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*Mike Pompeo, the C.I.A. director, has made a case to President Trump that Obama-era restrictions on drone strikes needlessly limit the United States' ability to fight terrorism. Credit Al Drago/The New York Times*

WASHINGTON — The C.I.A. is pushing for expanded powers to carry out covert drone strikes in Afghanistan and other active war zones, a proposal that the White House appears to favor despite the misgivings of some at the Pentagon, according to current and former intelligence and military officials.

If approved by President Trump, it would mark the first time the C.I.A. has had such powers in Afghanistan, expanding beyond its existing authority to carry out covert strikes against Al Qaeda and other terrorist targets across the border in Pakistan.

The changes are being weighed as part of a broader push inside the Trump White House to loosen Obama-era restraints on how the C.I.A. and the military fight Islamist militants around the world. The Obama administration imposed the restrictions in part to limit civilian casualties, and the proposed shift has raised concerns among critics that the Trump administration would open the way for broader C.I.A. strikes in such countries as Libya, Somalia and Yemen, where the United States is fighting the Islamic State, Al Qaeda or both.

Until now, the Pentagon has had the lead role for conducting airstrikes — with drones or other aircraft — against militants in Afghanistan and other conflict zones, such as Somalia and Libya and, to some extent, Yemen. The military publicly acknowledges its strikes, unlike the C.I.A., which for roughly a decade has carried out its own campaign of covert drone strikes in Pakistan that were not acknowledged by either country, a condition that Pakistan's government has long insisted on.

But the C.I.A.'s director, Mike Pompeo, has made a forceful case to Mr. Trump in recent weeks that the Obama-era arrangement needlessly limited the United States' ability to conduct counterterrorism operations, according to the current and former officials, who would not be named discussing internal debates about sensitive information. He has publicly suggested that Mr. Trump favors granting the C.I.A. greater authorities to go after militants, though he has been vague about specifics, nearly all of which are classified.

"When we've asked for more authorities, we've been given it. When we ask for more resources, we get it," Mr. Pompeo said [this week](#) on Fox News.

He said that the agency was hunting "every day" for Al Qaeda's leaders, most of whom are believed to be sheltering in the remote mountains that straddle the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"If I were them, I'd count my days," Mr. Pompeo said.

From the outset of his [tenure at the C.I.A.](#), Mr. Pompeo, a West Point graduate and former Army officer, has made clear that he favors pushing the agency to take on a more direct role in

fighting militants. Afghanistan, the most active war zone in which the United States is fighting, makes sense as the place to start: In the past three years, the number of military drone strikes there has climbed, from 304 in 2015, to 376 last year, to 362 through the first eight months of this year.

The C.I.A., in comparison, has had little to do across the border in Pakistan, where there were three drone strikes last year and have been four so far this year, according to the Long War Journal published by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

“This is bureaucratic politics 101,” said Christine Wormuth, a former top Pentagon official. “The C.I.A. has very significant capabilities, and it wants to go use them.”

Spokesmen for the C.I.A. and the Defense Department declined to comment on the pending proposal, which involves delicate internal deliberations.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has not resisted the C.I.A. proposal, administration officials said, but other Pentagon officials question the expansion of C.I.A. authorities in Afghanistan or elsewhere, asking what the agency can do that the military cannot. Some Pentagon officials also fear that American troops on the ground in Afghanistan could end up bearing the burden of any C.I.A. strikes that accidentally kill civilians, because the agency will not publicly acknowledge those attacks. The military has also had to confront [its own deadly mistakes](#) in Afghanistan.

One senior Defense Department official said that the United States would gain little from having the C.I.A. carry out drone strikes alongside the military, and that it raised the question of whether it was an appropriate use of covert action.

A former senior administration official familiar with Mr. Pompeo’s position said that he views a division of labor with the Defense Department as an abrogation of the C.I.A.’s authorities.

Mr. Pompeo’s argument seems to be carrying the day with Mr. Trump, who has struck a bellicose tone in seeking to confront extremist groups in Afghanistan, including Al Qaeda, the

Islamic State and the Haqqani network, a faction of the Taliban.

In Mr. Trump's speech last month [outlining his policy for South Asia](#), including Afghanistan, the president promised that he would loosen restrictions on American soldiers to enable them to hunt down terrorists, whom he labeled "thugs and criminals and predators, and — that's right — losers."

"The killers need to know they have nowhere to hide, that no place is beyond the reach of American might and American arms," the president said. "Retribution will be fast and powerful."

Mr. Pompeo may have a potentially important ally: Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr., the top commander in Afghanistan, who reportedly favors any approach to train more firepower on the array of foes of Afghan security forces and the [11,000 or so American troops](#) [advising and assisting them](#).

Mr. Trump has already authorized Mr. Mattis to deploy more troops to Afghanistan. Some 4,000 reinforcements will allow American officers to more closely advise Afghan brigades, train more Afghan Special Operations forces and call in American firepower.

Among the chief targets for the C.I.A. in Afghanistan would be the Haqqani network, whose leader is now the No. 2 in the Taliban and runs its military operations. The Haqqanis have been responsible for many of the deadliest attacks on Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, in the war and are known for running a virtual factory in Pakistan that has steadily supplied suicide bombers since 2005.

Despite their objections, Defense Department officials say they are now somewhat resigned to the outcome and are working out arrangements with the C.I.A. to ensure that United States forces, including Special Operations advisers, are not accidentally targeted, officials said.

Beyond the military, critics see the proposal as another attempt to expand the C.I.A.'s drone wars without answering longstanding questions about whether American spies should be running military-style operations in the shadows.

“One of the things we learned early on in Afghanistan and Iraq was the importance of being as transparent as possible in discussing our military operations,” said Luke Hartig, a senior director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council during the Obama administration.

“Why we took the specific action, who all was killed or injured in the operation, what we were going to do if we had inadvertently killed civilians or damaged property,” he continued. “I don’t know what the Trump administration is specifically considering in Afghanistan, but if their new plans for the war decrease any of that transparency, that would be a big strategic and moral mistake.”

When John O. Brennan, a former top White House counterterrorism adviser, became C.I.A. director in late 2013, he announced an intention to [ratchet back the paramilitary operations](#) that have transformed the agency since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Mr. Brennan’s goal, he said during his confirmation hearings, was to refocus the agency on the traditional work of intelligence collection and espionage that had sometimes been neglected. During those hearings, Mr. Brennan obliquely criticized the performance of American spy agencies in providing intelligence and analysis of the Arab revolutions that began in 2009, and said the C.I.A. needed to cede some of its paramilitary role to the Pentagon.

In a speech in May 2013 in which he sought to redefine American policy toward terrorism, President Barack Obama expanded on that theme, [announcing new procedures](#) for drone operations, which White House officials said would gradually become the responsibility of the Pentagon.

But critics contended that effort, too, proved slow-going, and that Mr. Brennan did not push forcefully for moving all drone operations away from the C.I.A.

Now, with Mr. Pompeo in charge, the agency appears to be aggressively renewing its paramilitary role, and pushing limits on other forms of covert operations outside conflict zones, including in countries where no fighting is underway, such as Iran. A veteran C.I.A. officer viewed as the architect of the drone program was put in charge of [the agency’s Iran](#)

[operations](#) this year, for instance, and Mr. Pompeo has made it clear that he believes the C.I.A. has a robust role to play in fighting militants.

“We broke the back of Al Qaeda,” he said at a public appearance in July, referring to the drone campaign inside Pakistan that decimated the militant network’s leadership ranks.

“We took down their entire network,” he said. “And that’s what we’re going to do again.”