

Center for American Progress



UN PHOTO/MARCO DORRINO

A National Strategy for Global Development

Protecting America and Our World Through Sustainable Security

Reuben Brigety and Sabina Dewan May 2009

“To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world’s resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.”

– *President Barack Obama, January 20, 2009*

“After all, it is the real possibility of progress—of that better life, free from fear and want and discord—that offers our most compelling message to the rest of the world.”

– *Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton, confirmation hearing*

“One of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win: economic development, institution building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications, and more—these, along with security, are essential ingredients for long-term success.”

– *Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Landon Lecture*

Center for American Progress



A National Strategy for Global Development

Protecting America and Our World Through
Sustainable Security

Reuben Brigety and Sabina Dewan May 2009

Executive summary

Recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as complex challenges throughout the world demonstrate the importance of effective development assistance across a wide array of circumstances. Whether responding to the tsunami in Indonesia, reacting to food riots in Egypt, promoting good governance in post-conflict Liberia, or supporting counterinsurgency efforts in the Philippines, the ability of the U.S. government to address the needs of civilian populations in various circumstances must be a key component of American foreign policy.

Although the United States is the largest national provider of overseas development assistance, it does not have a comprehensive strategy to guide the delivery of these resources. The increasing connectivity among the deprivation of essential human needs, state fragility, regional stability, and U.S. foreign policy interests suggests that our government must approach development assistance with coherent and complementary policies.

To do so, the administration should produce a National Strategy for Global Development. The NSGD would be modeled after the National Military Strategy that is developed by the White House. Just as the National Military Strategy is derived from the National Security Strategy and articulates how our military forces will be used to advance U.S. national security objectives worldwide, so should the NSGD be derived from the National Security Strategy and articulate how development assistance will be used to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives worldwide.

This document is divided into seven sections:

- Introduction
- Strategic guidance
- Types of assistance
- Objectives of a National Strategy for Global Development
- Challenges confronting development
- The strategy
- The relative roles of U.S. agencies and necessary structural improvements
- Conclusion

The introduction argues for a sustainable security approach to many of the challenges to U.S. interests. Citing numerous examples of the current state of disarray in our foreign assistance architecture, this section demonstrates why robust development mechanisms and programs are essential to this effort.

In a brief section, the strategic guidance shows that the NSGD is derived from the National Security Strategy. Though the Obama administration has yet to write a National Security Strategy of its own, this section extrapolates foreign policy objectives from recent documents and infers the role of development assistance in a future Obama strategy. An actual NSGD would ultimately be linked to the National Security Strategy of the current administration once such a document has been promulgated.

The next section proposes a categorization to differentiate multiple motivations for the performance of assistance activities that have a developmental impact. Specifically, this section notes three types:

- Fundamental assistance, which seeks improvement of the lives of its beneficiaries as its main objective
- Instrumental assistance, which sees improvement of the lives of individuals as a means to some other strategic or tactical end
- Diplomatic assistance, which is meant to improve relations with a recipient government or otherwise serve specific diplomatic objectives

The “Objectives of a National Strategy for Global Development” section articulates three broad areas in which development assistance can support U.S. national interests. Those areas in particular are national security—defined as the protection of the United States—human security, or improving the lives of individuals around the world in order to promote stability, and collective security, or the ability to work with other sovereign states and international organizations to counter common threats.

The section “Challenges confronting development” chronicles the three principal problems that a foreign assistance program will have to overcome to institute successful, sustainable development. In the NSGD, we argue that economic challenges (specifically the absence of decent work for unemployed youth), political challenges (manifested by state fragility), and social challenges (such as various levels of armed conflict which repeatedly stifle development gains) are of the greatest concern.

The strategy section lists the eight key actions that the U.S. government should undertake in its foreign assistance efforts. While the principles are largely self-explanatory, they are described in detail in this section and summarized below:

- Economic integration and growth
- Reducing vulnerability and poverty
- Effective governance and accountability
- Capacity building for sound institutions
- Addressing urgent humanitarian needs
- Protecting the environment
- Supporting U.S. government instrumental initiatives in nonpermissive environments
- Working with other partners and stakeholders

The core policy proposals of the NSGD are contained in the relative roles of U.S. agencies and necessary structural improvements section. While the specifics of each option are detailed in the body of the report, the proposals in brief are the following:

- Mandate clear leadership for development in the executive branch and specific responsibilities for individual agencies
- Create a Development Interagency Policy Committee
- Give the U.S. Agency for International Development officers flexibility for development assistance comparable to the flexibility inherent in the disbursement of humanitarian assistance programs, humanitarian and civic assistance programs and Commanders Emergency Response Program, or CERP funds, by the Defense Department
- Build U.S. government capacity by increasing the number of development personnel
- Assign development officers as tactical development advisors for regular deployment with tactical Army and Marine Corps units at the brigade and battalion levels
- Make a commitment to international assistance mechanisms

Finally, the conclusion reemphasizes the importance of robust development assistance for meeting the challenges of a complex world. It notes that the NSGD should be updated at regular intervals, and that development assistance efforts must be coordinated across the U.S. government.

This proposed National Strategy for Global Development is intended both as an example and an argument. As an example, it demonstrates what a NSGD might look like and, in so doing, might serve as a template for future drafting efforts. As an argument, it represents the Sustainable Security Program's position on a variety of strategic development issues ranging from bureaucratic structure to cooperation with international partners.

In both cases, we hope that it sparks a meaningful debate among development, defense, and diplomatic practitioners about how to think strategically about our overseas assistance programs and how to coordinate the efforts of our government accordingly.

We are very grateful to a number of people who have contributed to this effort. We owe many thanks to the Hewlett Foundation, which has generously supported the Sustainable Security Program. Center for American Progress Senior Vice President for National Security and International Policy Rudy deLeon and Vice President for Economic Policy Michael Ettlinger provided critical insight and support. Finally, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Gayle Smith, former Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress, for her initial vision of the Sustainable Security Program and her early contributions to this effort.

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

Sabina Dewan
Associate Director for
International Economic Policy
Center for American Progress

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.”

