

How do development and foreign policy connect?



Simon Maxwell

‘What if “we” (development ministries, say) and “they” (foreign ministries, say, or defence ministries, or trade ministries, or environment ministries) were trying to grapple together with intractable and inter-related challenges. Would it make sense to reconsider the acute ring-fencing that currently prevails?’

For a long time, the development aid community has worked to ring-fence aid and ensure that it is used specifically for ‘poverty reduction’. Historically, this has its roots in the often well-founded fear that ‘they’ would use ‘our’ money to further geo-strategic political or commercial interests that could only loosely be described as developmental – supporting some states, punishing others, using aid money to fund repression, diverting aid money to help rich country companies, and so on. Specific cases have been central to the aid debate for a generation – from US aid to Israel, Egypt and South Vietnam, through the scandal of the Pergau Dam, to EU aid for the ‘ring of friends’ in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Administrative and legislative instruments have been used to reinforce the stockade – whether restrictive rules on what can legitimately be claimed as official development assistance (oda), agreed by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), or the passage of the International Development Act in the UK, which limits the use of aid to poverty reduction.

But what if ‘we’ and ‘they’ were actually on the same side? What if ‘we’ (development ministries, say) and ‘they’ (foreign ministries, say, or defence ministries, or trade ministries or environment ministries) were trying to grapple together with intractable and inter-related challenges, in countries and regions with complex collations of political, military and developmental problems? Sierra Leone, for example? The Horn of Africa? Even Afghanistan? What if, in these and many other cases, the values and objectives were shared, but the instruments were independently owned by different agencies and differentially funded? What if aid ministries were relatively rich, and foreign or trade or environment ministries (and even defence ministries) relatively poor? Would it make sense to reconsider the acute ring-fencing that currently prevails?

Many have been grappling with these questions. On the one hand, attempts have been made to map the boundaries between different actors and define better the rules of engagement when they find themselves engaged on the same terrain: such is the case, for example, with the military and humanitarian communities. On the other hand, donors have recognised the need for a more integrated approach, for example by creating special funds which are jointly owned across government: the UK’s Africa and Global Conflict Pools are examples, now merged into a single, new Stabilisation Aid Fund; the Canadian Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) and Global Peace and Security Fund (GPSF) are others. The EU has regional strategies (for example for the Horn of Africa).¹ The US has probably taken the ideas furthest, with a discourse of transformational diplomacy and the creation of an integrated Africa Command, currently based in Stuttgart, incorporating both military and aid components. Internationally, the adoption of new doctrine on the Responsibility to Protect, and the setting up of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, reflect a similar concern for coherent analysis, better early warning, and more effective and integrated action.

In the UK, this issue has moved to the centre of the policy stage. Speaking at the Mansion House in the City of London in November 2007, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said:

‘If we are to honour the responsibility to protect we urgently need a new framework to assist reconstruction. With the systematic use of earlier Security Council action, proper funding of peacekeepers, targeted sanctions – and their ratcheting up to include the real threat of international criminal court actions – we must now set in place the first internationally agreed procedures to prevent breakdowns of states and societies.’

But where breakdowns occur, the UN – and regional bodies such as the EU and African Union – must now also agree to systematically

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combine traditional emergency aid and peacekeeping with stabilisation, reconstruction and development.

There are many steps the international community can assist with on the ladder from insecurity and conflict to stability and prosperity. So I propose that, in future, Security Council peacekeeping resolutions and UN Envoys should make stabilisation, reconstruction and development an equal priority; that the international community should be ready to act with a standby civilian force including police and judiciary who can be deployed to rebuild civic societies; and that to repair damaged economies we sponsor local economic development agencies – in each area the international community able to offer a practical route map from failure to stability.’²

It is not difficult to imagine the questions that might arise in implementing this vision. And they stretch well beyond the fragile states agenda into questions of how we deal with global security or with climate change. For example:

1. What are the shared values that operate across the development, humanitarian, foreign policy, military and environmental spheres? What is meant by a ‘progressive foreign policy’ or its Conservative equivalent?
2. Does the new doctrine of integrated engagement apply only to current or potential ‘fragile states’ (however defined), or more widely?
3. Should humanitarian action be co-opted to this agenda or does it have a special status?
4. Who is responsible for defining and managing

integrated strategies, and with what accountability?

5. What (in the International Development Act and more widely) is meant by ‘poverty reduction’? What can money legitimately be spent on?
6. Should the DAC criteria on what is allowable as oda be revised?
7. What would be the implications of an integrated approach for the level, geographical allocation and sectoral composition of spending?
8. Even if aid money remains ring-fenced, would a better appreciation of the foreign policy or defence or environmental context change spending priorities?

ODI is planning a meeting series which will explore these questions, using a combination of conceptual challenges, institutional perspectives and geographical case studies.

Endnotes

1. http://ec.europa.eu/development/body/press-forum/monthly-topics/monthly_topic_13_2006_en.pdf
2. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page13736.asp>

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