

Impact of the Department of Defense Initiatives on Humanitarian Assistance

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It is a great honor to speak to the Humanitarian Action Summit on the Pentagon's expanding role in US foreign aid—and its impact on humanitarian actions. This subject could not be timelier. Over the past decade, particularly since 9/11, we have seen a dramatic surge of US military involvement in the design and delivery of development, humanitarian, and other forms of non-traditional assistance. The Pentagon has increased its aid role not only in so-called “non-permissive” environments characterized by high-levels of insecurity, but also, increasingly, in permissive or “semi-permissive” environments.

These trends are problematic on a number of fronts—and not only for the humanitarian community. If not corrected, the growing imbalance between the military and civilian components of US global engagement has the potential to do significant damage to US foreign policy. It risks distorting the image and reality of US global engagement; undercutting the leadership role of the Secretary of State and US diplomats; undermining America's long-term development objectives; weakening the oversight role of the US Congress in the uses and impact of US foreign aid; and—of particular influence for this group—complicating the delivery of effective humanitarian assistance and endangering humanitarian actors operating in some of the most desperate countries of the world.

During the past year, a swelling chorus across the political spectrum has called for a re-balancing of the military and civilian sides of the US global engagement, and for investing more in the non-military instruments and institutions that constitute America's “smart power”. Ironically, one of the most effective reform advocates is the Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, who has acknowledged fears of a creeping “militarization” of US foreign policy. Several recent congressional hearings also have illuminated the imbalance. They underscore the need to place diplomacy and development on an equal footing with defense—and to ensure that the complicated problems of instability, poverty, and conflict are addressed in a “whole of government” manner that integrates the relative efforts across agencies.

The balance between civilian and military actors—and the ideal of integrating these efforts—is especially tricky when it comes to humanitarian action. Many aid groups object to the Pentagon's provision of relief and reconstruction assistance, particularly in war-torn contexts. Humanitarians worry that the “humanitarian space” is eroding, thus, reducing their independence, impartiality and neutrality. In contrast, many national security officials consider these aspirations quaint and unrealistic, given the nature of 21st century warfare. Thus, the two sides are groping to better understand each other's needs and perspectives.

With the arrival of the new administration, it makes sense to examine the dynamics behind the Department of Defense's (DoD) growing aid role—and its implications for US foreign development and humanitarian policies.

This morning I hope to do three things: I'll begin by providing an overview of the Pentagon's growing involvement in US foreign assistance, identifying some of the underlying dynamics and drivers behind this trend. I'll then outline the potentially worrisome consequences of these trends, not only

for US foreign and development policy, but also for humanitarian actors and organizations seeking to meet urgent human needs in conflict-prone countries. I'll close by offering some recommendations for a better balance.

Recent Trends and What's Driving Them

In recent years, we've seen a surge in the share of US aid provided directly by the DoD and its Regional Combatant Commands. The Pentagon is increasingly using its own resources to help build the capacities of weak and failing states, and not just in post-conflict and insurgency situations. A few points to highlight:

At an aggregate level, the DoD's share of US foreign aid has surged. There are two dimensions to this:

1. The DoD has become a massive provider of **bilateral security aid**, assuming a role that was formerly the responsibility of the State Department and USAID. Between FY2002 and FY2008, the DoD's share of US global security assistance rose from 6% (\$508 million) to 52% (\$8.6 billion), while that of the State Department declined from 94% to 48%.
2. The DoD is now the major provider of **official development assistance (ODA)**, or aid that is classified as having "development" purposes. Between 1998 and 2005, the Pentagon's share of total US ODA rose from 4% to 22%, or to \$5.5 billion, with the majority spent in Iraq and (to a lesser degree) Afghanistan. Although this has since declined to 18%, it remains at an extremely high level in historical terms.

To facilitate this new role, the DoD has gained expanded authorities to use its own resources to deliver new types of security assistance—and to reimburse allies in the global "war on terror".

3. Under new provisions (Section 1206) of the National Defense Authorization Act, the DoD now has the authority to use its regular budget to *train and equip foreign security forces involved in stability and counter-terrorist operations* (previously under the Department of State).
4. Likewise, the DoD now directs enormous lump sum transfers to friendly governments (e.g., Pakistan, Jordan), to reimburse them for expenses related to the global war on terrorism. These *Coalition Support Funds*, made with little bookkeeping, are in effect massive budget support, replacing funds that traditionally would have been under State Department control. Although neither provision involves humanitarian or development funds, they put a growing military face in US engagement with developing countries.

Within war-torn countries, meanwhile, the DoD has gained unprecedented authorities to use its own resources to provide relief, reconstruction, and governance assistance—much of which counts as "development"-type aid. This includes:

5. *Providing aid directly to local populations*—In both Iraq and Afghanistan, US military officers now enjoy enormous discretion to use Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds for the benefit of local populations. They can use this flexible basket of funds to advance a wide range of humanitarian,

reconstruction, governance, and infrastructure objectives that are fundamentally civilian in nature.

6. *Providing in-country platforms to coordinate US assistance*—In Afghanistan and Iraq, the US has created Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), as mechanisms intended to promote unity of effort among US military and civilian agencies in improving security, delivering good governance, and providing reconstruction assistance at the local level. In practice, PRTs have been overwhelmingly dominated by military personnel and raise the hackles of humanitarian and development actors for blurring the lines between military and civilian activities.
7. *The DoD has even emerged as a "donor" to US government civilian agencies*, providing funds to the State Department and USAID, under so-called Section 1207 authority, to deliver assistance to fragile states and post-conflict countries deemed critical for stability operations and counter-terrorism efforts.
8. *Notably, the Pentagon has repeatedly requested that some of these recently expanded authorities, which to date have been temporary and circumscribed to particular countries, be made permanent and global, through the proposed "Building Global Partnerships Act".*

Beyond these new security and development authorities, the Pentagon, over the past several years, has become involved in a number of regional counter-terrorism efforts that involve civilian-type activities. These include the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). Beyond training foreign security forces, the DoD has undertaken civilian functions as varied as digging wells in Ethiopia or building schools and clinics in coastal Kenya.

Finally, we have seen a trend toward using the DoD's Regional Combatant Commands as platforms for coordinating regional activities of not only of the US military but US civilian agencies. This trend is most apparent in the cases of the US Southern Command (SOUTCOM) and the new US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Both Commands are envisioned as having a "shaping" rather than war-fighting mission. Their goal is to lead US government efforts in ameliorating the sources of conflict and instability in their regions. Admiral James Stavrides, for example, has described SOUTHCOM as a giant "Velcro Cube" that other US agencies could conveniently adhere to, so that the United States government can bring all of its policy instruments to bear in bolstering regional security, good governance, and economic prosperity in the hemisphere. (The DoD often refers to this "shaping" mission as "Phase 0", using the terminology for US war plans, which are divided into discrete phases. But what the DoD calls "Phase 0" or "shaping" is what some of us, until recently, referred to as "foreign policy".)

What's Driving These Trends?

The Pentagon's growing aid role reflects three main factors:

First have been the perceived security requirements of the "Global War on Terrorism," particularly the dangers posed by fragile and war-torn states. During the past few years, the DoD for the first

time has embraced stability and reconstruction operations as a “core” military mission, on a par with war fighting. Beyond this new engagement in nation-building, the Pentagon increasingly is preoccupied with addressing the “roots” of instability and extremism in the developing world. This includes bringing order to the world’s “ungoverned spaces”, which otherwise might allow the activities of terrorists and other illicit actors, and of building the capacities of friendly nations.

The *second factor* is, frankly, *the vacuum left by civilian agencies*, notably the State Department and USAID, which struggle to deploy adequate numbers of personnel and deliver aid effectively within insecure environments. Because civilian agencies have been unable to secure fast-disbursing contingency funds, build deployable civilian capabilities, or make a major impact in the field, the Pentagon has rushed to try fill the gap, whether the objective is training Iraqi police forces or delivering aid through quick-disbursing CERP funds. From the DoD’s perspective, the central issue is not whether the agency is military or civilian, but which agency can get the job done. This January, the Pentagon even announced the creation of a *Civilian Expeditionary Workforce*—a standing body of DoD civilians trained and equipped to deploy in support of the US military in contingencies ranging from humanitarian missions to stability operations and drug interdiction.

The *third factor* in the DoD’s surging aid role—closely related to the second—is *chronic under-investment by successive US administrations and Congress in the in non-military instruments of US power and influence*. This has created an imbalance between the military and civilian components of US global engagement, particularly in fragile states. The result is a mismatch between authorities granted to the Secretary of State to lead the country’s global engagement (including the FAA), and the modest resources actually devoted to the Department of State, USAID, and other civilian agencies compared to the gargantuan budget of the Pentagon.

The massive capabilities and resources of the Pentagon exert a *constant gravitational pull*, tugging at civilian leadership in US foreign policy. Because there is little prospect that the Department of State will get adequate funds in the right accounts, there is a natural temptation to go in the other direction, by providing the DoD with new authority (albeit temporary and circumscribed to date). (Two classic instances of this work-around are 1206 and 1207 funds).

What Are the Consequences of the Militarization of US Foreign Assistance?

The Pentagon’s expansion into foreign assistance reflects an understandable effort to work around deficient civilian capacities. And, it has generated some short-term benefits in insecure environments. At the same time, it poses risks to the coherence of US foreign policy, the image of the US abroad, and the sustainability of US efforts to build stable, democratic, and economically prosperous states in the developing world. If not carefully managed, it could distort broader US foreign policy goals by putting a military face on US global engagement; undermine development objectives in target countries; and exacerbate the long-standing imbalance in resources the US currently budgets to military and civilian components of state-building.

The Pentagon’s foray into some humanitarian assistance activities also creates problems both for humanitarian agencies and service providers, reducing the perceived independence and neutrality of humanitarian actors and at times exposing them to additional security risks.

Experience suggests that the Pentagon’s expanding role in foreign aid is not good diplomacy. It’s not good development. It’s not good humanitarian assistance. Let’s take a few examples.

Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP)—CERP funds have given military commanders critical resources to win the political support of local populations and deliver benefits on the ground. At same time, experience suggests major shortcomings. There has been little strategy, doctrine, or training in their use, and input from US diplomats and development professionals has been negligible. And while CERP provides useful “walking around money” to purchase consent among certain power-wielders, its long-term impact on good governance and reconstruction is uneven at best.

Likewise, PRTs have had some successes in improving human security, rebuilding some infrastructure, and providing a liaison with local authorities. But, their performance has been uneven, thanks to an ambiguous mandate, the lack of strategic planning or baseline assessments of local needs; inadequate civilian resources and personnel; and poor development practice. Too often, PRTs have built schools without teachers or clinics without staff. They also have clashed with NGOs involved in humanitarian and development work, who blame them for blurring the line between civilian and military activities.

Similar criticisms can be made of a number of DoD-dominated regional counter-terrorism programs, particularly in Africa—The rationale for these programs is to help partner governments not only control their borders and territories and deprive extremists of safe havens, but also prevent conflict, advance good government, and provide social and economic opportunities to win the hearts and minds of potentially disaffected populations. Unfortunately, the bulk of activities are conducted by the US military, with only a modest civilian component. In some cases, the military is conducting activities through civil affairs teams (i.e., digging wells) that might more appropriately be done by civilian actors.

DoD Combatant Commands—Finally, the recent trend to make Regional Combatant Commands hubs for interagency coordination of US engagement with particular regions is problematic. This has been most controversial in the case of AFRICOM. At one level, the decision to create a single DoD command for Africa is a timely bureaucratic reorganization. AFRICOM has the potential to help improve Africa’s peacekeeping capabilities, and help to professionalize African militaries and security sectors, thus strengthening national controls over borders, coastal waters, and airspace.

What is more problematic, as noted in a just released GAO report, is the idea of using AFRICOM—as the main platform for integrating US engagement with a particular region. The

issue is partly one of *time frame*, since any effort to ameliorate state weakness and advance stability will require a patient, long-term approach to institution-building, not quick fixes, as well as expertise in development, governance, and the particular history and culture of the countries in question. The problem is both substantive and symbolic. Given the huge asymmetry between the resources available to civilian agencies and the DoD, the risk is that initiatives policies emerging from any command will be dominated by Pentagon priorities, putting a military face on US regional engagement and undercutting the authority of the National Safety Council, the Secretary of State, and US ambassadors in individual countries.

Humanitarian Assistance

Of all the challenges posed by the DoD's growing aid role, the most complicated may be its expanding involvement in humanitarian assistance. Of course, the US military has long provided humanitarian relief, dating from the Berlin airlift to Hurricane Mitch. The DoD continues to provide lifesaving relief during disasters and large-scale emergencies, and for the most part, its role in such operations is fairly uncontroversial. Where it becomes much more problematic is when the US military conceives and delivers "humanitarian"-type aid as part of a broader "civic action" effort in areas in which the US military is conducting stability, counter-insurgency, and counter-terrorist operations. This often places the US military in direct proximity with civilian actors, including international NGOs, who are delivering similar sorts of aid according to traditional humanitarian principles. This can present intense dilemmas for civil-military coordination. The US military and humanitarian actors often fail to agree on their diagnosis of the problem—much less how to resolve it.

Let's look first at *"pure" humanitarian action*. Given its unrivaled logistical capabilities, the DoD often is called upon to serve when speed is of the essence or the size of a disaster so necessitates, as in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami or the earthquake in Pakistan. The DoD supplies much of its routine humanitarian aid through the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster and Civic Action (or OHDACA) account. The scope of the DoD's humanitarian-relevant activities is vast, ranging from air and sealift to medical services for refugees to rudimentary construction and engineering.

Generally speaking, the DoD seeks to avoid overexposure to purely humanitarian operations, insisting, where possible, that civilian relief agencies act as first responders, except where US military forces already are involved or when the DoD can provide a unique capability.

At the same time, the Pentagon believes that its involvement in humanitarian action can have important instrumental benefits. At the tactical level, it provides training opportunities and operational experience to US troops. At the strategic level, it can influence regional attitudes toward the United States and improve bilateral relations with the host nation, as well as the image of the US among local populations. The Pentagon has described OHDACA funds as "a key shaping tool" that permits commanders "to interact with governments, indigenous organizations, and ordi-

nary citizens to establish long-term, positive relationships, mitigating terrorist influence and preventing conflict". After the Pakistan earthquake and the Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, the Pentagon responded quickly to strategically important, Muslim-majority nations. Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared, "Every effort we take to demonstrate the depth of America's compassion and generosity is an important step in the global war on terror."

In general, civilian-military coordination of humanitarian assistance tends to be relatively smooth when it comes to the military's role in disaster response, although it is not without its frictions. Three recurrent gaps include: (1) lack of joint planning between the US military and civilian agencies to anticipate and prepare for emergencies; (2) conflicting or contradictory signals from civilian agencies about what they want from the DoD and its combatant commands when a disaster strikes; and (3) failure of DoD Humanitarian assistance (HAST) teams and USAID Disaster Assistance Response (DART) teams to collaborate on needs assessments. All of these problems are manageable.

Where the DoD's expanding humanitarian role becomes far more controversial is when the military delivers such aid as part of its "civic action" efforts during protracted complex emergencies, stability operations, and situations of irregular warfare. In the Pentagon's view, humanitarian relief and civic action activities are critical to enhance operational effectiveness of the US military; minimize unintended harm to civilians; assist information and intelligence gathering; and win the trust and confidence of local populations.

Civilian actors, and particularly NGO service providers, tend to regard DoD involvement in this realm as deeply problematic. This indictment has at two parts.

First, they argue, DoD assistance is invariably inferior and skews local humanitarian and development outcomes. As an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study concluded a decade ago, civilians are more effective than soldiers in delivering humanitarian aid, in both conflict and non-conflict situations. This includes interacting with local populations; providing appropriate medical care, water and sanitation; and managing refugee camps. And because the DoD has massive resources, but rarely benefits from the expertise of humanitarian and development professionals, its activities can easily undermine the authority and capacity of local governance structures, by substituting for it or bypassing it to create parallel structures.

This argument has significant merit. The US military often fails to gain timely input from humanitarian and development professionals in the design of Quick Impact Projects. This certainly has been the case when it comes to the use of CERP funds and the activities of PRTs. As a result, projects that may be well-intentioned sometimes fail to meet the most basic human needs or prove to be unsustainable. Addressing these shortcomings will require greater investment in deployable USAID and other civilian capabilities.

Second, and even more problematically, the NGOs argue that DoD aid endangers humanitarian actors by blurring the boundary between civilian and military roles in the eyes of the local population and belligerent groups. The result is to undermine traditional humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, and neutrality; degrade

respect for humanitarian symbols; and expose such actors to unacceptable security risks. Rather than seeking to duplicate the role that international humanitarian and development actors can perform more effectively and less expensively, aid organizations argue, that the military instead should focus on providing ambient security so that civilian agencies and NGO actors can do their jobs.

The argument that humanitarian action by the US military causes belligerents to target international NGOs and aid workers is the subject of vigorous debate. Many US military officials and security analysts dispute the claim. They argue that the targeting of aid groups in Afghanistan, for instance, has less to do with the behavior of the US military than with the fact that civilian aid organizations present the Taliban with attractive “soft targets”.

More generally, the nature of modern irregular warfare has made the very notion of humanitarian “impartiality, neutrality, and independence” outmoded, since distinctions between combatants and non-combatants break down in practice. In Afghanistan, insurgents may well associate *anyone* working for safety, stability, and progress as being allied with the central government and committed to values—such as human rights and education for girls—that smack of alien, western concepts. This “guilt by association” will not suddenly disappear if the US military stops delivering its own aid projects.

Faced with this new threat environment, NGOs in non-permissive environments may face a unpleasant options: (1) to stand out, like UN peacekeepers, with emblems that make their neutral status visible; (2) to armor up, by contracting for their own security; or (3) to blend in, by seeking to be as unobtrusive as possible. Each option has its drawbacks. None of these is particularly palatable. The first—*standing out*—may be too dangerous, given the devaluing of humanitarian insignias; the second—*armoring up*—can impede access by frightening away would-be beneficiaries; and the third—*blending in*—is not always realistic in highly insecure environments. This may leave a fourth unsatisfactory choice: (4) bug out!

There is no question that humanitarianism faces a crisis in the age of modern warfare. But there also is growing evidence that heavy DoD involvement can endanger humanitarian aid providers and make things worse, encouraging locals to confuse NGO humanitarian and development efforts as part of a broader US military strategy. By definition, the military cannot be an impartial provider of assistance, because it represents a distinct political agenda and includes an armed component. Soldiers involved in such activity do not generally operate within the society itself, on the basis of trust, but behind fortified bases. In Afghanistan and Iraq, insurgents have attacked NGOs seen as associated with PRTs and the military. The Pentagon has complicated the situation by insisting “all USAID-funded staff co-locate on US military bases and seek DoD approvals and security clearances in order to have access to USAID.” This increases the perception, as Colin Powell once famously said, that humanitarian NGOs are “force multipliers” for US foreign policy.

Recommendations

What steps can be taken to address the downsides of the Pentagon’s expanding role in foreign assistance, including the provision of humanitarian aid?

The US is today at crossroads in defining its global engagement. Despite rhetorical attention to America’s security, foreign policy, development, and humanitarian stakes in failing and post-conflict states, as a nation the US continues to under-invest in the civilian instruments that will allow us to bolster institutions in the world’s fragile states and respond effectively to suffering in those countries. The good news is that these risks and dangers of over-reliance on the US military are increasingly recognized, even within the Pentagon.

To rebalance the role of the DoD and civilian agencies and actors, the Obama administration should take the following five steps.

1. *At the Level of Strategy, the White House should formulate, and Congress bless, an integrated US Government strategy for Conflict Prevention and Response.* This document would clarify the roles and responsibilities of US government agencies to advance conflict prevention and deliver US foreign assistance, including humanitarian aid, in the aftermath of violent conflict. Generally speaking, the justification for a lead DoD role in foreign aid varies with permissiveness of operating environment. In highly insecure settings, US soldiers sometimes may be the only actors capable of providing urgent aid. But the rationale for DoD leadership is far less compelling where civilian agencies have a mandate and, in principle, skills to be in forefront. This strategy should implemented by a new *Deputy National Security Advisor for Conflict Prevention and Response*.
2. *Regarding Combatant Commands: The Obama administration should ensure that the mandates and activities of Combatant Commands are narrowly framed and embedded in a larger US government strategy:* Congress should insist that the Commands play a *supporting* (rather than “supported”) role in the service of US strategy toward their regions, implementing US policy that is determined not at the Combatant Command, but in Washington at the National Safety Council and the Department of State and in civilian-led country teams within US embassies. The administration should support full USAID staffing of senior development adviser positions at each US combatant command, including individuals with expertise in emergency relief. This will ensure that the new Africa Command plays a supporting rather than supported role toward the African continent, in the service of a strategy dominated by civilian agencies and actors that balances attention to security, good governance, and development in the region. The main thrust of AFRICOM’s own activities should be security focused, including military training and based security sector reform.
3. *With respect to resources: As Bob Gates has said, “It has become clear that America’s civilian institutions of diplomacy and development have been chronically undermanned and underfunded for too long.”* Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made similar points in her confirmation hearings. The administration’s budget goes a very small way towards beginning to rectify this sit-

uation, calling for a 10% increase in the International Affairs or so-called 150 account. *The administration and Congress must go further, supporting a major increase in budgets of both the State Department and USAID, to ensure that civilian agencies have access to the flexible resources and personnel they need to do what is being asked of them.* This includes:

- a. Accelerating the ramping up of Foreign Service officers at the Department of State and USAID;
 - b. Restoring USAID's technical and professional expertise;
 - c. Fully funding the Department of State's Civilian Stabilization Initiative to create a deployable cadre of civilians to conflict zones; and
 - d. Providing greater funding for civilian humanitarian and reconstruction activities, by ramping up the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance and creating a State Department controlled Conflict Response Fund.
4. *The administration must balance the roles of the DoD and civilian agencies in the field.* The military's humanitarian and civic action role should be reduced to the minimum required, as well-resourced civilian agencies shoulder the burden. All humanitarian and development assistance projects under consideration by the DoD, including those by PRTs, should be subject to USAID review and joint needs assessments.

5. *Humanitarian Space*, Priorities include:

- a. Continuing the ongoing dialogue between DoD and NGO actors on their respective needs in violent or "non-permissive" environments, to facilitate understanding—if not necessarily agreement;
- b. Providing US military officers and enlisted troops with training on humanitarian practice and law and the role of NGOs;
- c. Ending the Pentagon's requirement that USAID-funded NGOs co-locate on military bases and follow DoD administrative procedures; and
- d. Taking steps to improve information sharing about security threats in areas in which both are operating. Developing some workable "rules of the road" is urgent, but also obviously delicate, given the classified nature of much DoD information, on the one hand, and the risks for NGOs of being perceived as part of an intelligence gathering operation on the other.

None of these steps will overcome what at times is a real clash of conflicting imperatives—the imperative of war and the imperative of humanitarian action. But such a regular dialogue may help to manage some unrealistic expectations about what each side can provide, while permitting agreement on an important set of humanitarian principles.