

## Statement of Nancy Lindborg President, Mercy Corps

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives

*Hearing on:*

“Striking the Appropriate Balance:

The Defense Department's Expanding Role in Foreign Assistance”

March 18, 2009, 10:00 am

2172 Rayburn House Office Building.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I want to express my appreciation to Honorable Representative Howard Berman, Chair of the Committee, and to Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen for the opportunity to offer testimony today on striking the appropriate balance between civilian and military agencies involved in U.S. foreign assistance activities. I applaud your leadership in tackling this critical issue.

**We now have a pivotal political moment, with an emerging and welcome bipartisan consensus in Washington and beyond around the idea of “smart power – the notion that America’s foreign policy is best served when there is a more balanced application and funding of the now familiar “Three Ds” of Diplomacy, Defense, and Development.**

I am here today in my capacity as the President of Mercy Corps, an international humanitarian and development nonprofit organization that currently works in 37 conflict-affected and transitional countries, helping to rebuild safe, productive and just societies. Mercy Corps works in some of the world’s most challenging and dangerous environments, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka and Colombia. Our efforts are supported by a wide range of public, private, and international donors, including a strong partnership with USAID.

Our teams are often working in tough environments where the only expatriates are aid workers, journalists and military forces. I know firsthand the heroic work of the military as well as the push for them to undertake tasks far beyond the limits of their mandate or core competency.

I also serve as the Co-President of the Board of the US Global Leadership Campaign, a broad-based nationwide coalition of more than 400 businesses, NGOs and community leaders that advocates for a strong U.S. International Affairs Budget. Our corporate leaders include such companies as Caterpillar, Pfizer, Microsoft and Lockheed Martin, and our NGOs involve a wide array of groups such as Care, the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Relief Services, all jointly focused on the importance of ensuring the fundamental tools of diplomacy and development are available for global engagement.

A recent report by the USGLC's sister organization, the Center for Global Engagement, summarizes more than 20 recent reports and commissions calling on the government to revitalize our civilian capacities in global affairs. The need for a modernized, fully funded and smarter approach to global challenges is well documented, with a common clarion call for increasing the resources for civilian agencies.

Perhaps most telling is the overwhelming majority of Americans who believe there must be more emphasis on diplomatic and economic methods - 69% in a March 2008 Public Agenda nationwide poll - rather than a reliance on the military in our global engagement.

A stronger, more vibrant civilian leadership is essential to more fully reflect who we, as a nation, want to be in the world.

Secretary Gates has been one of the most eloquent voices on the need to rebalance these authorities and capacities. He noted in a speech given at the USGCL annual dinner last July that:

*It has become clear that America's civilian institutions of diplomacy and development have been chronically undermanned and underfunded for far too long – relative to what we traditionally spend on the military, and more important, relative to the responsibilities and challenges our nation has around the world.*

As the House Foreign Affairs Committee and others within the new US Administration and Congress work to improve the overall coherence and structure for US foreign assistance, we have an important opportunity to re-balance and rationalize our investments in the civilian and military agencies.

Today I would like to address two key points: the need to re-balance military and civilian authorities and the need to promote coherence while at the same time protecting the core capacities of both civilian and military actors. I will conclude with five recommendations for action that the US Congress can promote.

## **Re-balancing military and civilian authorities**

As we have faced the increasing need to jumpstart development activities in complex, insecure environments, the lack of civilian capacity has been starkly noted. The military, with its can-do culture and ample resources, has jumped into the void with doctrine and funding mechanisms that have enabled it to play an ever more far-reaching role.

The Pentagon's November 2005 Directive 3000.05 established the importance of stabilization and reconstruction operations on a par with the military's traditional kinetic operations. Although a key provision notes that many stability tasks are best performed by civilian actors, Directive 3000.05 also emphasizes the need for DOD to play these roles when civilian capacity does not exist.

New authorities that expand the military's role include 1206 funding for training and equipping foreign militaries, 1207/1210 funds to support mostly civilian-implemented counter-extremism and conflict prevention programs coordinated by the State Department's Office of Conflict, Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), and a vast Commanders Emergency Response Program or CERP, which provides officers with funding for emergency response and reconstruction that is readily accessible.

The Combatant Commands, or COCOMs, are continuing to develop their capacities to implement assistance programming in their regions, particularly in Africa and South and Central America, where there is already ample civilian presence.

As you noted in your invitation to us, Chairman Berman, the result is that the Defense Department's foreign assistance programming has grown from 7% in 2001 to nearly 21% in 2006. As significant, the percentage of overseas development assistance funding controlled by USAID, the government's principle assistance agency, has shrunk during this period from 65% to 40%.

We now see evidence that these temporary authorities are evolving into permanent fixtures: DOD has proposed to expand CERP globally and make both it and authorities like Section 1206 and 1207/10 funding permanent. Instead, we should shift these authorities to the civilian agencies that have the capacity and experience to implement programs that seek to address poverty and conflict in fragile environments.

These developments reflect a profound shift in how we pursue foreign assistance globally and have led to further expansion of the military into activities best undertaken by civilian agencies. A chronic under-investment in civilian capacities has led to an over-reliance on military solutions and military tools, as military leadership has become more vocal in identifying. We have increasingly limited our ability to apply the full array of diplomatic and development approaches to some of the most pressing issues of the day.

## **Coherent structures that enable core competencies**

We urgently need to harness with maximum impact the value and core competencies of both our civilian and military agencies. Terms such as “whole-of-government approach” have become synonymous with the critical need for our nation to act with the full power of its military and civilian agencies directed toward common national goals.

The danger of whole-of-government approaches is that we may create structures and approaches that inadvertently subordinate longer-term development objectives to the urgency of stability and short-term security objectives.

As we look to the future, we have several issues to consider:

### **The Military’s Role**

The U.S. military has extraordinary capacities that are often unmatched. Often, only the military can provide the amount of lift capacity that can mean the difference between life and death in the aftermath of a serious disaster. These capacities were used with great effect in the aftermath of the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami and 2005 Pakistan earthquakes.

Most importantly, only the military can be responsible for providing security in conflict. I had the opportunity to participate in the Blue Ribbon Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction convened in 2001 by CSIS and AUSA. The resulting task framework identified security as the precondition for achieving successful reconstruction. Without securing the lives of civilians from immediate and large-scale violence, there cannot be true recovery.

The military must be able and willing to step aside once the heat of conflict has subsided and create space for well-resourced civilian actors to assume the lead. The main objective should be to keep the military fully focused on what it does best, and what only it can do, which in most cases is to provide security.

As counterinsurgency methods have been refined, the military is increasingly conducting “hearts and minds” activities that seek to promote stability, improve force protection and generate positive local public opinion. While these methods are a cornerstone of the military’s new, adaptive approach to the realities of today, if not well coordinated, they can undermine civilian-led longer term development activities. Increasingly these approaches are also conducted in areas with significant civilian presence and capacity.

AFRICOM provides a good example of the Defense Department’s expansion into humanitarian and development arenas. The military rationale for consolidating operational authority for the continent in one combatant command is of course compelling. Yet Africa remains a continent where civilian agencies and actors have vast experience and significant humanitarian and development resources and

capacity. Unlike Afghanistan and Iraq, there appears to be no compelling "gap-filling" rationale for the military's engagement in these arenas. And yet, AFRICOM now engages in assistance projects in multiple countries across the continent. For example, the US military has engaged in well drilling in Uganda and Kenya, two countries where there is ample civilian capacity to carry out such activities – and where, in fact, USAID funds NGOs to carry out similar work.

#### When the lines blur between military and civilian actors, insecurity can increase for civilians

I know well the increased security threats facing humanitarian workers. I have the responsibility every day for sending aid workers into risky places. And while it may seem logical to work closely with the military in such environments, in fact the opposite is often true.

When NGO programs are confused with efforts supported by the military, in Afghanistan and Iraq most often by association with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), we may face even greater security risks. In Iraq, Mercy Corps has worked without arms since 2003 with USAID funding, based on the strong support of the communities we serve. We have operated with strict separation on the ground from the PRTs and are hopeful this operational approach will continued to be supported by USAID.

Increasingly, insurgents have been invading NGO compounds across Afghanistan in search of evidence of cooperation with PRTs and military units. A recent report by European NGOs cites an example from 2007 when a Danish NGO was told by a community in Faryab that they could no longer protect them because a Norwegian PRT had visited one of their projects. In Iraq, there have been a number of cases when local contractors who "collaborate" with Coalition Forces have been threatened and in some cases killed, and numerous reconstruction projects that have been attacked and destroyed by insurgents.

Of note, a recent poll by WorldPublicOpinion.Org, supported by the Department of Homeland Security, showed widespread opposition in eight Muslim countries to terrorist attacks on civilians. However, strong majorities in most of these countries also showed support for attacks on the US military. When NGOs are associated with the military, we are more likely to be perceived as a legitimate target, and so have a greater vulnerability. Our value and ability to work in insecure environments is thus further compromised.

#### The importance of civilian-led development

Successful development requires a comprehensive approach that combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Especially in post-conflict or fragile environments, it is critical to strengthen the capacity and reach of the national government while simultaneously pursuing community-led development strategies that create constituents for stability and connect citizens to their local government and the private sector. While

community-led approaches to development cannot succeed alone, they are a key component in an overall US strategy that addresses instability in countries impacted by conflict, state weakness, and overall social fragility. World Bank President Robert Zoellick made a similar point in a recent speech, saying that local ownership is “fundamental to achieving legitimacy...and effectiveness” of aid efforts.

However, the military is inherently challenged when it seeks to engage in the longer-term development approaches. It will in most cases be seen by local communities as part of an outside force with interests that diverge from their own. Co-mingling of these distinct roles risks undermining longer term development.

### Rethinking the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

The history of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) also illustrates the potentially negative consequences of creating structures that too closely link military and civilian actors. As you all know, the US developed the PRTs to respond to the sudden new state-building challenges it was facing in Iraq and Afghanistan. These hybrid military-civilian units were originally intended to be a temporary method of delivering emergency and reconstruction assistance to communities until civilian agencies and local governments could gain access and assume responsibility. PRTs were first launched in Afghanistan in 2002 with this fairly narrow mission, one that the ISAF PRT handbook describes as assisting the government of Afghanistan in extending its authority to create a stable and secure environment and enable security reform and reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> The PRT concept was transferred to Iraq in 2005 with a somewhat modified mission to increase the capacity of provincial and local governments to govern effectively and, for the more recent embedded (civilian) ePRTs, to support moderate political influences and assist in the military’s counterinsurgency efforts.

A fundamental problem with PRTs is that, as an *ad hoc* and improvised military-based response, they face inherent conceptual and structural challenges to meeting their multiple missions:

- high staff turn-over and rotations that inhibit relationship-building and cultural and environmental awareness;
- negligible links to the community;
- programming that is based on force security rather than community needs;
- extremely expensive operations and projects.

PRTs may in fact have a destabilizing impact on the areas where they work. Poor knowledge of local community structures and opaque and poorly vetted contracting procedures may exacerbate corruption and deform local power dynamics.

Despite these evident short-comings, PRTs are now often cast as a new, primary delivery platform for US humanitarian and development assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> ISAF PRT Handbook, Edition 3 (3 February 2007).

## Finding balance and coherence

It is critically important to develop a coherent strategy that lays out an overarching vision of national security that includes the importance of reducing poverty and conflict. We then need to structure our missions and fund and deploy each actor with a full understanding of the different skills and modalities they bring to the task at hand.

Let me offer what we believe. In exceptional overwhelming humanitarian disasters or crises, military support for civilian-led responses is often welcome and vital. However, in all but the most extreme conflict situations where civilian access is impossible, the military's role in stabilization, complex development and post-conflict operations should be minimized and focused on what the military does best. In most cases, this is first and foremost providing ambient security, followed by specific tasks such as security sector reform and training, and delivering select short-term emergency relief.

Civilian agencies – those possessing the expertise, experience and cultural knowledge necessary to succeed in such environments – should lead whenever and wherever possible. The guiding principle for these efforts should be civilian leadership.

Importantly, we must find structures and approaches that enable communication and coordination without co-mingling necessarily differentiated approaches.

No single actor can do everything alone. The challenge for the USG is to ensure that the roles, resources and capabilities that it invests in and mobilizes are selected based on long-term policy priorities rather than short term capacity considerations. In recent years, the opposite has occurred, leading to the current civilian-military imbalance.

## **A Way Forward: Five Recommendations**

1. **Support a robust International Affairs Budget (IAB) Account:** The IAB Account should be strongly supported in line with a strategy for increasing our diplomatic and development capacities. President Obama's request for the IAB reflects a 9.5% increase; an important step forward as we seek to rebalance our military and civilian capacities. This request sets us on the pathway of rebuilding our diplomatic and development agencies, with critically needed resources and personnel. I urge this committee to support this request.
2. **Move forward with a national strategy for global development:** The process of developing a national strategy for global development could be extremely useful both in articulating broad principles for effective development and in laying out how these principles affect the delineation of roles and responsibilities within the government.
3. **Rethink the PRTs:** As discussed above, PRTs function as primarily militarized entities. Even the ePRTs in Iraq, which are nominally civilian-led, still operate from

military bases and within a context of DOD policy leadership. This type of structure is inconsistent with a smart power approach.

4. Increase USAID's ability to work in transitional environments: The military has benefitted greatly from the flexibility and availability of the CERP funds that enable military commanders to respond more quickly to opportunities and needs. USAID should be supported to develop similarly flexible structures and capacities, which are so necessary to success in transitional environments. Currently USAID assistance is divided into emergency funding through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and longer term development funding through its regional bureaus. It lacks longer-term, more flexible funding and the ability to ensure a strong handshake between short- and long-term programming, so critical in post-conflict and post-disaster environments.
5. Strongly reinforce the principle of civilian leadership in the new Foreign Affairs Act: The development of a new Foreign Assistance Act provides an opportunity to strengthen both the principle and the practice of civilian leadership in the development sphere.
  - a. USAID should be represented in principals and deputies meetings on humanitarian response, post-conflict recovery, and long-term development issues.
  - b. The recent House Appropriations hearing on civil-military issues in foreign assistance indicates that there is a broad and developing interest in these issues across the Congress; HFAC would do well to reach out to the Appropriations and House Armed Services Committees to discuss cross-jurisdictional reforms

There is broad and deep support for undertaking this rebalancing and rethinking of how the US engages in the world. By increasing investment in our civilian capacities and rebalancing the roles of our civilian and military capacities, we have the possibility of tackling with great vigor the substantial global challenges ahead.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important topic.