

Civilian-Military Cooperation: What's Next?

To many, the linkage between conventional development and military action remains unclear. Development is by nature civilian-based, inclusive, and long-term; military operations tend to be direct, decisive, and concerned with conducting or preventing war. Yet the two are inextricably linked: Both are fundamentally rooted in promoting U.S. interests and protecting national security. Development is distinct from counterinsurgency, and should remain so, but its time-proven principles can inform effective engagement within warzone communities. The question is, “What more can be done to enhance USAID’s capabilities to work alongside the U.S. military while safeguarding its core mission?”

Aid workers rarely question the value of Department of Defense (DoD) support to large-scale humanitarian operations like the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the 2011 Pakistan earthquake. Nor would many question the need for tightly integrated planning when development workers operate in unsecure (non-permissive) environments. But a decade of

U.S. military working alongside USAID and its implementing partners in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere has underscored the gap that separates the two communities and the need for improved operational capabilities on both sides. DoD should focus on developing its capabilities to work effectively in interagency environments, and USAID officers need to gain better familiarity with how the military plans and executes its operations. We must pay serious attention to developing the tools and approaches to address instability and violence, which often pose the greatest threat to sustainable development. The benefit to doing so will be to achieve development results that would not be possible through civilian or military programs conducted alone.

Growth in Civilian-Military Collaboration

Over the past decade, coordination and collaboration of development with DoD became common, accelerating rapidly since the creation of the Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation in 2005. USAID



Pakistani aid workers offload food supplies from a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter to aid flood survivors in Kalam Valley on August 10, 2010. In 2010, torrential monsoon rains lashed Pakistan for two weeks, triggering catastrophic flooding. | AFP Photo: Behrouz Mehri

developed, and the DoD has widely adopted, a framework for analyzing the dynamics of conflict in non-permissive environments, such as Afghanistan, and has trained thousands of ground troops in this approach, using DoD funding. The placement of Military Liaison Representatives from the DoD's geographic combatant commands (COCOMs) within USAID and the placement of USAID Senior Development Advisors inside the COCOMs and Joint Staff has opened the door for effective, real-time civilian-military cooperation.

USAID routinely approves or advises on the expenditure of DoD funds for humanitarian and civic action purposes. These linkages have already yielded significant benefits to U.S. national security, ranging from rapid and effective coordination

in the response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake, extensive development and stabilization activities in coordination with Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and joint exercises and experiments for humanitarian assistance and stabilization responses.

Considerable Gaps Remain

Aid workers have voiced understandable concern about being too closely associated with U.S. military objectives. USAID implementing partners are sensitive about how they are viewed in the eyes of their counterparts—with whom they must develop relationships based on trust. Securitization of the U.S. presence overseas has made it difficult to interact with host-country counterparts.

On the other side, military planners assigned to interagency work are typically frustrated by the apparent lack of a chain of command, the inexplicable need for consensus in decision-making, and the chronic lack of resources and personnel. The imbalance in resources and personnel is such that USAID can generally afford only one advisor to serve an entire COCOM. These tensions can lead

Development partners will need to be adept at working in the civilian, military, and civil-society environments. No single agency can do this alone.

to mutual suspicion and parallel planning efforts in isolation from one another. Both sides must work assiduously to mitigate these tensions.

Daunting as the challenges of institutional alignment may be, there are some encouraging signs from the field. USAID cooperation with the military has made some significant gains in the past five years or so—particularly in these three areas: stabilization operations, like those in Colombia and Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas; training of USAID and military personnel in joint civilian-military operations; and coordination of humanitarian assistance interventions. Each of these deserves a closer look:

- **Stabilization has yet to be recognized as a discipline distinct from conventional development.** In countries like Afghanistan, tools provided for long-term institutional change are pressed into service to achieve short-term

effects. In such cases, tactical gains can be made at the expense of strategic goals. But there is growing evidence of USAID’s influence on DoD’s broader counterinsurgency strategy. Among the themes familiar to development practitioners are the critical role of host-country ownership in countering violent extremism, the importance of integrating gender analysis into conflict, the value of effective monitoring and evaluation, and the critical necessity of understanding the host country context in program design. A recent U.S. Army study highlighted USAID’s efforts and the development approach in military operations in the Philippines, where the Agency has enjoyed a strong relationship with the Joint Special Operations Task Force for many years.¹ The Army’s Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24)² reflects a development approach to stabilization, and USAID is having increasing success in influencing core DoD policy documents, including Guidance for the Employment of the Force, the Quadrennial Defense Review, and the regional Theater Security Cooperation Plans, which are now shared with USAID regional bureaus as a matter of course. It is significant that in the workshops now underway to redraft FM 3-24, the authors have expressed particular interest in the role of gender in conflict analysis.³ These efforts should continue, but the time has come to address stabilization as a separate discipline from development and counterinsurgency. This could begin

1 Seth Bodnar and Jeremy Gwinn, “‘Monetary Ammunition’ in a Counterinsurgency,” *Parameters*, U.S. Army War College, August 2010.

2 “Counterinsurgency,” Field Manual 3-24, Headquarters, Department of the Army, December 2006. The document is currently undergoing a substantial review based on the past five years’ experience in the field.

3 The *United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (released by The White House in December 2011) notes that, in Afghanistan, U.S. and NATO forces have established gender advisors to assist commanders in identifying the differing effects that a potential operation may have on local men and women.



Rear Admiral Carol Pottenger, commander of Task Force 76, speaks with USAID personnel aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) after meeting with American and Bangladeshi military and government personnel to help plan Tropical Cyclone Sidr relief efforts on November 24, 2007.

Photo: Peter R. Miller/U.S. Marine Corps

with a serious retrospective examination of what has worked on the ground over the past decade and culminate in a whole-of-government policy on stabilization that applies shared metrics of success to guide civilian and military efforts. These efforts would help to propel stabilization into a recognized and distinct discipline that can be established with appropriate funding and institutional support.

- **Training in civilian-military cooperation has expanded, but must move beyond the briefings and online courses now available for use in preparing missions.** The goal of joint training and personnel exchanges should be to develop a body of qualified civilian and military professionals adept at civilian-military coordination and joint operations, able to

work together in the field toward a shared objective in permissive and non-permissive environments. This can only succeed if the civilian-military collaboration function is recognized as a legitimate discipline and not a temporary rotational assignment. Interagency exchanges should continue and expand, and such exchanges should be viewed as career-enhancing rather than a departure from a successful career path. USAID does not tend to value training and education in the same way as the military, which poses difficulties for designing effective joint training experiences. But if it is true that “everything depends on personal relationships,” the concerned agencies should explore and encourage the assignments and rotations that build these relationships.

- **Coordination in complex crisis response is clearly improving, as evidenced in humanitarian relief efforts in Haiti and Pakistan.**

In peacetime, DoD can expand its support to the militaries of countries cooperating in disaster reduction, response, and mitigation. Security Sector Reform (SSR) on the civilian side should be complemented by similar DoD efforts aimed at professionalization of host-country military forces. Military-to-military cooperation in SSR should be guided by the same principles used in civilian work, like supporting host-country ownership, incorporating good governance and respect for human rights, which links security and justice and fosters transparency. This cooperation can apply the recognized principles of “Do No Harm” that have guided NGO work around the world for many years.⁴ Planning efforts should focus less on crisis response and more on building partner capacity to strengthen resiliency.

The coming decades will challenge our institutional agility and ability to adapt. The information revolution, the media, non-state actors, the growing role of civil society, the flow of refugees

⁴ Mary Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999). The text is used in training provided by the USAID/Ethiopia Mission to Civil Affairs teams in the Horn of Africa.

and internally displaced persons, and resource conflicts are thrusting civilian and military personnel into the same arena. To succeed, development partners will need to be adept at working in the civilian, military, and civil-society environments to build partnerships that form a strong network. No single agency can do this alone.

Aid workers understand that, in the end, development is the only effective long-term guarantor of U.S. national security. USAID contributes a powerful set of tools to help create peace and stability around the globe. DoD’s role is to ensure the security conditions are in place so that countries can transition toward peace that can take root and grow. The effectiveness of U.S. government involvement depends on coordinated action between the two. Few believe that the need for military action will disappear in our lifetimes. The challenge for USAID is to demonstrate that a development approach to conflict prevention and global security issues is cost-effective and scalable.

Richard Byess is a retired USAID Foreign Service Officer and has served in USAID’s Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation since 2006. The views expressed in this essay are his own, and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.