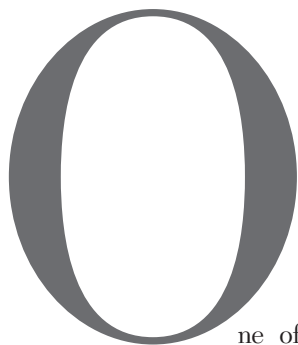


# THE CIVILIAN CORE OF AMERICAN POWER



PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA SHOULD TELL HIS NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM TO PREPARE A JOINT INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL SECURITY BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2010.

BY DAVID SHORR, DEREK CHOLLET AND VIKRAM SINGH

One of the more remarkable aspects of the intense debate about America's global role is the current widespread support for helping to stabilize weak and failing states. Less than a decade ago, such missions were politically controversial, derided as nationbuilding or mere social work. Today, leaders on both sides of the political aisle are championing ideas to equip the U.S. government to handle such situations.

The lack of capacity in key international affairs agencies, particularly the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, has been a major focus of this discussion. While the U.S. military has embarked on reforms in planning and doctrine to improve its ability to perform stability operations — including a directive placing that objective on par with combat operations and a new counterinsurgency manual — the civilian agencies have lagged behind.

Looking at the larger picture, the steady and steep growth of defense budgets contrasts starkly with the lack

of support for diplomacy and development. The resulting shortfall in funding for international affairs agencies has implications well beyond the problem of failing states. It hinders the ability of the United States to manage the full range of challenges we confront.

## The Importance of Civilian Capacity

Within the professional national security policy community, there is near-universal consensus on the seriousness of the situation and the need to strengthen civilian capacity. Just in the last several years, dozens of high-level commissions, working groups, congressionally mandated efforts and publications have examined the problem and proposed solutions. Some call for major change, such as a new Cabinet agency and an overhauled congressional committee structure, while others stress more modest (yet important) initiatives such as revamped personnel training. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has emerged as one of the most forceful and articulate spokesmen for such efforts.

The repeated calls from the nation's top defense official for the expansion of civilian capabilities naturally garnered wide attention. Even so, comprehensive action to remedy this weakness has not been forthcoming. Efforts by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to reorient her agency toward "transformational diplomacy," including

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establishing the so-called “F” process to manage foreign assistance and bolstering the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, are admirable. But they constitute incremental change at best.

More than a mere case of long-overdue bureaucratic reform, this problem goes to the very heart of American power in a changing and increasingly challenging world. Every international problem confronting the United States includes more variables than ever before. This is an age of stakeholder proliferation — from the private sector and powerful nongovernmental organizations to rising powers, and from criminal and terrorist networks to workers in the global supply chain. To have any chance of shaping world events, Washington must be alert to this panoply of actors and engaged at many levels in the intricate dynamics that determine political trends and policy decisions around the globe.

Accordingly, the essential aim of any effort to strengthen the U.S. civilian agencies must be to extend our lines of communication and cooperation to reach those on whom future peace and prosperity hinge. In the same way that globalizing trends have broken down international barriers for information and business, the United States must break down communication barriers to understand others’ concerns, by expanding ties further beyond the confines of officialdom in national capitals, and by responding more diligently and creatively to emerging problems. But we won’t be able to do this without more effective — and better resourced — civilian agencies. Just as we need to invest in education and science to ensure that the American work force can compete and thrive in the globalizing world, we must likewise transform our government to be competitive in the effort to sustain America’s global power in the 21st century.

### **How to Lose Friends and Alienate People**

There is not much to add to what has already been said about America’s strained relations with the rest of the world or the events that led to the current state of affairs. The distressing opinion research showing America’s international unpopularity has been widely discussed. The United States confronts a great deal of skepticism and mistrust as it pursues its national interests around the world today, even when those interests overlap manifest-

## ***The Foreign Service has too few resources to bring to bear when facing challenges.***

ly with the interests of other nations. Given that most, if not all, of the hardest issues America faces — from counterterrorism and nonproliferation to global warming — require extensive international cooperation, skepticism about American motives and competence has real costs.

During the fall campaign, both presidential candidates claimed they could rebuild America’s reputation around the world. President-elect Obama and his team now confront formidable policy challenges: How can we align ourselves more effectively with others and get them to join with us? How will we compete and cooperate with state and non-state actors? And how can we support positive developments and counter negative trends?

A key misconception of the past eight years has been the belief that Washington could meaningfully wield influence merely by stating its expectations and demonstrating the willingness to flex its muscle. The lesson we have learned, simple as it may seem, is that even a superpower’s leverage is not simply a matter of available military assets. Effectively shaping global conditions requires the active and constant pursuit of desired outcomes using all elements of national power.

If we are to be truly clear-eyed about the intensely interconnected world that has emerged, the U.S. must take a keen interest in the battle between the forces of integration and those of disintegration. As a global power with strong ideals and a central place in the international political, security and economic systems, the United States has an enormous stake in the vitality and relevance of the international order. In other words, a well-functioning international community — able to minimize armed conflict and maximize the spread of prosperity — provides the structural foundation upon which we can promote our interests and values.

Yet it will be impossible to protect (and, as necessary, rebuild) the international system unless we redress the mismatch between this massive workload and our diminished work force. At just the moment when U.S. relations with the world are in a deep slump, our capacity to turn things around is also at a low point. Some elements of this challenge have received attention: post-conflict reconstruction, economic development and public diplomacy. Yet these are merely pieces of a wider, systemic

civilian capacity deficit. Furthermore, focusing primarily on crisis response may lead us to ignore a key fact: our Foreign Service is simply too small and has too few resources to bring to bear when facing challenges.

To remedy this, America needs foreign policy infrastructure investment — and not just for special initiatives or boutique programs.

### **Follow the Money**

But where to begin? Despite a doubling of military spending, the Pentagon finds itself stretched, juggling ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the associated need to re-equip, rebuild and augment our forces, as well as major continued modernization and weapons acquisitions. And, of course, the coming hard economic times will only intensify governmentwide budget pressure and the scramble for resources. Eight years of skyrocketing deficits and supplemental budget spending mostly for defense have produced a poisonous budgetary status quo made up of jealous, stovepiped interests and nervously guarded resource streams, each with its own political and bureaucratic constituencies.

Still, after spending eight months consulting with foreign policy analyst colleagues across the political spectrum, we have concluded that, given the difficulties, a head-on approach offers the only prospect of meaningful success.

America's national security system is out of balance. One indicator of this is the often-cited fact that there are more musicians in military bands than active-duty Foreign Service officers. Defense will always require more total resources than diplomacy and development, but our military capabilities are ill-served and our defense interests undermined when the civilian components fall short of the mark. Yet there is no policy process that looks at the totality of national security resources and the associated tradeoffs between military and civilian resources.

In almost every organization, budgets are planned comprehensively to ensure that the right proportion of resources flow to various departments. The existing balkanized federal budget process poses an obstacle to any steps toward the urgently needed rebalancing of the

*Without effective civilian tools, we will find ourselves reacting to the world while others shape it.*

relevant agencies. And since the issue is the overall effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy, the push for budgeting across stovepipes must come from the top, where overall responsibility resides.

The new president should tell his national security team to prepare a joint international affairs

and national security budget to bring the relative strength of the agencies into better balance. Under such a mandate, the FY 2010 budget and subsequent budgets for the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development will invest in their overstretched and inadequate bureaus and underwrite significant growth in their work forces. As another metric of progress, the inordinately skewed ratio of defense to international affairs spending will start to come down.

Whatever other reforms are undertaken, this new policy discipline would set a positive example of interagency cooperation on behalf of the national interest and against stovepiping. The budgets would be prepared jointly and supported by a common committee at the Office of Management and Budget and by the National Security Council. They would then be presented to and ushered through Congress jointly, as well.

The senior and mid-level officer corps in the military has been among the loudest voices for stronger support of civilian agencies; they truly do “get it.” Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen has asked Congress to give the State Department more personnel and resources. “The U.S. government is not set up for the wars of the 21st century,” Mullen said in a speech last summer. “It doesn't reflect the expeditionary world we're living in. We haven't recruited, hired, promoted, trained or educated the people in our civilian agencies for the kind of expeditionary requirements and rotations that we are actually doing right now.”

The U.S. military was cut less than civilian agencies during the 1990s “peace dividend” era and has grown more than them since 9/11. A unified budget may finally force leaders to take the next difficult step of making trades across military and civilian programs, most likely trimming defense expenditures not absolutely critical to national security, so that civilian agencies can halt and reverse the erosion of America's political and economic relations. Although wasteful spending can be found on

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both the civilian and military sides, the economic logic strongly suggests focusing on the latter. Each additional \$100 million in the defense budget produces a smaller incremental contribution to national security than the equivalent amount invested in diplomacy or development.

After decades of nearly flat budgets, increased effectiveness cannot be achieved solely by tinkering with the agencies and their organizational charts. We need to spend more on diplomacy. To do so will require strong leadership from the administration and Congress, especially as the impact of the current financial crisis becomes clearer. Going forward, political leaders must resist the temptation to slash funding for diplomacy and development as a way to find savings: the money spent on building civilian capacity is a tiny fraction of the overall budget and one of the only investments we make to prevent crises and their attendant costs.

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Human resources are uniquely important: the number of people “on the case” with the right skill sets determines how effectively the U.S. government can manage relations with the rest of the world.

### **Crisis Response ... and Its Limits**

So far, the focus of reform has fallen disproportionately on crisis response. One remedy was the recent creation of a Civilian Reserve Corps, based in the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. This corps will have members from various federal agencies with key skills for post-conflict reconstruction who can be sent at a moment’s notice wherever needed. These experts would be used as “surge capacity” to help deal with the emergency needs of (hopefully temporarily) destabilized regions.

The focus on crisis response is an understandable

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reaction to the incredible array of duties dropped into the laps of U.S. military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan in the absence of civilian counterparts and funding. And there's no dispute about the need to do better at stabilizing global hot spots. The essential problem, however, is not simply resources for nationbuilding, crisis response, "surge capacity" or any other challenge, no matter how compelling. Rather, it is a fundamental weakness in America's steady-state capacity for international affairs in general — its ongoing interactions with the world beyond our borders — caused by inadequate numbers of Foreign Service and other civilian foreign affairs personnel.

The connection between the discussion of civilian capacity and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan points to another challenge. Governmental reform efforts of the type needed are usually precipitated and driven by a threat to the nation. While the civilian capacity shortfall arguably constitutes a danger to the country, it is not the kind of threat that makes policymakers lose sleep or spurs constituents to complain to their member of Congress. Yet the inability to keep up with events, trends and attitudes in the world hinders our ability to influence those events and attitudes, and makes it more likely that our crisis response capabilities will be needed. Moreover, the issue represents not just a danger, but a lost opportunity to help build a strong global sense of common cause.

### **Getting a Finger on the Global Pulse**

Despite talk of transformational diplomacy and global repositioning, under the current configuration of the Foreign Service there are nearly 200 cities in the world with populations exceeding one million that lack any official American presence. Moreover, where our presence is strong — in foreign capitals — it is also sequestered behind fortified embassy walls.

For a global power, the United States does not really seem to have its finger on the global pulse. The premise of Secretary Rice's transformational diplomacy initiative is to engage the world more deeply, more consistently and more constantly. This cannot be achieved with "virtual presence posts," but only by having representatives on the ground who interact with locals.

Today, in developing countries in particular, such interactions are much more likely to come via the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the Alliance

Francaise, one of China's mushrooming Confucius Institutes or the private sector. Contact almost certainly is not through an American Center, most of which long ago stopped hosting events or serving as lending libraries. In contrast, Beijing plans to build 1,000 Confucius Institutes worldwide by 2020.

The slipping American relationship with average people — the students and academics who rely on resources like the American Center — parallels a fall-off of elite relationships by a Foreign Service barely able to maintain interactions at the highest level. In Pakistan, for example, the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf illustrates the trap into which the U.S. has fallen again and again: namely, channeling too much of its relationship with another country through an individual leader. In the end, Musharraf's unpopularity fed America's unpopularity — and vice versa — leaving Washington with the task of rebuilding its relations with a pivotal country.

Maintaining a broader set of links to different leaders, including key members of civil society and the political opposition, is certainly more labor-intensive than cultivating a foreign nation's leadership. But in a fast-changing world, the U.S. can only succeed by having deeper, multilevel relations with other nations.

### **A National Responsibility**

The lion's share of the burden to address these issues will fall on the new president's shoulders, but Capitol Hill must also step up. In recent efforts to adapt U.S. foreign policy to the challenge of fragile states, Congress has struggled to find an appropriate role. At best it has acted mainly as an observer, ceding most responsibility for the condition of U.S. capabilities to the executive branch. At worst it has been an obstacle, with a narrow vision of what it takes to be effective in the world, causing it to look askance at any capability development that isn't tied to concrete counterterrorism missions or pet development projects.

Perhaps because of the way Congress operates — in a deliberative, reactive manner, focused on the election cycle — it is difficult to tackle the problem of fragile states and too easy to pass the buck. However, only Congress has the ability to provide the authorities and funding that will improve the U.S. government's long-term ability to plan and execute policies to advance the nation's strategic international goals and to react effec-

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tively when things go wrong. Indeed, if the Obama administration adopts the unified budget described above, it will have to make a concerted effort to engage Capitol Hill as a true partner.

### **A First Step**

One of America's national assets is a dynamism that enables it to adjust and thrive amidst economic, technological and political changes. Nevertheless, because our systems have ossified in their 20th-century forms, we continue to think of defense, diplomacy and development separately — even as we hope to ensure they support common national ends.

Addressing international challenges unilaterally can be utterly futile, yet the infrastructure we need to work effectively with a range of partners around the world is

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crumbling. Today's rapid changes require that we adapt and strengthen this governmental architecture, or face the continuing erosion of American influence.

But this investment should not be made in a vacuum or as a panicked reaction to another crisis. Deliberate evaluation of our various capabilities and their relative importance in advancing American interests can help bring our investments into the right balance.

The change in administration is the opportunity, and an integrated national security budget is the best first step to take. The new team should get started with DOD, State and USAID's respective briefing books now, during the transition, to be ready to deliver a new way of doing business as soon as possible after the 44th president's inauguration. ■

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