a presidential authorization, but not a source of funding. Articles 506(a)(1), 506(a)(2), and 552(c)(2) of the FAA set a limit of 325 million dollars in each fiscal year (starting in October) available for drawdowns authorized by the president (GAO-17-26, 2016). In the US institutional design, it is worth noting, budgetary control is carried out by Congress, so that over time the Legislature has approved supplementary appropriations to sustain different arms and foreign assistance disbursements beyond the ceiling set in 1961 (GAO-02-1027, 2002). The most recent case is Ukraine, with congressional approval of billions of additional dollars to carry out presidential drawdowns.

Over the decades, Congress has made occasional changes to the FAA that have had an impact on drawdown authority (GAO/NSIAD-85-79, 1985). There were, for example, a few times the amendment lowered the ceiling for spending, and the president relaxed the grounds for invoking the authority. In 1976, Congress, seeking to regain control of foreign policy, established that a budget appropriation had to be approved before a drawdown could take place. Since there was no funding for the next three years, this presidential authority virtually ended. In 1981, however, the ceiling was raised.

In practical terms, a drawdown follows a certain rite involving the president and some government agencies (GAO-17-26, 2016). The first step involves the State Department and the Defense Department, which must agree to the president’s willingness to use drawdown authority as a reaction to an international crisis. State and Defense need to act in synergy, as they are the central actors for the operationalization of assistance. Also within this stage, the government’s military structures are consulted to review the potential impact, in budgetary and stockpile terms, of transferring materials and equipment to other countries or international organizations. It should be stressed here that weapons, vehicles, ammunition, and other military items sent abroad come directly from the Department of Defense’s stocks and budget or from contracts already signed between the government and military industries, so that a drawdown affects the organization of US military agencies.

The second stage is the drafting of a memorandum of justification by the State Department. This document is submitted to the President’s office for review. Once approved,

the next step is for the Secretary of State (delegated by the president) to notify Congress of the president's willingness to use his drawdown power.

A fourth step, after the Executive has notified the Legislature, is the signing of a Presidential Determination setting out the official position of the US government in relation to a given international event that requires immediate assistance. In this document, which has the force of law and is published in the Federal Register (equivalent to the *Diário Oficial*), the President transfers to the State Department the authority to carry out the drawdown, in cooperation with other agencies. The Presidential Determination is also sent to Congress for information, as required by the FAA.

The next step is the execution of the presidential order. Under the Department of Defense, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency plays a central role in this stage. It is the agency that organizes with the military entities (the Army, Air Force, and Navy) the equipment to be sent abroad, as well as which services, such as military instruction, will be offered, and is responsible, together with the State Department, for transporting the items in stock.

One of the main characteristics of a drawdown is precisely the speed with which military equipment, lethal or not, is sent. The existence of many US bases abroad reinforces the capacity for rapid delivery of these items. Once the Presidential Determination is signed, the State Department notes that such assistance "can begin arriving within days—or even hours—of approval." (State, 2024).

As these are withdrawals of weapons in stock, already acquired by the government, it is up to the Department of Defense to carry out "technological security review to determine what items may be transferred without putting the U.S. warfighter's edge at risk" (State, 2024). A drawdown, therefore, cannot compromise the United States' war capability, especially its weapons stocks. In practice, however, old, spare military items that do not compromise the country's defense capability are generally transferred (GAO-02-1027, 2002).

The last step is to report to Congress on the drawdown, which is done by sending a list of military services and items, with an estimate of their respective values, sent to the countries or international organizations receiving assistance. The end of a drawdown occurs when the emergency that caused its declaration has ended or when the money allocated by the authorization runs out (GAO-02-1027, 2002).

As can be seen, the presidential power of disbursement is a tool that helps to project US power, particularly military power, in the international system. It is a little-known presidential power resource, but one that has been used extensively since its creation, and which has regained its importance due to its extensive use by Joe Biden's administration to provide military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

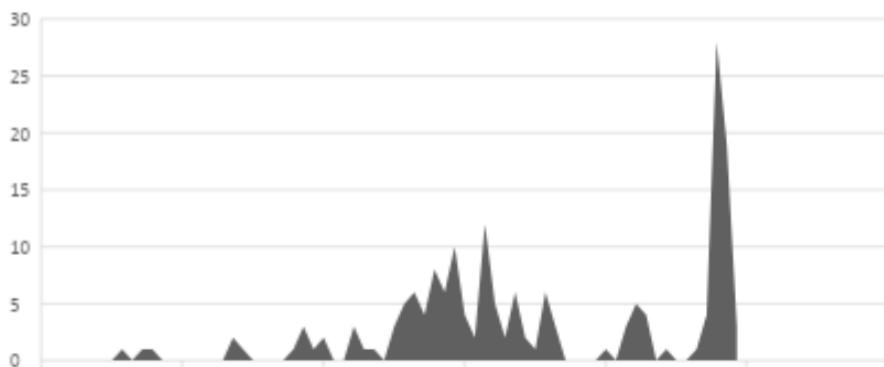
#### 4 DRAWDOWN: ANALYSIS OF ITS USE (1961-2024)

Since its approval in the FAA, the presidential drawdown authority has been used for six decades. Diachronic studies on its use are practically non-existent and those that have

been published are technical reports by the US government itself. With the aim of reducing the gap in understanding such an important tool for US foreign policy, a database was compiled of the drawdowns determined by the president from 1963, when he first issued his order, until April 2024<sup>1</sup>.

Graph 1 shows the occurrence of drawdowns for foreign assistance determined by the US president. The FAA dates back to September 1961, but the first invocation of this authority only occurred in 1963 with military aid to India in the context of the conflict with China, to the value of 55 million dollars—this aid, however, was never implemented. The database shows a total of 172 presidential orders to send military articles and services in emergencies. It can be seen that there is a variation in the number of drawdowns over the decades, and that in many years the president did not use this authority. In the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, it is possible to see the periods of greatest absence of presidential orders. The occurrences, in turn, are related to the conflict in Southwest Asia.

**Graph 1. Occurrence of drawdowns (1961-2024)**



**Source:** Authors' preparation based on GAO-02-1027 (2002); DSCA H-1 (2004) and Federal Register.

Even though it was created in the context of the Cold War, and reflected President John Kennedy's concern to contain the Soviet zone of influence and strengthen the international projection of the United States from a humanitarian and even military point of view, there was an acceleration in its use from the 1990s onwards, i.e., after the end of bipolarity in the international system. In that decade, drawdowns were recorded in every year, with an average higher than in previous decades—the peak was in 1999, with 12 presidential orders for foreign assistance.

The 2000s followed a pattern similar to the previous one, with significant numbers of drawdowns lasting until 2006, reflecting, in many cases, the Global War on Terrorism promoted by George W. Bush's Republican administration. The use of presidential authority resumed in 2011

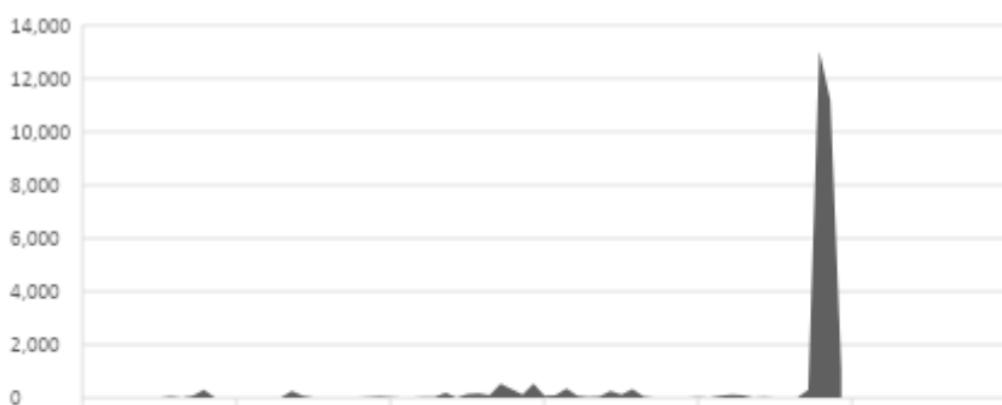
<sup>1</sup> The occurrences from 1963 to 2001 were collected from GAO-02-1027; those from 2002 to 2004 are from DSCA H-1; 2004 and the drawdowns from 2005 onwards were collected by the author directly from the Federal Register website from the Presidential Determination documents. Once the information was collected, it was systematized and statistically processed using Excel and SPSS

with the sending of non-lethal equipment to Libya, was not invoked in the following two years and resumed in 2013, continuing until 2017.

The early years of the 2020s are witnessing an unprecedented use of drawdowns. For every three presidential determinations, one is concentrated until April 2024. There was a total of 55 drawdowns. These figures show a clear upturn in the use of drawdown authority, which is incomparably higher than in any previous decade or even year.

The explanatory variable is the start of Russia's conflict with Ukraine. Drawdowns have become a form of humanitarian and mainly military assistance from the United States to the Ukrainian regime. In 2022, for example, all 28 presidential determinations to transfer military items had Ukraine as the beneficiary, as did the 19 drawdowns in 2023. All these figures confirm our first working argument, which asserts that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has produced a revitalization of the presidential drawdown authority on a level hitherto unprecedented in the history of the FAA.

**Graph 2 - Drawdowns in US\$ (billion) (1963-2024)**



**Source:** Authors' preparation based on GAO-02-1027 (2002); DSCA H-1 (2004) and Federal Register.

Graph 2, with the annual values of the drawdowns, also goes in this direction, showing that the case of aid to Ukraine really stands out from the others, manifesting a typical outlier behavior. During the period analyzed, US aid amounted to 30.4 billion dollars. From the 1960s until before the start of the 2020s, the drawdowns in just two years exceeded 500 million dollars, with the highest levels being found in the 1990s. In the years 2022, 2023, and 2024 there was an explosion in values, totaling 25.9 billion, or 85% of all values since its inception. This is the result of using presidential drawdown authority to send military items to the Ukrainian government.

Using the records of presidential orders, it was possible to map out the legal basis for the drawdowns (Table 1). The first thing to note is that drawdowns, over time, have been based not only on articles 506 and 552 of the FAA, but also on other sections of the law, as well as other regulations. This means that the US president has a series of legal grounds for transferring humanitarian or military aid abroad using the drawdown tool.

Article 506(a)(1) comprises more than half of the drawdowns authorized by the president and 86.4% of the total resources. Out of every ten transfers, five are based on this article of the FAA. The Ukrainian case, once again, strongly influences these results, as since 2022 there have been 42 drawdowns based on this provision of the law. The difference with the other legal bases is that 506(a)(1) refers to international situations characterized as emergencies, a discretionary decision by the president.

**Table 1. Drawdown authorizations and their legal basis (1961-2024)**

Legal basis	Number of drawdowns	Number of drawdowns (%)	Total authorized (US\$ million)	Total authorized (%)
Article 506(a)(1) of the FAA (emergency)	91	52.9	26.319	86.4
Article 506(a)(2) of the FAA (non-emergency situation)	27	15.7	1.089.6	3.6
Article 552(c)(2) of the FAA (peace operations)	26	15.1	469.49	1.5
Foreign Operations Law	18	10.5	1.359.8	4.5
Article 614(a)(1) of the FAA	4	2.3	650	2.1
Article 506 of the FAA	3	1.7	266.99	0.9
Law in Support of the Liberation of Afghanistan	2	1.2	300	1.0
Iraq Liberation Law	1	0.6	5	0.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30.460</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Authors' preparation based on GAO-02-1027 (2002); DSCA H-1 (2004) and Federal Register.

It is, in practice, a kind of “umbrella” for a sufficiently wide range of episodes. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, 506(a)(1) was used by presidents to justify military assistance to South Vietnam and Cambodia against the North Vietnamese threat. In the 1980s the provision was used to send military assistance to El Salvador (1981 and 1982) against guerrilla activities in the country, to Chad in its war effort against Libya (1983 and 1987) and to the Philippines (1986) to deal with a humanitarian disaster situation.

The following decade, with a greater number of drawdowns than the previous ones, presents a greater diversity of objectives for presidential decisions. In 1990 and 1991 military items were transferred to Israel and Türkiye in the context of Operation Desert Storm in the First Gulf War. In 1994, assistance was provided to the Dominican Republic to combat smuggling in the country, and to Jamaica and Haiti for humanitarian reasons. In 1995, military assistance was provided to France and the United Kingdom, via drawdown, as part of the rapid reaction force for Bosnia. Peacekeeping operations have also been the object of US aid through Article 506(a)(1), as in 1996 with assistance to Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone in the intervention in Liberia led by the Monitoring Group of the Economic Community of West African States, and in 1999 in Liberia. The article was also used to provide military assistance to Colombia in its fight against drug trafficking and guerrillas in the country.

In the 2000s, military aid was given in 2002 to Afghanistan, Georgia, and the Philippines with the aim of assisting these countries against the activities of terrorist organizations, a reflection of George W. Bush's foreign policy. In the following decade, starting in 2013, there were drawdowns to France and Chad for military operations in Mali, and support for the

African Union's international coalition in the Central African Republic. It was in September 2014 that the first drawdown with military assistance to Ukraine was recorded, amounting to 5 million dollars. It should be remembered that this year Russia invaded the territory of Crimea and unilaterally annexed it. In 2015 there was a second round of assistance to Ukraine worth 20 million. From 2022 onwards, as already mentioned, there will be a profusion of drawdowns to Ukraine, which will become the practically sole beneficiary of US military assistance via FAA devices.

Still according to Table 1, Article 506(a)(2) was invoked in 15.7% of the drawdowns, but represented only 3.6% of the total resources authorized. The events receiving aid from the United States were of a non-emergency nature, but nevertheless of concern to Washington. They are therefore more specific and concentrated on the fight against international drug trafficking in various South American countries in the 1990s and assistance for natural and humanitarian disasters in countries on various continents, also from the 90s onwards.

Article 552(c)(2) has historically been reserved for peacekeeping operations and the stabilization of countries in efforts generally led by international organizations or coalitions of countries. These cases account for 15.1% of total drawdowns and total 469 million dollars over time, 1.5% of total committed resources. These include peace operations led by the United Nations in 1988, 1993, 1994, 1997, and 1999, the transport of African Union troops to Darfur in Sudan in 2005, the stabilization operation in Haiti in 1995 and the training of the country's presidential guard the following year. In 2013, Barack Obama authorized two drawdowns, sending non-lethal military items to the Syrian Opposition Coalition and the Supreme Military Council, opposition groups to the Bashar al-Assad regime. It should be noted that 552(c)(2) was also activated to provide military assistance to internal groups challenging regimes not supported by the Americans.

There are also five other grounds for drawdowns. Three authorizations only generically cite article 506 of the FAA, without specifying which sections and subparagraphs, and another four mention section 614(a)(1) of the legal text. This last provision allows the President to authorize a disbursement of military equipment or services when he considers it "important to the security interests of the United States" (FAA, 1961, p. 206). In all the cases in which it was applied, from 2002 to 2023, the recipient of immediate military assistance was Ukraine.

Drawdowns have also been determined by the president on the basis of specific legislation passed by Congress. These were the cases of Afghanistan (2003 and 2004) via the Afghan Liberation Support Act, and Iraq (2000) with the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998. In the case of Iraq, in particular, the law authorized the President of the Republic to establish assistance to "Iraqi democratic opposition organizations," including military aid through the shipment of defense articles and military training from drawdowns worth up to 97 million dollars (ILA, 1998). In other words: the drawdown applies not only to states, but also to non-state organizations or groups that challenge the *status quo*, such as the opponents of Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime.

Finally, the Foreign Operations Act was used by the president to carry out 10.5% of the drawdowns, amounting to 1.3 billion dollars. There was a total of 18 presidential determinations, including for Israel, for US national interest in the 1990s, for Jordan with the

aim of border protection and modernization of its armed forces, and for Tunisia (four times between 1999 and 2002) for the purposes of military training, sending parts for aircraft and for US national interest.

The records of the 172 drawdowns therefore reveal that the president has at his disposal a series of legal bases for authorizing the sending of military equipment and services to countries and international organizations. This goes beyond the authority of the FAA, which created this type of authorization, and at certain times and in certain cases the executive branch cites other laws to support the presidential decision.

In total, 69 countries have been the subject of drawdowns, two international organizations (the UN and the African Union) and regime opposition groups, as in the cases of Iraq and Syria. The large number of beneficiaries, spread across the most diverse regions of the planet, show that the drawdown authority serves as a tool for projecting US power, presided over by its strategic interests of national defense and international security.

Presidential decisions are not only presided over by altruism or a sense of moral responsibility for nations that need help, but also by strategic requirements, first in a bipolar and then multipolar world, to maintain and even expand the US presence worldwide by providing aid to allies at certain times. This is one of the many forms and possibilities of power projection.

Table 2 lists the countries to which the drawdown has been most recurrent over the last few decades. The highlight is Ukraine with more than 50 presidential determinations, reinforcing the finding that authority in the 2020s has been reinvigorated to send military items to the country to defend itself against Russian aggression. The United Nations appears as the second beneficiary with 11 cases, illustrating the commitment of the United States to multilateral actions carried out by the main organization of the international system. Israel's presence in third place is consistent with the Jewish state's historic alliance with the United States since its creation after World War II. In fourth place, with 7 drawdowns, are the assistances to Afghanistan, which occurred in the context of the intervention in the country in October 2001, and the withdrawal of US forces in 2021 with the return of the Taliban to power. The table also highlights the case of Colombia, which received a great deal of US military assistance in the 1990s to combat international drug trafficking. El Salvador and Haiti, meanwhile, are the countries on the continent, after Colombia, that have received the most drawdowns. In Africa, the biggest recurrence is Chad, followed by Nigeria. In Asia, the Philippines stands out. And France is listed with 6 authorizations for its actions in Bosnia and in the fight against insurgent organizations in Mali.

From another angle, Table 3 shows which countries have received the most military aid in terms of military equipment and services, based on the amount of dollars committed. Remember that a drawdown does not mean sending money to countries or organizations, but rather defense articles and services, such as military training, that are priced. Ukraine, in the entire period of the authority, has so far taken more than 25 billion dollars, or 83.2% of all the amounts authorized by US presidents.

Table 2. Drawdown authorizations by beneficiary countries (1961-2024)

Country	Number of drawdowns
Ukraine	53
United Nations	11
Israel	9
Afghanistan	7
Colombia	7
Chad	6
France	6
El Salvador	5
Haiti	5
Nigeria	5
Philippines	5

**Source:** Authors' preparation based on GAO-02-1027 (2002); DSCA H-1 (2004) and Federal Register.

Close to a billion dollars is Israel, a strategic and privileged partner of the United States, but with only 3% of the total. It is interesting to note that the drawdowns were higher for Afghanistan than for Iraq. In the case of Iraq, which was also subject to intervention in 2003, the drawdown was not used extensively by the government to provide military or humanitarian assistance—other budget lines were used. It is also possible to verify the importance of the conflict in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, with half a billion dollars in aid for Cambodia and 375 million for South Vietnam.

The UN and its peace operations, although numerous, received 1.3% of the value of commitments. The drawdowns, in this sense, did not favor multilateral actions, but rather individual assistance actions led by the United States.

Table 3. Total drawdown authorizations by beneficiary countries in US\$ million

Country	Total authorized (US\$ million)	Total authorized (%)
Ukraine	25.329.5	83.2
Israel	923	3.0
Afghanistan	768.99	2.5
Cambodia	525	1.7
United Nations	409	1.3
Vietnam	375	1,2
Jordan	150	0.5
Iraq	139	0,5
Haiti	130	0.4
Türkiye	107	0.4
Bosnia	100	0.3
Others	1.503.39	4.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30.459.88</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Authors' preparation based on GAO-02-1027 (2002); DSCA H-1 (2004) and Federal Register.

We should also highlight the presence of Jordan, which benefited from 150 million, as an example of the projection of US power in a strategic region. From 1996 to 1999, President Bill Clinton authorized three drawdowns to Jordan with the manifest aim of strengthening security in the Middle East, one of the objectives of the Democratic administration's foreign policy. This military assistance followed the signing of the peace treaty between the Jordanian monarchy and the state of Israel in 1995, and the role played by the country in the Wye River agreements between the Jewish state and the Palestinian Authority in September 1988.

For example, Jordan received 88 tanks, 18 helicopters, 38 armored vehicles, a C-130 aircraft, 302 air-to-air missiles and other equipment from Defense Department stocks. "According to DOD and State officials, the defense articles that were transferred helped Jordan secure its borders," points out a report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO-02-1027, 2002, p. 12).

The Jordanian case is important because the sending of military equipment, as well as services such as training and military education, is pointed out as one of the factors that established an "excellent" relationship between the United States and the Middle Eastern country (GAO-02-1027, 2002). During the intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, Jordan's armed forces contributed on the ground with mine clearance operations and the installation of a field hospital. More recently, in April 2024, during Iran's air attack on Israel, the Jordanian air force actively participated in the effort to intercept drones and missiles fired at the Jewish state.

On the other hand, military assistance to the country has fostered more contracts for American defense firms. The Jordanian government, for example, signed one worth 38 million dollars to modernize M60 tanks, including the almost 90 supplied by the United States in 1996, by fitting them with a 120mm cannon (GAO-02-1027, 2002). The drawdowns, therefore, are also aimed at expanding the market of the US military-industrial complex.

The Bosnian case, in turn, exposes the problem of maintaining the equipment sent (GAO-02-1027, 2022). In 1996, Bosnia received helicopters and tanks from the Department of Defense, but was unable to keep them operational over the following years. The Bosnian Federation received 6 million dollars a year from the United States to support the equipment, which was far less than it needed. The Federation's Ministry of Defense estimated that it would need \$10 million a year for fuel and spare parts alone. Given these insufficient resources to maintain the items, in May 2002 there was a deterioration and "the operational rates were below 35 percent for the helicopters and below 60 percent for the tanks" (GAO-02-1027, 2002, p. 15).

A similar situation occurred in Colombia with the 40-million-dollar drawdown of September 1996, in which there were many problems with the equipment sent (GAO/NSIAD-98-60, 1998). Twelve UH-1H helicopters, for example, delivered in May 1997, flew an average of only 10 hours, requiring substantial maintenance. In July 1997, the Colombian police reported that only two of the 12 helicopters sent were fully operational.

Such situations reveal the technological asymmetries between countries in terms of their military capabilities. Drawdowns “typically provide for 1 or 2 years of essential spare parts for aircraft, vehicles, and weapons, but many recipients do not have the resources to support the defense articles after that” (GAO-02-1027, 2022, p. 15). Drawdowns “are successful over the long term,” as Defense Department officials point out, “only if the foreign recipient has the ability to support the defense articles or if the United States provides additional funding for maintenance” (GAO-02-1027, 2022, p. 15).

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of presidential drawdown authority, from its implementation in 1961 until 2024, revealed the evolution and importance of this tool for US foreign policy. It is worth noting that this is one of the many possibilities for the US president to provide military or humanitarian assistance to countries. Over time, drawdowns, from sending military items from Department of Defense stocks, and military services such as troop education and training, have ended up being used as means of projection and influence, reflecting geopolitical dynamics and the changes, continuities, and priorities of US administrations.

From the database it was possible to observe the variation in the use of drawdowns, with decades of greater or lesser incidence. Since their creation, there have been times of intense activity, such as during the 1990s and 2000s, and periods of lesser activity, such as in the 1960s and 1970s. Russia’s war against Ukraine from the 2020s onwards, in turn, became an important catalyst for the expansion of President Joe Biden’s determination of drawdowns, resulting in an unprecedented amount both in numerical terms and in resources for weapons and military education.

Analysis of the data also highlighted the diversity of legal grounds used to support drawdowns, demonstrating the flexibility and breadth of presidential authority. In addition, the data reveals that the United States has provided military assistance to a range of countries and organizations with objectives ranging from stabilizing strategic regions to combating terrorism, military assistance to conflicts, humanitarian aid in the face of disasters, and support for United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is therefore a way of projecting the country’s power and influence at an international level.

Finally, by carrying out a first study on the use of drawdowns by US presidents, the article may have the potential to give greater visibility to this tool available in foreign policy, encouraging further research to be carried out, including specific case studies on its application, particularly the Ukrainian case which, as shown, has come to give drawdown authority even greater importance compared to previous decades.

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