

**Securitization of Official Development Aid:  
Analysis of current debate**

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Despite the rhetoric of neutrality, foreign aid has always been, and continues to be, a political tool. Recently, it has increasingly been 'securitized' as a means to foster security in the recipient societies, which also satisfies the donor governments' national interests. A good example of this process is the suspension of all US aid to Pakistan after the 1998 nuclear tests and the subsequent renewal of aid as a part of the response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Political decisions of major donors seem to be based on a conventional wisdom which directly links extreme poverty to violence.

This paper analyses the current debate over the securitization of aid from the perspectives of NGOs and multilateral aid agencies. On the one hand some authors argue that increased political and/or security conditionality undermines the ability of aid to address the needs of the poorest. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the unintended consequences that official development aid (ODA) might have on the recipient societies when blind to their political realities, particularly during conflict. Efforts are being made to maximize the positive impact of ODA on conflict resolution and peace building.

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Recent years have seen a heated debate about the securitization<sup>1</sup> of foreign aid,<sup>2</sup> especially in the context of ‘War on Terror’ (WOT). Some welcome it as a positive move towards better coordination of donors’ efforts and a creative instrument of improving international security. Others oppose it as a means of furthering donors’ national interests and diverting funds from non-political goals of social and economic development. This paper summarizes arguments of both sides and analyses some of the complexities of using foreign aid for security goals.

To be sure, the use of ODA for advancing national security is by no means new. The Cold War period was characterized by the use of financial assistance to win and maintain strategic alliances in the then bi-polar world. Starting with Marshall Plan, a massive financial assistance program for post-World War 2 (WW2) reconstruction of Europe, the primary objective of aid flows from the two empires into their respective areas of influence was strategic. Development was left on the back burner.

Many would like to think that this approach has changed with the demise of the Soviet Union, as there was no longer a need to distinguish between enemies and allies and aid could start to be allocated according to other criteria than political bonds, namely the recipients’ needs rather than the donors’ wants. Sadly, research shows that this is not quite the case—Jean-Claude Berthélemy writes that “most donors behave in a rather egoistic way ... [these] results do not change qualitatively from one decade to the other, in spite of the end of the cold war.” (Berthélemy 2006, 192) Roger Riddell shows that the share of ODA to least developed countries has not changed with the disappearance of bi-polar world, and increased only slightly after 2000 (from 25 to 31 percent). (Riddell 2007, 104)

Riddell concludes that commercial, political and other criteria matter more greatly than developmental and humanitarian motives. He identifies growth and poverty-reducing goals as one of eight motivations for giving aid. The others are helping address emergency needs; showing solidarity; furthering the donors’ commercial interests; historical legacy (mostly colonial);

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the term ‘securitization’ to describe a process of using foreign aid to advance the donor governments’ national security. This may include investing in the recipient country’s security sector or programs specifically targeted at aspects human security. This paper draws on the concept of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School. (Buzan, et al. 1998) In the private finance sector, this term has a different meaning—‘[s]ecuritization allows issuers to diversify funding sources, thereby reducing their reliance on bank borrowing and the resulting sensitivity to banking crises.’ (Securitization 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Foreign aid is a broad term which includes components like humanitarian assistance, direct budget support, military aid etc. A bulk of it is official development assistance (ODA), usually tied to specific projects and with an overarching goal of long-term development. This paper focuses on this specific component of foreign aid and mainly examines bilateral, not multilateral, aid (as national security is not an issue for multilateral institutions, although multilateral institutions can be used by key donors to further their national interests indirectly).

contributing to public goods and lessening public evils and promoting compliance with human rights norms. (Riddell 2007, 91-92) Interestingly, furthering the donor's strategic interests is not included in his list of motivations, although this seems to be the most important of all. Alberto Alesina and David Dollar (2000) found that one of the strongest statistical correlates of aid giving is 'friendly' voting in the United Nations (i.e. more aid is sent to countries who support the donor in the UN General Assembly), especially for Japan. For France, the most important factor is its colonial past.

Despite this continuity in patterns of aid allocation, aid policies have still changed significantly since the Cold War. First, the beginning of 1990s saw a sharp drop in the amount of aid given, continuing until mid-1990s when it levelled. Riddell identifies three reasons for this: it was a period of large fiscal deficits in lending donor countries; the collapse of communist bloc reinforced arguments against large involvement of state and central planning in economics;<sup>3</sup> and that with the disappearance of the areas of influence aid lost much of its *raison d'être*. Second, despite the overall decline in ODA, humanitarian aid and emergency relief quadrupled,<sup>4</sup> a shift explained by a greater incidence of natural disasters and an increasing engagement of the international community in intra-state wars with grave humanitarian consequences. Third, the development community re-invented poverty reduction<sup>5</sup> as the key objective of development assistance.<sup>6</sup> (Riddell 2007, 38-49)

The rise in humanitarian assistance and emergency relief, especially into conflict and post-conflict environments, had important consequences. It provided for the disruption of another continuum significant for the early post-cold war period: a belief that aid in its essence is a non-political, technical tool for kick-starting growth and development. That is not to say that it cannot be and is not being used for political purposes—most often as a set of carrots and sticks to promote policy reform etc. (Esman and Herring 2003) However, it was believed that as a tool in itself it is

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<sup>3</sup> To a certain extent this resembled the argument that foreign aid makes the recipient countries dependent on external help, resulting in unwillingness and inability to pursue their own solutions. This argument first emerged in the 1980s and led to a decline in aid flows. It is not to be confused with the 'dependency theory' coined by Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer in 1950, suggesting that economic growth of the first-world countries is contingent upon the transfer of resources from the third-world.

<sup>4</sup> After we include NGO disbursements.

<sup>5</sup> Poverty reduction first came to the centre of attention of the development community in the 1970s as a principle goal for development aid, as opposed to gross economic growth.

<sup>6</sup> However, Paul Collier and David Dollar (1999) have shown that countries with severe poverty and adequate policies only receive 56 % of their 'fair share', which renders the disbursed aid half as effective as it could be. A few years later, David Dollar with Victoria Levin (2006) described that in the period of 1984 to 2003 aid was being allocated increasingly selectively in favour of democracies, but with weak economic institutions where it was often not used very well. Alesina and Dollar (2000) found that recipient countries are rewarded for democratization (50 % increase in aid flows on average), but this does not happen for economic liberalization (although the improvement of economic policies is likely to attract more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)).

largely free of any political burden. This assumption first proved wrong on the unintended impacts of humanitarian aid in conflicts. Although the debate started in the early 1970s after the Biafra crisis and the founding of Médecins Sans Frontières as a group politically opposed to the strictly impartial Red Cross, it intensified after the 1994 Rwandan crisis. (Terry 2002) The recognition that aid can have serious consequences on conflict when it is blind to political realities on the ground then expanded from humanitarian to development aid with Mary B. Anderson's project entitled **Local Capacities for Peace** (LCPP), today known as the Do No Harm (DNH) project. (Do No Harm 2007) After a summary book with the same title was published (Anderson 1999), 'conflict sensitivity' became the new buzzword in the development community and major aid donors started to draft and adopt guidelines for conflict-sensitive engagement.<sup>7</sup> A very good example of what can happen if this aspect of development aid is neglected was given by Peter Uvin in his criticism of the role of aid agencies in the sequence of events leading to Rwandan genocide. (Uvin 1998)

Another result of increased humanitarian engagement in internal conflict,<sup>8</sup> both military and non-military, was an ever-greater understanding of the relationship between development and security, especially after the emergence of the concept of human security.<sup>9</sup> Interdependence of these two factors requires aid agencies to cooperate with armies and vice-versa, blurring the distinction between the roles of the military and aid enterprise in restoring security and assisting development. (Stewart 2003)

The last milestone in the evolution of foreign aid was 9/11, which triggered a sharp increase in ODA flows to levels so far unprecedented. Besides that, it catalyzed the evolution of the process already under way as described above—adding a security component to the task lists for development agencies. These changes were most significant in United States, the largest bilateral donor by aid volume.<sup>10</sup> George W. Bush announced that “[w]e fight against poverty because hope

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<sup>7</sup> DAC OECD adopted the 'Helping prevent violent conflict' guidelines in 2001; DFID published its guidance notes 'Conducting Conflict Assessments' in January 2002; at the same time EC discussed its 'Checklist for root causes of conflict'. Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit of the World Bank announced it has developed 'Conflict Analysis Framework' in October 2002, but did not publish the full draft until April 2005. UNDP and ADB adopted similar documents in October 2003; USAID in August 2004; SIDA in 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Although the number of armed conflicts has declined (Human Security Centre 2005), increased spending on humanitarian aid documents an increase of international involvement in these conflicts. As Mark Duffield puts it, contemporary 'complex political emergencies' are no more complex than past emergencies, but it is our increased engagement in them which creates the impression of greater complexity. (Duffield 2001)

<sup>9</sup> The concept of Human security, coined in 1994, is described in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report of 1994.

<sup>10</sup> By share of aid to its GNI U.S. ranks towards the end of the donors list.

is an answer to terror.”<sup>11</sup> Although he later expressed doubts about such a connection,<sup>12</sup> the use of foreign aid for the purposes of national security was already firmly built in the National Security Strategy as one of the three pillars of national foreign policy (along with diplomacy and defence). Since 2002 U.S. economic assistance grew rapidly and in 2004 it reached double the amount prior to 9/11. Most of the increase was channelled through the Department of Defense (DoD) Security Assistance into Iraq and Afghanistan for debt forgiveness, reconstruction and counter-narcotics efforts. Total budget of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also increased, although not as much. (U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook) 2006) In 2006 DoD was accountable for the management of about 21 % of total U.S. ODA, versus 5.6 % in 2002. USAID, the main agency responsible for projects targeted at development, poverty reduction and disaster relief, was allocated only 38 % of the aid budget, while in 2002 it managed about ½ of all aid. (The United States Peer Review 2006)

As the Cold War history of US foreign aid suggests, the use of ODA for advancing security interests is not novel in the U.S. and attempts were made to continue the practise after 1989. In April 1994 the Congressional Budget Office released a study titled **Enhancing U.S. Security Through Foreign Aid**, requested by the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. This study suggested that “[s]elected types of development assistance may help greatly in stemming the rapid population growth and economic deprivation that, especially over a period of years, can provide a breeding ground for extremist groups that cause political instability and violence-or that make it more difficult for governments to take politically difficult yet responsible steps in pursuit of peace.” (Enhancing U.S. Security through Foreign Aid 1994, xi) USAID and the use of foreign aid for strategic purposes were consistently mentioned in the National Security Strategies preceding 9/11. However, given that in the 1990s volume of aid dropped to historically low levels, such a sharp increase reaching the highest volume of aid ever since the Marshall Plan, together with changes in the pattern of aid allocation described above, is a strong signal.

Finally, in January 2006 Condoleezza Rice launched ‘U.S. Foreign Assistance Reform’, an overhaul of the existing foreign aid structure. The reform introduced a new position, Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance, holding a rank equivalent to Deputy Secretary and concurrently serving as USAID administrator. The mandate of the Director is to coordinate aid programs

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<sup>11</sup> March 22, 2002, Monterrey Mexico. Cited in Krueger and Malečková 2003, 119.

<sup>12</sup> National Strategy for Combating Terrorism released in September 2006 states that “Terrorism is not the inevitable by-product of poverty. Many of the September 11 hijackers were from middle-class backgrounds, and many terrorist leaders, like bin Laden, are from privileged upbringings.” (National Strategy for Combating Terrorism 2006, 9)

administered by USAID and Department of State (DoS), devise a strategic Foreign Assistance Framework and evaluate the whole system. (Rice 2006) Interestingly though, major aid programs of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and programs under DoD are left outside the powers of the Director. Critics have thus opposed the proposal as being too ambitious as well as too limited. (Nowels and Veillette 2006) As aid volumes reach levels close to those during the Marshall Plan,<sup>13</sup> such an attempt at coordination seems a logical step. Some have even proposed the creation of a new Department of Global Development on the level of a cabinet minister, similar to British Department for International Development (DFID) or Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). These efforts have been strongly opposed by some congressmen and even USAID staff.<sup>14</sup>

Similar shifts towards securitization of aid can be traced among other major donors. The Reality of Aid Report 2006 pointed that Australia put security interests in front of poverty alleviation, and described signs of securitization of aid in Denmark, Japan, Canada, The Netherlands and the European Union. (The Reality of Aid Management Committee 2006)

## Critics

The most vocal critics of the incorporation of ODA into a national security framework and attempts for coordination under the DoS come from the non-governmental sector. In a paper titled **The Impact of the War on Terror on Aid Flows** a South African anti-poverty NGO ActionAid expressed concerns that prioritizing security over humanitarian goals will undermine development effort and divert funds from poverty-reduction projects elsewhere. Therefore, the promising drive of the international community expressed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be dissolved. Moreover, recognizing that terrorism is not a ‘weapon of the poor’ means that aid used to prevent terrorism will not benefit those most in need (i.e. the poorest), but those most likely to be recruited by terrorist organizations. The paper gives an example of Iraq, which alone receives the same amount of aid as that distributed to the whole Sub-Saharan Africa.

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<sup>13</sup> During the Marshall Plan the U.S. disbursed on average \$32 billion annually over the period of 4 years; in 2004 and 2005 total U.S. ODA was close to \$30 billion (in constant 2006 \$US). (U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook) 2006)

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the U.S. foreign assistance structure see Adams 2008 and Birdsall et al. 2006.

Bringing foreign aid under the DoS, similar to the efforts to bring development under Common Security and Foreign Policy in the European Union,<sup>15</sup> will lead to increased politicization, which is seen as a step back into the Cold War period. Subjugating other principles, such as human rights, to the vague concept of the WOT will undermine the donors' bargaining position against countries with bad governance. (Cosgrave 2004) On the same note, one could add that the unconditional aid to Pakistan, renewed<sup>16</sup> and doubled after 9/11 to help the then president Musharraf contain Taliban and Al Qaeda in the regions bordering Afghanistan, stands in sharp contrast to the newly-established Millennium Challenge Corporation which ties aid to stringent criteria on democratic governance and trade policies.

Oxfam America (*Smart Aid: Why Us Foreign Aid Demands Major Reform* 2008) warns that securitization of aid will eventually prove self-defeating: diverting aid from long-term strategies of poverty reduction and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to short-term objectives of national security will prevent aid from achieving its long-term purpose, which is a precondition for a safer world. Assigning civilian tasks to military personnel is prone to failure, as soldiers are not trained and prepared to build schools or promote gender equality. Likewise, burdening aid agencies with security tasks (just as direct counter-insurgency programs) will effectively strip them off their hard-won impartiality and put their staff in danger of armed attacks (which is already happening). Oxfam pointed to the fact that 1/3 of all U.S. aid funds 'war on terror' or 'war on drugs' and only 1/16 is spent in the least developed countries. Out of the top 10 U.S. aid recipient only two countries are among the world's poorest. Oxfam also points out that most aid is sent to strategic allies in the WOT and on the top of it 93 % of all aid is tied to the purchase of US goods and services. Indeed, Berthélemy (2006) identifies Switzerland, Austria, Ireland and most Nordic countries as the most altruistic, while he considers Australia, France, Italy, and to some extent Japan and the United States as the most egoistic.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, an analysis of USAID funds allocation before and after 9/11 shows that the new counter-terrorist programs are being funded separately by increases in aid budgets, while old programs keep running. (Moss, et al. 2005)

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<sup>15</sup> Such a step was proposed in the EU Constitution, which was rejected by popular vote in several EU countries and thus never materialized.

<sup>16</sup> US aid into Pakistan was suspended after the 1998 test nuclear explosion.

<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Alesina and Dollar found that when controlled for its special interest in Egypt and Israel, US aid is targeted to poverty, democracy and openness—this holds true though for the year 2000. Nevertheless, in his previous work Berthelémy identified US together with France, Germany and UK as relatively altruistic. (Berthélemy and Tichit 2004)

To sum up, a common denominator for all these arguments is a suspicion that targeting security goals is treating symptoms rather than addressing the causes of problems. This corresponds with the objections against aid securitization voiced by academics. (Dollar 2003)

## Counter-arguments

Although the above listed arguments are very convincing, the policies driving the current shift of aid towards a security-driven approach are not absolutely unfounded. In its **Helping prevent violent conflict** guidelines, the DAC has expressed the need of aid agencies to work ‘in and on conflict rather than around conflict’. Behind this expression lies an understanding that any conflict-sensitive project will not necessarily have a positive impact on the resolution of the conflict, while any peace-building project will not necessarily be conflict-sensitive. (Barbolet, et al. 2005)

Moreover, aid agencies have admitted that they can and should play a pro-active role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, depending on which phase the conflict is in.

The very same agencies whom we hear today warning against increasing politicization of foreign aid were yesterday calling for ‘whole-of-government approach’ and greater coordination. In a complex environment with numerous stakeholders and countless agencies working in the field coordination is highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary. However, coordination and holistic approach cannot happen outside the realm of politics. A clear and tight framework, which would make these decision predictable and transparent, might help diffuse the fear of politicization; however, the DAC Guidelines, Paris Declaration or more generally international humanitarian law are nowhere close to such a clear and tight policy toolbox. Coordination can hardly take place without making compromises which include political concessions. Thania Paffenholz observed that “Every intervening actor wants coordination but nobody wants to be coordinated!” (Paffenholz 2004)

Besides that, donor governments and multilateral agencies have long been criticized for pursuing contradicting policies—e.g. sending aid and running programs to support agriculture in poor countries, but at the same time maintaining trade barriers and subsidizing their own farmers which effectively bans products from the poor countries from their markets (EU and U.S.). Such discrepancies can hardly be solved without better coordination, and most importantly without taking difficult political decisions.

David Kilcullen, a leading strategist on counter-insurgency (COIN) and author of the COIN handbook for the U.S. Army, has identified three pillars of counter-insurgency: security, politics and economy. The latter includes both humanitarian and development assistance.<sup>18</sup> After the governments, the military, and the aid agencies themselves have come to realize that security and development simply cannot be separated, it seems highly improbable that securitization of foreign aid could be avoided. On the other hand, it should equally lead (and we see some signs of it in Afghanistan) to greater military engagement in ‘soft-power’ tools—protection, reconstruction, DDR and finally development itself.

It should be noted that areas like the role of economics in counter-terrorism or failed states remain largely a mystery. Although there is a mounting body of research on these issues and interconnections between them, the conclusions are either ambiguous or openly contradictory.<sup>19</sup> Policy makers are therefore left to decide on personal beliefs or preferences rather than sound empirical arguments. In his report for Congress on international terrorism in 2007, Raphael Perl presented both arguments for and against the use of foreign aid as a part of the response,<sup>20</sup> but didn’t recommend any of those options. (Perl 2007)

The current task in front of the development community as well as policy makers who set its agenda is to marry the demands for policy coordination, whole-of-government approach and the contribution of humanitarian and development assistance to conflict resolution and prevention with the demands for sufficient autonomy of aid agencies and the pursuit to prioritize development over national security goals, or to resist the subjugation of development enterprise to donors’ national interests. This task can be seen as a tension, but it can also be regarded as an opportunity for cooperation between the various actors who exercise Western influence in the developing world, including greater participation of the recipient societies themselves.

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<sup>18</sup> Kilcullen 2007 cited in Marczuk 2007.

<sup>19</sup> For example, as mentioned earlier, some suggest that there is no clear link between poverty, illiteracy, inequality and terrorism (Krueger 2007), but others found relationship between terrorism and lack of welfare. (Burgoon 2006) On another note, Stewart Patrick explored how big a threat can failed states pose and concluded that transnational threats are on average more likely to emanate not from the weakest states, but from stronger states which possess critical gaps in capacity and will. (Patrick 2006)

<sup>20</sup> Perl used a broader term ‘economic inducements’ and argued that they can play a powerful role in anti-terror cooperation and might even change economic and social conditions which provide breeding ground for terrorism, but then disputed the latter argument.

## Epilogue: the new Marshall Plan?

Official Development Aid started 60 years ago with a grand project which in essence pursued security interests. We might not like it, but we simply have to admit that Marshall Plan was built as a bulwark against the ‘Spectre of Communism’. (Radelet 2003) Today many call for another Marshall Plan—some want to fight poverty, yet others fear the ‘Spectre of Terrorism’. Notwithstanding which enemy they are more compelled to fight, they all believe they can win today just as Marshall Plan did half a century ago.

Unfortunately, there are huge differences between the situation in post-WW2 Europe and today’s Middle East, South Asia and Africa. First, we need to remember that Marshall Plan was not completely successful—it ended with a divided world. Today, as it seems, no-one is keen to shut their borders down again. Second, as Chollet and Goldgeier (2005) write, there is a big difference between development and resuscitation. Marshall Plan was built on a multilateral approach, followed contemporary economic practices, backed by a very sound security arrangement (NATO) and the Truman administration undertook a massive effort to sell the plan to both U.S. and European publics. Above all, the Plan was preceded with a clear vision, which provided a clear and tight framework upon which it could have been built.

None of these conditions are present in the current situation. However, it is also clear that development cannot be left out of the equation. As Chollet and Goldgeier conclude: “Although the answer to today’s challenges in the Middle East and Africa might not be to re-create a Marshall Plan, the solution certainly requires a **healthy dose** of the Marshall spirit.” (Chollet and Goldgeier 2005, 18, emphasis added)

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