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International Perspectives on Interagency Reform

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to contribute to this important debate.

Over the past few years, the United States and many of its allies and partners have become increasingly involved in stability operations and nation building around the world. Yet ongoing efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere have revealed major capability shortfalls that can undermine their prospects for success. The single most important limitation has been a lack of civilian capacity for such operations, which has led to an overreliance on military forces.

Several countries, including the United States, have recently adopted bureaucratic reforms that are intended to improve civilian capacity for stability operations, nation building, and crisis management efforts. Unfortunately, these reforms have only been marginally successful so far. The reforms enacted by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the European Union all face a remarkably similar set of challenges and constraints – despite their differences in structure, purpose, and national context – that have prevented them from living up to their initial expectations.

The United States: The Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization

The most important interagency reform effort in the United States has been the establishment of the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (CRS) in July 2004. Its mission is to "lead, coordinate, and institutionalize" civilian capacities for post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization efforts. In December 2005, National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 44

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designated the State Department as the lead agency for such efforts, and directed the Coordinator to co-chair a new interagency Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) for Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations.

CRS has undertaken several notable initiatives. It created an Essential Task Matrix, which specifies the many different tasks that such operations involve. It is developing a database of deployable civilians, is collecting lessons learned, and has worked with Joint Forces Command to develop a civil-military planning framework. It has also led or participated in government planning efforts for Sudan, Haiti, and Cuba, and has worked on conflict prevention efforts in several countries including Congo, Nepal, and Zimbabwe.

I know that Ambassador Pascual will provide an insightful perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of CRS, since he served as its first Coordinator. From my perspective, though, it suffers from three key problems that prevent it from fulfilling its mandate.

1. *Lack of funding*. Congress has repeatedly scaled back the administration's budget request for CRS, which has made it difficult for the office to build its own capacity and to conduct activities. As this committee heard in testimony by the GAO in October 2007, some agencies have criticized CRS for not being able to provide additional resources, and as a result, are reluctant to cooperate with it in future planning efforts.

   Congress has also consistently chosen not to fund the president's request for a Conflict Response Fund, which would enable CRS to improve its rapid response cadre and other deployable capabilities. The Active Response Corps (ARC) is a particularly vital program for increasing the number of deployable civilian specialists, but it only includes 10 people so far. That is insufficient to meet global demands. The Congressional appropriation of $50 million for a separate 500-person Civilian Reserve Corps (CRC) is a step in the right direction. But that money cannot be spent until Congress specifically authorizes the creation of the CRC, which it has not yet done.

2. *Lack of staff and interagency representation*. As of October 2007, 77 people worked for CRS (which includes the 10 members of the ARC). Not only is this a small number given the magnitude of its responsibilities, but more than 92 percent of its staff – 71 out of those 77 people – are from the State Department. If the two staff members from USAID are considered part of State, that number rises to almost 95 percent. Clearly this is a severe limitation for an organization that is supposed to take the lead in interagency coordination. CRS remains open to a much greater degree of interagency representation,

but its small size and limited budget means that it lacks the bureaucratic prestige and power to push other agencies to provide much-needed detailees.

3. *Lack of operational role*. CRS has not yet been designated as the lead agency for any stabilization or reconstruction missions, and the planning frameworks it has established have not yet been fully utilized. CRS has conducted several planning activities, and ARC members have deployed overseas for small advisory missions. While important, these activities fall far short of the active policy coordination role envisaged in NSPD-44. As long as it remains primarily a support organization with limited planning, expertise, and bureaucratic clout, it is unlikely to fulfill its mandate as a true lead agency.

The United Kingdom: The Stabilisation Unit

The United Kingdom has actively participated in many recent stability operations, including those in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In 2004, the government created a new Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) in order to facilitate government-wide planning, to build a deployable civilian capacity, and to serve as a source of expertise and lessons learned from previous operations. It is a joint office of the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Department for International Development, and includes approximately 30 personnel. PCRU officially changed its name to the Stabilisation Unit in December 2007.

The Unit has three primary tasks, which are similar to those of CRS: to conduct planning and assessment activities, to provide deployable civilian experts, and to identify and disseminate lessons from previous operations. Its activities to date have included assessment and mission planning in Helmand province in Afghanistan; supporting the British-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Basra, Iraq; supporting the 2006 peace agreement in Nepal; and supporting the African Union in Sudan by developing a communications strategy for the Darfur Peace Agreement. In the fall of 2007, the Ministry of Defence asked the Unit to manage its £269 million Stabilisation Aid fund, which enables it to direct and prioritize a wide range of activities.

However, the Unit has had a hard time achieving true coordination within the British government. Having three agencies jointly direct the unit was intended to give it three advocates within the government, but it has not worked out that way. Instead, it lacks a single champion that is invested in its success and that has the power to promote its mission and force coordination among reluctant bureaucrats. These agencies have also limited the Unit's operational capacity, and have instead directed it to focus on strategic planning efforts. But strategic planning and

policy coordination is the primary function of the Cabinet Office in the British system, which leaves the Unit without much influence.

Canada: The Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force

The Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) was established in 2005 within the International Security Branch of Foreign Affairs Canada. Unlike the other organizations discussed here, it did not build its organizational capacity from scratch: it was part of a larger reorganization of the foreign ministry. The offices that dealt with humanitarian affairs, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, peacekeeping and peace operations, and mines and small arms were moved from their previous branches and into START.

In its first year, START included approximately 60 full time personnel, and reported supporting 176 projects around the world. Haiti has become a particularly high priority for START, where it is pursuing initiatives to increase security, enhance the rule of law, and improve regional stability. It funds its work through the Global Peace and Security Fund (GPSF), a fund within the ministry that has been allocated C$235 million for the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

START has been the most successful of any of these reorganization efforts so far, and the GPSF has been well funded. To be fair, though, it would be surprising if START were not successful. It avoided a lot of bureaucratic resistance by combining preexisting offices into a new task force, rather than creating a new office with a completely new mission. But it is also not clear whether START has created much additional value and capabilities than the individual offices had to begin with. And since it remains in a single ministry, it has not made much progress in achieving interdepartmental cooperation.

Germany: Civilian Crisis Prevention

In 2004, Germany adopted an Action Plan on Civilian Crisis Prevention, with 160 initiatives that the government pledged to undertake within five to ten years. It directed each ministry to designate a commissioner working in these areas, and the commissioners would then meet as an Interministerial Steering Group for Crisis Prevention. A new office was formed within the Foreign Ministry, with the designation GF-K, to chair the steering group and serve as the overall coordinator. The office has a very small full-time staff – only seven people during its first year – and an annual budget of €25 million. It is deliberately not an operational office: its funds are designed to support projects within the ministries that do have operational responsibilities.

Its contributions to date remain fairly limited. The office has convened several working groups, on issues such as security sector reform and whether Germany should create resource pools like the GPSF in Canada and the Stabilisation Aid fund in the United Kingdom. There was also a discussion group that used Nigeria as a test case for crisis prevention strategies, but it produced little.

The office faces a formidable obstacle. There is a very strong tradition in Germany of ministerial independence – much more so that in other countries, including the United States. This is compounded by the fact that interministerial coordination meetings are not taken very seriously, with low-level staff members participating instead of more senior officials. They are not empowered to take decisions and they tend to accomplish little. Most policy coordination occurs in the Chancellor's office instead. The office has been able to have a small impact by funding small projects within other ministries, but this is a long way from the interministerial coordination function that was originally envisaged.

The European Union: The Commission versus the Council

Interagency coordination is hard enough within a single country, but it becomes even more challenging when it occurs in a multinational institution. The European Union often emphasizes the importance of civilian capacity and crisis prevention efforts in its rhetoric, but it has had great difficult building any actual capacity in this area. The main problem is that two distinct bodies have responsibility for EU crisis management and stability operations, and the division of labor between them is unclear.

- The *European Council* consists of the heads of state and ministers from each of the EU's 27 members. It is the main decision-making body for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and decisions in this area require unanimity. The Council has undertaken a number of efforts to improve its military capabilities, including establishing the EU battlegroup initiative and declaring the intention to create a European Gendarmerie Force. On the civilian side, it established a Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, which is supposed to promote the development of rapidly deployable civilian capacity for international police operations, the rule of law, civil administration, and civil protection. The Council has had great difficulties with both sets of initiatives, but the civilian capabilities have proven even more challenging because, unlike the military, member states do not already have national capacities that they can leverage.

- The *European Commission* is essentially the executive body of the EU, and it possesses supranational authority in its areas of responsibility. Most of these areas are related to the administration of the common market, but they do include promoting international development and managing the EU's external relations. In both of these areas, the Commission has funded a wide range of projects designed to reduce instability and prevent conflict. The Directorate General for External Affairs even has a branch dedicated to crisis management and conflict prevention.

In principle, the division of labor is clear: the Council conducts short-term operations with security implications, while the Commission supports long-term development and stability. In practice, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the two, since both can involve immediate stabilization, peacebuilding and governance efforts. This problem is compounded by the fact that the Commission and the Council lack any formal coordination mechanisms. They exist as two separate branches of the EU, and each one plans, assesses, and executes its own programs with few mechanisms to ensure policy coherence.

Ideally, the roles of the Council and Commission would be complementary instead of competitive. The Commission has much of the expertise and resources necessary for crisis management, while the Council has the structure, political authority and operational capacity to respond quickly to emerging crises. The proposed European Constitutional Treaty sought to solve this problem by creating an EU Minister of Foreign Affairs, who would absorb the Council's responsibility for the CFSP and the Commission's responsibility for external affairs. Yet the French and Dutch populations failed to ratify this treaty. This provision is included in the Treaty of Lisbon that was signed by the EU heads of state in December 2007, but that treaty will not enter into force until and unless it is ratified by all 27 member states.

Common Problems

Several common problems have plagued all of these efforts to improve civilian capacity and interagency cooperation for stability operations, regardless of country. These include:

- *Bureaucratic turf wars*. The expertise needed for successful stability operations is usually spread out across multiple government agencies. The new offices described above were all designed to promote interagency coordination, but they often faced stiff resistance from the agencies whose efforts were supposed to be coordinated. The greater the mandate these offices possess, the more likely they are to provoke resistance from agencies that view them as intruding on their turf and interfering with their mission.

- *Poor organizational placement.* Some of these offices are too low in their government hierarchies to forcefully advocate their views or to compel other agencies to provide them with the information, personnel, and resources they need. Some are embedded in organizations that are less far removed from operational planning, and others suffer from not being part of any organizational structure at all. This makes them highly dependent on the personal connections and persuasive powers of individual leaders, which hinders the development of real institutional capacity.

- *Lack of financial resources.* Most of these offices lack the money that they need to achieve their missions. They have small operating budgets that can easily be targeted by legislators seeking to save money. Limited financial resources limit the programs and activities that these offices can sponsor, and can also exacerbate bureaucratic challenges because money and bureaucratic power are often closely linked.

- *Lack of qualified personnel.* These offices rely heavily on secondments from other agencies to include true subject-matter experts and to augment their relatively small staffs. Yet home agencies are often reluctant to approve such secondments, especially when they do not see contributing to stability operations as part of their core mission. They believe that they are losing valuable people and expertise, which indeed they are. When they do provide people to these offices and missions, they often prevent their best people from serving in these positions or limit the secondments to a few months to minimize disruption. Efforts to develop rosters of deployable civilian personnel are being undertaken by several countries, including the United States, but identifying qualified personnel remains an ongoing challenge.

Overcoming These Challenges

Why is this so difficult? Why have all of these countries, regardless of their differences, been unable to make much progress in promoting interagency reform? The main reason is that our political systems are not structured for it. These problems result from deliberate political choices about how our governments should be organized. The expertise needed for successful stability operations is spread out across multiple agencies, including many with domestic mandates and little or no interest in international operations. Experts in judicial reform, for example, are more likely to work for the Department of Justice than the Departments of State or Defense. Experts in economic reform are more likely to work for the Department of the Treasury. Experts in improving

agricultural output are more likely to work for the Department of Agriculture. Yet all of their expertise needs to be harnessed, integrated, and deployed for successful stability operations.

One potential solution would be to strip all of these functions out of their home agencies and put them together in a new office. This might improve policy coordination, but it would undoubtedly raise new challenges as well. And beyond the fact that it might not improve policy effectiveness in this area, it would also be very politically unpalatable. It would essentially create a standing department whose mission would be to reconstruct countries abroad, which would raise charges of imperialism and undoubtedly raise fundamental questions among the American people. Since this isn't much of a solution, we are stuck with the problems of decentralization, which means that some amount of bureaucratic stovepiping, turf wars, and competition for resources is inevitable.

That said, there are some ways to minimize some of the negative effects of interagency competition and increase U.S. capacity for stability operations. These include:

1. *Manage interagency competition*. There is no silver bullet that will solve the problems of interagency competition, because the decentralized structure of the United States government will not change. Bureaucratic reforms or other initiatives that claim to solve these problems should be viewed very skeptically, because agencies will continue to do what is in their own interests. Successful reforms will create incentives for cooperation so that agencies perceive cooperation as providing some benefit.

2. *Create incentives for interagency secondments*. Right now, there are several strong disincentives that prevent even willing agencies from cooperating. The most important of these disincentives – and possibly one of the easiest to fix – is personnel policies for secondments. Experts who are willing to serve in other government agencies or to deploy for stability operations often find that their home agency prevents them from doing so, because that agency has to pay for all of the costs involved: it is not reimbursed for that expert's salary, much less the cost of hiring someone to replace that person during the secondment. At a minimum, this disincentive needs to be removed so that the home agency can recover its costs and manage its workload. It would be even better to offer positive inducements for providing personnel to interagency assignments, and career inducements to the individual personnel, so that home agencies seek out these opportunities instead of simply relying on volunteers.

3. *Increase the capacity of USAID*. Interagency secondments must complement, but cannot substitute for, full-time professional expertise on stabilization and reconstruction. The

Agency for International Development is the government repository of knowledge on promoting stability and development in post-conflict situations, but is hindered by its small size and lack of resources. While this committee does not have jurisdiction over the USAID budget, it does oversee a wide range of issues that are directly affected by the lack of USAID capacity, since the armed services are consistently called on to fill that gap during ongoing operations.

4. *Establish flexible funding mechanisms*. This is the area where Congress can make the greatest contribution. As the lead agency for stability operations, the State Department – and CRS in particular – needs to be able to quickly allocate funds in order to respond effectively to rapidly changing mission requirements. Yet Congress has consistently failed to fund the Conflict Response Fund, largely due to concerns about maintaining oversight over the use of these funds. While this is certainly an appropriate concern, effective oversight can be created through a requirement to report any expenditures from the Fund to be reported to Congress within 30 days, or some similar mechanism. Requiring the State Department to specify the ways in which the funds will be used ahead of time defeats the purpose of a contingency fund and hinders mission accomplishment.

5. *There is no substitute for an involved president and an involved Congress.* Only the president has the political power necessary to break through the inevitable bureaucratic frictions of the interagency process. The president needs to make this a high priority, both by establishing clear interagency coordination procedures and then following up to ensure that they are regularly used for both routine matters and crisis situations. Yet even an actively involved president can accomplish little without Congressional support. Building the civilian capacities necessary for effective stability operations will require a sustained Congressional commitment to support interagency reform efforts and to provide the funds necessary for capacity building in this critical area.