

Advancing Peace and Mitigating Crises: Proposed Language for the Foreign Assistance Act

Part 2 in a series on the Foreign Aid Assistance Act Rewrite

22 February 2010

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DESCRIPTION AND MAJOR POLICY POINTS

WASHINGTON, DC – The February **Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum (CPRF)** was held at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) on February 22nd, 2010. Over 50 individuals from government agencies, think-tanks, non-profits and local universities attended the event. The CPRF is organized by the non-profit organization **Search for Common Ground**, and is co-sponsored by the **Alliance for Peacebuilding, American University, 3D Security, Council on Foreign Relations, George Mason University, Johns Hopkins University, Partners for Democratic Change, United States Institute of Peace and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.**

The forum was structured such that each panelist discussed the issues surrounding the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) and Quadrennial Diplomacy & Development Review (QDDR), the recommendation paper generated by the previous forum and presented recommendations of their own. After a summary of the FAA reform series and introduction from moderator Chic Dambach, Lisa Schirch began the discussion of the FAA reform recommendations.

LISA SCHIRCH

Lisa Schirch started by examining some of the issues with the current FAA language. She pointed out that the FAA currently fails to recognize the link between conflict and development whereas the peacebuilding that is currently prioritized by the US government takes place in

arenas of conflict. This disregard of conflict sensitive development hampers the government's own efforts in the areas that are most important to it. She also pointed out that government restrictions on who aid organizations can assist are limiting and potentially counter-productive, citing the example of the potential for aid and training for Taliban supporters in Afghanistan to win them way or better enable negotiation. Finally, she pointed out that Peacebuilding NGOs are far more financially efficient than the military in terms of preventing problems, but continue to receive a far smaller budget share.

Recommendations

For her recommendations Lisa Schirch suggested changes in focus, oversight and infrastructure. She pointed out the importance of recognizing the intricacies of peacebuilding and a greater focus on local actors, and a diverse group of stakeholders including a decentralized Congressional committee, emphasizing that this could help peacebuilders stay true to their missions and avoid involvement in geopolitical resource conflicts. Along with Congressional oversight she also suggested the creation of a Civilian Liason and Peacebuilding Coordinator to help clarify relations with the government. She also suggested the creation of greater support for Peacebuilders in the form of a \$100 million dollar crisis fund and more robust peacebuilding training for government actors.

DANE SMITH

Dane Smith responded by defending executive oversight, suggesting that Congress lacks the necessary flexibility, citing the example of Congressional handling of USAID. He did acknowledge the importance of Congress' participation in establishing a basic framework.

Dane Smith then shifted his focus to the issue of Defence/Civilian spending imbalance. He argued that the QDDR should be replaced by a Quadrennial National Security Review to include peacebuilding, diplomacy and defense. This could lead to the recognition that peacebuilding is an activity that is in some ways parallel to defense in the arena of National Security. This recognition could lead to some redress of the current budget imbalance between defense and peacebuilding funding.

He also stressed the importance of defining an authority for peacebuilding. He defended the State Department in this role, arguing that the importance of diplomacy to peacebuilding makes them naturally partners and that the State Department is unique in that it has the capacity to operate within a larger region rather than a single country.

Recommendations

Dane Smith's final recommendations were based on the importance of defining State Department authority, paired with reforms within the State Department to make it better able to run Peacebuilding operations. In order to clarify the system of authority he recommended an Executive Order confirming that the State Department is in charge of peacebuilding and also that the FAA rewrite confirm the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability's (CRS) authority. He specified that although it should continue to be under the State Department's authority the CRS should be integrated with USAID due to the natural overlap in their functions and that the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) could be the active arm of this partnership. This relationship should be established by a Congressional pronouncement. Within the State department this

integrated agency should coordinate with but have autonomy from the Geographical Bureaus, whose peacebuilding capacity should be enhanced by a mandatory conflict management training module.

PAUL STARES

Paul Stares began by emphasizing the importance of the current moment and quantifying the possible responses to it. He observed that the current opening for reform is an important and brief opportunity. He held the position that due to the briefness of the opening and the current attitude towards spending more modest recommendations could be preferable to the mass overhaul proposed by the other panelists. He pointed out the risk that new organizations or concepts, such as peacebuilding, could be marginalized due to the internal workings of the bureaucracy. Further, he added that the broadness of the term peacebuilding could be too nebulous to be useful in rigid bureaucracy.

Recommendations

Paul Stares' main recommendations focused on streamlining rather than reorganizing the State Department and government Peacebuilding mechanisms. He suggested a greater focus on strategic and anticipatory capacity as an important way to choose more important tasks and objectives. To aid the smoother internal function of the government he proposed the promotion of positive norms within the government, as well as creating a greater focus on learning from the past and inter-institutional mediation. He also focused on the importance of coordinating with important non-state actors such as the business sector, the media, private diplomacy actors, NGOs and others.

After the presentations there was a response section which allowed audience members to ask questions or share their input. Responses included Joe Montville, Director of Preventive Diplomacy at the Center for Strategic International Studies stressed the importance of conceptual evolution in the State Department through the training suggested by Dane Smith and by the inclusion of conceptual language. Joe Jones, Senior Law & Order Advisor of the Department of Justice stressed the importance of the Justice Department's training of law enforcement in conflict regions as a crucial part of peacebuilding.

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