



Swords and Ploughshares

Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul

Reuben E. Brigety II March 2009



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Open letter to President Obama

March 19, 2009

Nearing its eighth year, the war in Afghanistan is one of the most pressing foreign policy challenges of the Obama administration. The intersection of hostile insurgents, a weak national government, a booming opium poppy trade, and an unstable neighbor in Pakistan means the crisis in Afghanistan defies solution through military means alone. There are many studies available on the best military approaches to take in this conflict, but there have been comparatively few efforts to examine how the United States and its allies should best use its foreign assistance resources to achieve success.

Afghanistan, of course, is but one of a series of complex challenges facing the United States. From Iraq to Sudan and Haiti to North Korea, the United States must rethink how it employs all instruments of its national power—including defense, diplomacy, and development—to achieve our national security objectives around the world. The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress has issued a series of reports offering details on how U.S. national security policy would benefit from an expanded implementation of development assistance and the related tools to utilize these capabilities. A list of our work is displayed on the opposite page.

As part of its work in this area, the Center decided to examine the current situation in Afghanistan. In partnership with the Institute for State Effectiveness, CAP developed an innovative scenario exercise to test how much “bang for the buck” the U.S. government could achieve in stabilization and reconstruction operations if it undertook many of the foreign assistance reforms advocated in previous CAP reports. If the application of a Sustainable Security model proved to be effective in Afghanistan, then it might be usefully applied in other areas of concern as well.

The exercise invited a series of leading Afghanistan and foreign assistance experts to spend three days at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia. Under the guidance of expert facilitators from the ISE and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, participants recreated the strategic planning process in Washington and the operational planning process in Kabul. The foreign assistance tools available to them were made increasingly robust over time, and the decision making of the group was examined to determine how the improvement in foreign assistance mechanisms affected the quality of strategic and operational plans that were developed. The results of the exercise are included in the enclosed technical study, “Swords and Ploughshares: Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul.”

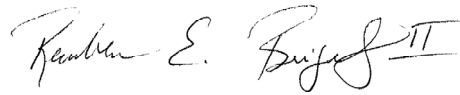
Over the course of three days, we learned the following essential lesson:

If the United States is to be effective conducting stabilization and reconstruction operations in fragile states such as Afghanistan and beyond, then robust foreign assistance reform is urgently required.

Despite the selfless dedication of America's brave fighting forces, the war in Afghanistan cannot be won through military means alone. It is essential to bring all instruments of national power—including elements of defense, diplomacy, and development—to bear on the problem. Yet America's development assistance mechanisms in their current configuration are not up to the challenge. That is why robust reforms should be seen as a key national security priority.

We hope this report sheds light both on the path forward in Afghanistan and on the importance of enabling a sustainable security approach to U.S. foreign policy. The moment has never been more urgent to address them both.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Reuben E. Brigety II". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Reuben" and last name "Brigety" being more legible than the middle initial "E." and the suffix "II".

Reuben E. Brigety II, Ph.D.
Director
Sustainable Security Program,
Center for American Progress

Executive summary

The breadth and complexity of the security challenges facing the United States abroad often defy solution through the application of military force alone. The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress over the past year generated a series of analyses to examine alternative approaches to conventional notions of national security—alongside policy recommendations to strengthen the non-military tools of U.S. power. All of this work is based on the premise that the United States can best promote its security interests abroad by supporting the essential needs of citizens around the world, especially in poor and unstable countries.

Yet the ability of the U.S. government to improve the lives of others in countries with varying degrees of instability does not match its ability to wage decisive combat operations. There is a fundamental mismatch between the civilian and military aspects of American power—a mismatch that undermines the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy, particularly the effective implementation of foreign assistance programs across the spectrum of conflict. This must be corrected to achieve near-term successes in immediate crises facing the United States, such as in Afghanistan today, as well as to ensure the long-term viability of U.S. foreign policy objectives abroad.

With the assistance of the Institute for State Effectiveness, the Center for American Progress sponsored a simulation exercise to assess the impact of various foreign assistance reforms on the ability of the U.S. government to stabilize countries in crisis, choosing Afghanistan as the crucible because of the immediate need for the United States to confront the crisis now confronting policymakers there. Approximately 20 experts with significant experience in development assistance around the world and in Afghanistan were invited to participate. The exercise was designed to test the hypothesis that reforming key aspects of America's foreign assistance architecture would significantly improve the government's ability to foster a stable environment in Afghanistan.

Going into the exercise, we presumed that if this specific conclusion proved correct in Afghanistan, then we could reasonably infer that such improvements might help the U.S. government to perform stabilization missions effectively in other conflict environments as well. Coming out of the three-day simulation exercise at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, Virginia, we realized that our original premise—that robust foreign assistance reforms outlined in our Sustainable Security analyses (see Page 2 for details) would secure U.S.

foreign policy objectives abroad—was not sufficient to bring about success in Afghanistan. In fact, even more sweeping reforms were required to stabilize and then turn around the security situation in Afghanistan.

Major results

The results of the exercise yielded five major conclusions for foreign assistance reform generally and for U.S. policy toward Afghanistan in particular:

- **Integrated planning and programming in Washington and abroad is essential.** U.S. foreign assistance mechanisms must be flexible and robust enough to have an immediate and enduring strategic impact abroad.
- **Counterinsurgency and development strategies must be intertwined.** U.S. development assistance must be focused first in the most militarily secure areas of the country to build momentum and demonstrate success to other areas of the country still struggling with basic security problems.
- **Catalytic development of local development assistance capabilities is paramount.** U.S. policies must build local capacity and demonstrable domestic solutions rather than building dependence on external support from abroad.
- **Development professionals matter.** Hire enough development professionals to put them everywhere they are needed.
- **“Maximalist” measures are insufficient.** Strengthening foreign assistance will require more reform than we thought.

In the pages that follow, the simulation exercises conducted over three days will be detailed alongside the conclusions drawn from them. A complete breakdown of the simulation model employed in the exercise and the list of participants and their roles in the exercise over the course of those three days is available online at the Sustainable Security page on the Center for American Progress Web site. Together, this report demonstrates that success in Afghanistan (and by inference success in other unstable trouble spots abroad) will require the Obama administration to retool its foreign assistance programs quickly and efficiently in the coming months and years. U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives will be much better served because of the effort.

Introduction

In recent years, two separate but related debates have garnered significant attention among U.S. foreign policy and development experts. The first is the need to reform the U.S. foreign assistance structure. The second encompasses the search for stability in Afghanistan.

The Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress believes that the attainment of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan depends, in large measure, on improving the socio-economic circumstances of Afghan civilians through the provision of basic government services and the growth of an economy grounded in legitimate activities—not the cultivation of poppy seeds for the production of opium, which is far and away Afghanistan’s principle money crop. Markedly improving the daily lives of the majority of Afghans would provide their central government with greater legitimacy in the eyes of the population, undermine popular support for the Taliban insurgency, and provide alternate activities for many young men who are now engaging in armed conflict.

Regrettably, the mechanisms of the U.S. government to facilitate socioeconomic development worldwide are under considerable strain, not least in Afghanistan. Congressional earmarks limit program innovation on the ground. The dearth of qualified development professionals in the required numbers within the U.S. government often inhibits the effective monitoring, implementation, and reach of key foreign assistance projects. And perhaps worst of all, development activities performed by various U.S. government agencies are not formally coordinated via a coherent strategy.

While these and other shortcomings affect U.S. foreign assistance programs around the world, they have proven to be acutely problematic in Afghanistan. The absence of robust and effective foreign aid mechanisms often prevents the U.S. military from consolidating and capitalizing on its combat gains in the country. Furthermore, many of the problems with the foreign assistance program in Afghanistan manifest themselves in other countries, to greater or lesser degrees and across the spectrum of conflict.

Recognition of the failures of U.S. foreign assistance programs and strategies has led many development advocates to lobby for sweeping reform of our foreign aid system. Similarly, national security experts concerned about the stability of Afghanistan are increasingly calling for the improvement and strengthening of civilian development capabilities to complement the military efforts of the U.S. military and our allies in Afghanistan.

The Center for American Progress is one of the few organizations active in both debates, arguing for the reform of U.S. foreign assistance mechanisms generally, and for increased development efforts in Afghanistan in particular in order to help out military forces achieve lasting success. This dual approach is consistent with the central premise of our Sustainable Security Program—ensuring the security of the United States and our national interests abroad depends in large measure on supporting the essential needs of individuals around the world, especially in the most poor and unstable countries. The Center has produced a number of studies to advance the theoretical components of the sustainable security model and to derive specific policy proposals from them, but we continue to look for ways to apply these concepts to pressing foreign policy challenges.

With the United States engaged in two major wars and confronting the challenges of numerous fragile states from Haiti to Yemen—all of which defy solution through the use of conventional military force alone—never has the need been greater for proactive reforms to promote and protect U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives simultaneously. To demonstrate the importance of these reforms and to test their efficacy, the Center’s Sustainable Security Program developed a simulation exercise of our foreign assistance reform proposals, using Afghanistan as a case study. Partnering with the Institute for State Effectiveness, we invited the participation of leading experts in Afghanistan as well as development assistance to engage in a rigorous simulation exercise to learn how effective our proposed foreign assistance reforms might be in practice and what the implications might be for U.S. policy in Afghanistan.

To understand the rigor of the exercise requires a brief review of the problems we set for ourselves and the other participants in the simulation exercise, as well as the methodology used and the scenario in which the simulation was conducted. We now turn to each of these building blocks of the exercise.

Problem and hypothesis

The principal issue under consideration is the efficacy of CAP’s proposals to improve U.S. foreign assistance. In particular, the recommendations included the:

- Existence and promulgation of a National Development Strategy
- Existence of a Cabinet-level development agency with consolidated responsibility for all non-military foreign aid programs of the U.S. government
- Existence of legal authority to deliver foreign assistance worldwide and without “Buy American” purchase requirements at the discretion of the president
- Increase of professional development staff, allowing the assignment of civilian development advisors to military units down to battalion level
- Designation of the U.S. Agency for International Development mission director as senior development officer in country and senior development advisor to U.S. ambassador.

Extensive research and analysis led CAP to conclude these are vital reforms, but there had been no empirical study to validate their utility in the field. Consequently, for our simulation exercise we framed the problem to test the efficacy of our reform proposals in the following way:

Would the adoption of the Sustainable Security recommendations for reforming foreign assistance substantially improve the ability of the U.S. government to facilitate the emergence of a stable environment in a country coping with state fragility or outright state failure?

The analysis that led to CAP's recommendations suggest that each of our proposed reforms, for different reasons, would be critical for making U.S. foreign assistance more effective, particularly in unstable environments. The basis for CAP's recommendations included both theoretical and pragmatic considerations and analysis. On the theoretical side, sustainable security takes a more holistic approach toward security. National security—the safety of the United States—must be coupled with human security, the well-being and safety of people, and collective security, or shared interests of many countries. This approach is related to the so-called “3D” concept that calls for the integration of defense, diplomacy, and development efforts throughout the globe.

Pragmatic considerations, of course, require that we test our analysis of the best way to operationalize and implement sustainable security based on the multiple agencies and actors involved in the defense, diplomacy, and development sectors. First and foremost, sustainable security calls for stronger leadership at the highest levels. CAP also recommends a robust strategy for coordination. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed to test the efficacy of our proposals:

The adoption of our Sustainable Security recommendations for reforming foreign assistance will generally improve the ability of the U.S. government to strengthen its strategic and operational planning capabilities for stabilizing a country, particularly in Afghanistan.

An Afghan elderly man is seen destroying the opium poppies on the field during a poppy eradication campaign in Nangarhar province, east of Kabul. Afghanistan depends on the growth of an economy grounded in legitimate activities—not the cultivation of poppy seeds for the production of opium, which is far and away Afghanistan's principle money crop.



AP PHOTO/REHMAN GUL

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

