



New Directions in Security Assistance After 9/11

Former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Lincoln Bloomfield, Jr. addressed a group of policy experts on new directions in foreign and military assistance after 9/11 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on March 16, 2005.

Foreign assistance is an investment in stabilization architecture and serves the national interest by managing risks and containing potential costs, Bloomfield said. In peacekeeping, combat, post-conflict, political and humanitarian assistance, influence is the “coin of the realm.” “If our assistance strategies are effective, our influence around the world will gain in large and small ways,” he argued.

The foreign assistance landscape has changed since September 11. New demands include military support for allies in the counterterrorism effort, expanded U.S. intervention in regional crises, and two high-profile development initiatives: the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Millennium Challenge Account. At the same time, the foreign assistance budgeting and oversight architecture is largely unchanged and is not equipped to meet current realities. Bloomfield advocated greater transparency in budget and strategic planning, streamlined management structures for improved coordination and efficiency, wider exposure among Members and greater responsiveness to security issues on Capitol Hill, and a rebalancing of investments between military and non-military policy tools.

The United States is providing support to new allies in the war on terrorism such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. The United States has also forged deeper relationships with governments that may pose moral or political conflicts with U.S. policy, which has led to a “blurred moral profile” of U.S. foreign aid, Bloomfield said.

The United States is making operational investments in localized counterterrorism efforts, including in the Philippines, Georgia and Yemen, and has supported training and long-term modernization programs with new NATO allies. In regional crisis situations like Liberia, Haiti and Darfur, the United States continues to provide support in the “window of urgency” to minimize damage.

U.S. Response Capacity

Budgeting for effectiveness. Currently, agency managers tally program numbers but lack clear budget projections. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Congressional staff go over agency budgets to reflect budgetary priorities. In the process, the needs of frontline diplomats and military personnel can be obfuscated. Better top-down coordination from the OMB and Congress to the various players such as U.S. embassy teams, combatant commanders, and the office of the secretary of defense, would result in increased efficiency and effectiveness. Early signals from decision makers about the direction of budgetary trends would improve planning and effectiveness of frontline implementers.

Transparency in setting priorities. Bloomfield stressed the value of transparency in setting national priorities. The current planning process reflects a tug of war marked by discrete, unconnected moves that snarls U.S. policy and confuses foreign governments. The United States needs a more transparent, cooperative forum for resolving competing strategic priorities.

Creating a chief financial officer for decision-making. The Executive Office of the President and the National Security Council will make commitments that the OMB does not intend to cover with new money. Executive foreign policy decision makers would be well served if OMB played a more active role in their deliberations, akin to a chief financial officer in the private sector, that focused on maintaining budget discipline with the least detriment to important policy goals. Current budgeting patterns allow too little room for unplanned but frequent externalities; here as well, a CFO-like participant at each level in the policy process could help minimize the high-level effort expended trying to reconcile authorized budgets with unprogrammed imperatives.

Supporting questionable governance. There is a taboo in Washington regarding using taxpayer money to fund “bad people doing bad things.” In special cases these reservations must be overlooked, Bloomfield said. He cited the example of warlords in Somalia who were interdicting food supplies in 1992, and said that perhaps these could have been coopted with assistance, which would have saved valuable time. “The United States will have to weigh whether putting life and limb at risk is always the best option,” Bloomfield said

A Congress ready for crisis. While the Executive Branch launched into full-time crisis response mode and created the National Security Strategy to meet 21st century threats, Congress has not kept pace, according to Bloomfield. Military aid can be delayed while Congress is in recess. Committees enforce holds and earmarks, and can be reluctant to share crucial information with each other. Bloomfield proposed that Congress maintain staff operations enabling it to act full time on authorizing, appropriating and overseeing military aid.

Recommendations

Bloomfield argued that the following changes could improve the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance.

Balancing investment in military and non-military policy instruments. There exists a major imbalance of investment in military and non-military tools for foreign operations. For example, operation and command centers across southwest Asia have not been balanced with non-military resources in the region, such as transport and advanced communication facilities for public diplomacy, humanitarian and reconstruction operations. “Killing and blocking is just the beginning of addressing the problem set in the world. We need to address how much of this is political, just engaging populations and showing the synergy between American interests and foreign interests,” Bloomfield said.

Embed OMB in decision-making. Bloomfield advocated further integrating OMB into the foreign assistance decision-making process. An earlier and deeper engagement by OMB would provide an institutional check against major financial commitments outside the budget process. Bloomfield also recommended adjusting the budget baseline to reflect the reality of recent supplemental budgets. “It’s time to dispense with the fiction that the pre-9/11 budget baseline means anything. We’re in a new situation,” he said.

Cooperation on Capitol Hill. Combined jurisdiction on the Hill, including more frequent joint hearings, could improve decision-making and coordination. There may be too many gavels on the Hill and not enough information-sharing. “There are committees that follow the war fight, yet all of that good information is not always with the appropriators,” Bloomfield said.

Empower frontline operators. Increased discretionary planning and spending by frontline operators would improve their ability to deliver results. “When the money is already answered for in Washington, we shouldn’t wonder that it doesn’t buy us much influence,” Bloomfield said. Frontline operators should have channels to enable real-time coordination with appropriators.

Discussion

Susan Rice of the Brookings Institution led off the discussion and stated the purpose of foreign assistance programs as “building the capacity of states to cooperate effectively with us, and building their will to cooperate at both government and popular levels.” Bloomfield endorsed capacity building and emphasized the need for civilian officials, rather than the military, to carry out this effort.

Gordon Adams, Professor at George Washington University argued that the U.S. government fails to take a sufficiently long-term view of U.S. national interest. Adams advocated a stronger relationship between the NSC and the OMB to coordinate strategic priorities. “No other government agencies can handle the job, and no single executive agency alone can coordinate the effort,” he said. George Ingram of the Education and Data Policy Center agreed with the importance of cooperation between the NSC and OMB, but Ingram expressed concern that such an arrangement might undermine other government agencies. “You still want to support the power and responsibilities of the line agencies. It’s a difficult line to draw,” Ingram said.

On the topic of budget supplementals, Charlie Flickner, noted that the “reality of the post-9/11 budgeting process is funding through supplementals, though this is being challenged now.” Anthony Cordesman, Arleigh Burke Chair for Strategy at CSIS, argued that the rise of budget supplementals is “a symbol of terrible interagency management.”

Joseph Collins, Professor at the National Defense University, underscored the resource discrepancy between the Department of Defense and the Department of State. “DoD now has capabilities far beyond what it was supposed to have. That imbalance seems to be the clear problem.” Ingram also noted the over-tasking of the military and under-resourcing of U.S. diplomacy.

“The budget crisis is starting to impinge on domestic programs, and there is the issue of the military’s condition. This takes us to the need for a much longer-term strategy to lower the national cost of getting these things done, and relieving the burden from the U.S. military,” Bloomfield said.

Planning and delivery of foreign assistance is failing to keep up with new demands in the post 9/11 world. Former Assistant Secretary of State Lincoln Bloomfield, Jr.’s recommendations—greater transparency in budget and strategic planning, streamlined management structures for improved coordination and efficiency, increased cooperation and urgency on security issues on Capitol Hill, and balanced investments in military and diplomatic resources—are valuable for understanding the future of U.S. foreign assistance.

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr. served as Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs from May 2001 to January 2005. He was also designated by President Bush and Secretary Powell in 2001 to be the Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action.

Mr. Bloomfield recently established the firm of Palmer Coates LLC. He is Senior Advisor to CSIS.

The Development and Security Initiative was started by CSIS Director of Studies Patrick M. Cronin to help bridge the gap between development and foreign assistance and global security.