



## Restoring U.S. Civilian Capacity and Authority to Manage Foreign Assistance

The increasing involvement of the U.S. military in development and humanitarian assistance is a growing concern for Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and other private voluntary organizations (PVOs). Through new programs and initiatives, the U.S. military is pushing beyond its traditional security mandate to provide and influence development, humanitarian, and reconstruction assistance. This larger role for the Department of Defense (DoD) is attributed to inadequate resources and depleted capacity of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department. The advent of an integrated foreign policy approach, which combines security, political and development instruments to support U.S. strategic security objectives, also contributes to this expanded role for the military. This “whole of government” approach does not provide adequate guidance on the roles and responsibilities for different actors within the U.S. government, leaving space for a well-resourced military to take on greater and inappropriate responsibilities in foreign assistance. CRS questions the integrity and effectiveness of U.S. development and humanitarian assistance when managed and implemented by the U.S. military in support of security objectives.

### Statements of Concern

CRS’ concerns related to the expansion of the U.S. military into development and humanitarian assistance were made more urgent by the U.S.-led invasions of and continued conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, our concerns also stem from new military initiatives in Africa and Latin America.

- The U.S. military views development and humanitarian assistance primarily as a tool to further short-term strategic objectives, as opposed to a tool for alleviating human suffering or reducing poverty. Under the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership, the U.S. military engages in development and humanitarian assistance to “reduce extremist ideologies” that threaten U.S. national security interests.
- Short-term, quick-impact projects implemented by the U.S. military are largely unsuitable and unsustainable because they address the symptoms, not the underlying causes and conditions, of poverty. Projects designed for short-term strategic gains do not account for community ownership and participation, which are essential for addressing the long-term needs of beneficiaries.
- Such humanitarian and development assistance projects provided by the military can undermine sustainable development and ultimately hinder the mission of preventing conflict and promoting sustainability. Under the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, the U.S. military provides humanitarian assistance with the Ethiopian Defense Forces to “legitimize authority of local government.” Given the local unpopularity of the alliance between the U.S. and Ethiopia in the war on terror, assistance can not only alienate local communities, but also be met with suspicion and hostility. Success of hearts and minds activities requires favorable perceptions among local populations. In their absence, development is undermined, as is CJTF-HOA’s strategic mission of preventing conflict and promoting stability.
- The principles of independence and impartiality are the basis of our acceptance in communities. Blurred boundaries between civilian and military actors in the field undermine these humanitarian principles of independence and impartiality, heightening insecurity for staff, partners and beneficiaries and restricting access to communities. In Afghanistan, the military’s use of “hearts and minds” tactics, the delivery of assistance in civilian clothing, and the conditionality placed on military-led humanitarian aid challenge the distinction between humanitarian and military action.

Humanitarian and development assistance should remain the responsibility of civilian actors, including USAID, the State Department and PVOs. Drawing on their expertise and training, military forces should perform the security tasks they are uniquely qualified to perform. The well-being of people affected by poverty, disasters and conflict is the priority of the relief and development community. PVOs have the local knowledge,

technical expertise and long-term perspective that are essential for creating responsible and effective responses to human needs.

## **Recommendations**

CRS recommends that the Obama Administration support the following reforms to address concerns about diminished capacity and authority of U.S. civilian agencies to manage foreign assistance:

**Define poverty reduction and human development as the central purposes of development and humanitarian assistance.** Assistance that aims to reduce poverty and promote human development is a strategic imperative for the U.S. While recognizing that poverty and injustice can alienate populations from states, increase the risk of conflict and undermine state's capacity to govern and – ultimately – present national security concerns for the U.S., CRS maintains that development and humanitarian assistance should not be framed by national security interests. As development has become part of the U.S. national security strategy, it has been increasingly integrated under military doctrine and strategy to achieve national security interests. Development and humanitarian assistance will only be effective when designed and implemented to alleviate poverty and promote human development.

**Support legislation to rebuild the U.S. civilian agencies responsible for promoting development and responding to human needs.** The Obama administration must firmly place development on equal footing with diplomacy and defense in achieving national security interests. Heightened recognition of development must be accompanied by revitalization of U.S. civilian capacity and authority to manage foreign assistance, which has steadily migrated to the Defense Department. The U.S. must significantly increase the funding of civilian agencies so they can begin to rebuild strong staff with broad development expertise. Stronger capacity will allow for greater civilian participation in strategic foreign policy considerations, balancing a scale that currently favors Defense.

**Ensure that DoD authorities and programs that duplicate those of civilian counterparts are temporary, limited in geographic and programmatic scope, and meticulously coordinated with State and USAID.** Under the Bush administration, the Defense Department received expanded authorities that have allowed the U.S. military to influence the purpose of development resources and implement directly development activities. An unchecked expansion of these authorities and programs will further undermine the role of the DoD's civilian counterparts in shaping U.S. foreign policy, a role granted to USAID and State under the Foreign Assistance Act. While these authorities and programs *may* be necessary under hostile, insecure conditions, where USG implementing partners cannot operate due to insecurity, they must be temporary, limited in scope, and coordinated with U.S. departments and agencies.

**Create transparent evaluation mechanisms for Department of Defense programs and activities related to development, humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.** The Defense Department does not have a methodology for measuring the effectiveness of its development and humanitarian activities. For this reason, it is difficult to test the assumption that has largely justified the Defense Department's implementation of development activities – that development *directly* supports U.S. national security interests. Without measures for demonstrating the causal link between development and security, it is not possible to determine which humanitarian activities that military forces undertake support security objectives, if any. The DoD should be required to demonstrate the utility of specific development activities for security interests and – at the same time – monitor and evaluate development and humanitarian activities according to international standards and best practices. Continued Congressional funding for the programs (e.g. CERP) that have grown in scope and scale should be contingent upon the DoD's willingness to develop transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

CRS believes that these recommendations will restore proper civilian control of development, humanitarian, and reconstruction assistance, while also improving the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance programs. To the extent that poverty reduction, human development, and the promotion of human dignity contribute to global stability, they will also more certainly strengthen our national security.