



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

www.pomed.org ♦ 1820 Jefferson Place NW ♦ Washington, DC 20036

---

Hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs:

## **Striking the Appropriate Balance: The Defense Department's Expanding Role in Foreign Assistance**

Rayburn 2172, March 18, 2009, 10:00 am

Chairman **Howard Berman** (D-CA) noted in his introductory remarks that the hearing was convened to explore whether the Department of Defense (DoD) should be heavily involved in long-term humanitarian and development aid operations after conflicts or during peace time. Berman pointed out that the staff of USAID has shrunk from about 4,000 to 2,500 since 1975, and the Department of State (DoS) is having trouble filling vacancies. Meanwhile, DoD has stepped into this vacuum, increasingly taking on foreign development and reconstruction assistance projects traditionally handle by civilian agencies. Ranking member **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) believed that the military must provide humanitarian aid during conflicts to win support of the local populace, but should not be involved in long-term development activities. Likewise, **Christopher Smith** (R-NJ) claimed that the military is effective at providing immediate comfort to local citizens after conflict or natural disasters, but that NGOs are better at sustaining aid efforts.

The witnesses at the hearing were **General Michael W. Hagee**, former commandant of the US Marine Corps; **Nancy Lindborg**, President of Mercy Corps; **Philip L. Christenson**, former assistant administrator of USAID; and **Reuben Brigety**, Director of the Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress Action Fund.

**General Hagee** agreed that the military is best qualified to rapidly delivery comfort and stability in chaotic situations. (Nonetheless, he later added that NGOs were usually on the ground before his forces arrived.) The **military is not suited to supporting long-term post-conflict development**. The resources of DoS, USAID and other civilian agencies should be increased and the various agencies should be better coordinated so that the US can bring all aspects of its power to bear in these crises.

**Linborg** likewise argued that resources and authority for foreign assistance should be rebalanced, calling for increases in USAID and DoS funding beyond what President Obama has called for in his first budget. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the military has had to improvise a state building effort, because DoS and other civilian agencies are under-resourced. She also **called for better coordination across agencies**. That includes greater differentiation in the roles of each agency, and adjusting counterinsurgency tactics to minimize danger to civilian workers.

**Civilians not affiliated with the military can best carry out long-term development assistance**, according to Lindborg. Mercy Corp's relative safety from attack in crisis areas depends on not being associated with the US military. And development is most effective and sustainable when locals feel like they have ownership of it, which is harder to achieve when the military (with its security-driven agenda) is running the show.

**Christenson** raised the opposite concern, about the “civilianization of the battlefield,” as civilian agencies became involved in activities traditionally overseen by DoD. For instance, because of DoS’s internal safety regulations, Foreign Service officers in post-conflict zones end up “holed up in their embassies” Or occasionally venturing out surrounded by massive military escort contingents, which is “no way to win hearts and minds.” Christenson said **he would like to see more veterans involved in post-conflict aid, given their experience in hostile settings.**

In Christenson’s view, **having soldiers involved in work like drilling wells is both good PR for the U.S. military and training for peacekeeping operations.** He also raised concerns about DoS and other civilian agencies, saying they need to do a better job of creating and committing to multi-year assistance plans with host governments. He also noted that Foreign Service officers had been involved in urban planning and promoting tourism in Iraq, which he felt were not appropriate roles for State. Until these issues are addressed, he argued, the agencies should not be given more funds.

**Brigety** drew a distinction between fundamental and instrumental foreign assistance. Fundamental aid aims to improve the lives of beneficiaries as an end in itself. Instrumental aid targets goals that will promote US security objectives. **Iraq and Afghanistan show that you can’t win the peace through force alone – aid is a necessary tool.** Investing in development today can also prevent future conflicts.

**We need to configure civilian agencies for both types of aid, by easing legal restrictions that hamper USAID’s flexibility on the ground,** immediately expanding the USAID officer corps (and embedding economic development advisors throughout the military), and training civilian development specialists to operate anywhere in world. He called for the government to write a report on instrumental development strategy and on how to coordinating assistance efforts across agencies.

During the question and answer session, **Chairman Berman** relayed a conversation he had recently had with personnel from International Medical Corps, who noted that they are not targeted in conflict zones because they are not in military uniforms. Hagee agreed with this point and described the subtle ways his forces have provided security for aid workers without actually traveling with them.

Linborg responded to Christenson’s call for aid workers with expertise in war zones, arguing that such groups already exist. She also agreed with Brigety that **USAID needs greater flexibility,** as its effectiveness is currently undercut by numerous overly rigid earmarks and other directives from Washington. Lindborg also felt that aid workers should be freer to move around without excessive military escorts. Brigety elaborated that **there are greater legal restrictions on how USAID officers can spend money overseas than on military officers.** He agrees with **Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)** that USAID needs “more money, more flexibility.”

**Jackson Lee** also reported seeing an effective school-building effort by U.S. troops in Afghanistan, arguing for an appropriate balance in the utilization of the military for development and reconstruction. Smith suggested involving doctors from the Veterans Administration in providing medical care in post-conflict areas, and Hagee concurred.

**Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)** mentioned that **she has introduced “Smart Security” legislation intended to increase the U.S. emphasis on conflict prevention, diplomacy, and reconstruction.** This would require an increase in the international affairs budget, noting that an “alternative progress budget” would be introduced in Congress calling for greater increases than the White House has proposed.