

The Tumultuous Recent History of U.S. Stabilization and Reconstruction Efforts: The Way Ahead?

by David A. Anderson

The U.S. has been directly involved in some level of foreign stabilization and reconstruction effort since the end of World War II (WWII): from the occupation and reconstruction of post-WWII Japan/Germany, the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan), to civil operations and revolutionary development support (CORDS) in Vietnam, to recent efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The one common denominator that resonates is that the U.S. military and U.S. interagency required varying degrees of direct involvement to be successful—with notable reliance on the military to support/execute these efforts regardless of who was directly responsible.

Another commonality is that both entities almost unilaterally dissolved most of their capabilities and capacities to conduct these activities once their efforts were completed. This proved problematic in supporting the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, where the military was held directly responsible for stabilization and reconstruction activities at the onset of both wars. What follows are the efforts put forward by the Department of State (State) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to rectify the situation for both in the short-run and long-run, to avoid the ultimate inertia that led to the failings of such efforts.¹ Finally, a way ahead is provided that requires unremitting mutual cooperation at multiple levels between State, USAID, and the military to ensure enduring success in future stabilization and reconstruction operations.

The Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization

The Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) was established in 2004 to enhance U.S. security “through improved coordination, planning and implementation for Reconstruction and Stabilization assistance for foreign states and regions at risk of, in transition

David A. Anderson is a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer. He is currently a Supervisory Professor and the William E. Odom Chair of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Operations at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds a doctorate degree in business administration with emphasis in international business and development economics. He has published over sixty articles on military, economics, international relations, and interagency related topics.

from, conflict or civil strife.”² S/CRS was created for filling a coordination void between the Military, its planning and execution of operations, and its interagency counterparts who play an essential role in orchestrating stabilization and reconstruction efforts. This principally meant coordination with State and USAID who have the greatest vested interest in seeing to the social, political, and economic well-being in states of consequence to the U.S. and its allies. The inherent vacuum was made readily apparent throughout stabilization and reconstruction efforts during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

S/CRS faced much more bureaucratic resistance along the way, particularly within State and USAID.

S/CRS purpose was officially outlined in National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD-44) signed by President Bush in December 2005. NSPD-44 replaced NSPD-24 which had been in effect since January 2003. NSPD-24 directly placed the handling of post-conflict responsibilities on the Department of Defense (DoD). NSPD-44 ended the militarization of stabilization and reconstruction activities, activities the military was assessed as performing poorly.³

The DoD lauded NSPD-44 and was more than happy to steer stabilization and reconstruction requirements toward the interagency. The Secretary of Defense even put out a DoD Instruction (DoDI 3000.05) making stability operations equally as important as combat operations, noting the importance of and necessity for military and interagency cooperation.⁴ Interagency synergies were gained with the DoD through such things as planning and coordination activities, military academic institutional collaboration, training

and exercises, and Geographic Combatant Commander supported operations.

NSPD-44 also directed S/CRS to coordinate budget requirements with other appropriate Stabilization and reconstruction interagency organizations. S/CRS started with an initial budget of \$17 million dollars, enough only to hire 37 of the 80 personnel Ambassador Carlos Pascual, the Coordinator for S/CRS, thought necessary.⁵ DoD subsequently transferred \$100 million dollars through Section 1207 of the National Security Authorization Act for 2006 to S/CRS to aggressively start their efforts.⁶

S/CRS faced much more bureaucratic resistance along the way, particularly within State and USAID. To begin with, neither the Secretary of State, Colin Powell nor his Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage endorsed its creation. Not surprisingly, funding and staffing issues ensued.⁷ There was even a lack of agreement between agencies on what constituted reconstruction and stabilization.⁸ Many existing State Bureaus claimed S/CRS was redundant relative to their own responsibilities. Specific examples include State’s Bureau of Security, Democracy and Human Rights, its offices of Political-Military Affairs, and numerous regional Political Affairs Offices.⁹ USAID’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, and its Offices of Foreign Disaster Assistance, Conflict Mitigation and Management, Civilian-Military Cooperation, and geographically focused bureaus, inherently had most of the capabilities and competing responsibilities prescribed to S/CRS in NSPD-44.¹⁰ The Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance (DFA) and S/CRS fought over monies because of perceived role redundancies and responsibilities.¹¹ Furthermore, embassies in countries targeted by S/CRS felt little need for and/or had little confidence in the fledgling organization. Eventually, differences in planning capacity, processes, collaboration, and resources between S/CRS and the interagency as a whole, resulted in insignificant synergistic achievements

with the military.¹²

In 2008, Congress finally codified S/CRS and appropriated \$140 million dollars to expand its capacity and capabilities. The preponderance of which was toward advancing the concept of a Civilian Response Corps (CRC), a core competency mission to be manned by applicable government agencies in order to rapidly deploy to conflict areas.¹³ The deployable pool of qualified personnel was to fit within a three tier system. The first tier consisted of the Active Response Corps (ARC). These personnel were assigned by their respective U.S. government agency to be readily deployable to respond to an international crisis. The second tier consisted of a Standby Response Corps (SRC), a cadre of personnel consisting of civilian government volunteers possessing critical skillsets necessary to augment that of the ARC. The third tier of personnel, the Civilian Reserve Corps, was to consist of U.S. civilian volunteers with special skills sets (e.g. engineers and public administrators) that could deploy for up to a year.¹⁴ Getting personnel committed to the ARC and SRC proved problematic. Agencies committing people did not receive personnel backfills to replace those that were supporting CRC.

It took until 2010, five years from its inception, for S/CRS to get a formal budget line. By this time only one CRC member had made it to Iraq and only 130 had made it to Afghanistan. Of the \$140 million dollars appropriated by Congress for S/CRS for 2010, \$70 million dollars was ultimately rescinded.¹⁵ S/CRS requested \$184 million dollars for fiscal year 2011 to make-up ground lost in 2010, but received just \$40 million dollars.¹⁶ Over the next five years CRC struggled building its ARC/SRC force, sending merely 235 personnel on approximately 400 engagements to forty countries.¹⁷ Development of the Reserve Corps became even more problematic because of training, compensation, competitive hiring, and legal issues, to name just a few. Ultimately, Congress never authorized the

Reserve Component of the force, even though both the Bush and Obama administrations endorsed the funding requirement.

S/CRS eventually failed to win over State/USAID¹⁸ agencies and U.S. embassies who saw no real need for S/CRS, believing existing systems worked just fine.¹⁹ The fate of S/CRS was sealed when it was overlooked as an option in addressing the 2010 Haiti earthquake disaster. Subsequently, the 2010 State-USAID Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) eventually moved S/CRS out from the Office of Secretary of State, relegating it to Bureau status and renaming it the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO). CSO became one of eight organizations falling beneath the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.²⁰

The fate of S/CRS was sealed when it was overlooked as an option in addressing the 2010 Haiti earthquake disaster.

The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

CSO was to be the new “institutional locus for policy and operational solutions for crisis, conflict, and instability” and the nexus for a coordinated whole-of-government effort.²¹ The 2010 QDDR mandated that CSO enhance CRC capabilities and capacity over that initiated by S/CRS so the U.S. could better respond judiciously to conflict. Seeking a better approach for effective engagement, CSO struggles with its identity and sense of worth within State and throughout the interagency. It has not fared any better than its predecessor. This struggle is exacerbated by a precipitous decline in budget. Its budget went from \$43.5 million dollars in FY 2012²² down to \$21.6 million dollars for FY 2017.²³ Beginning in 2012, under Ambassador

Rick Barton, CSO dramatically deviated from CSO's mandate due to budgetary and relative value issues.²⁴ By 2013 the CRC was down to 68 personnel due to repeated budget cuts.²⁵ The CRC was eventually disbanded, essentially ending direct collaboration with other stabilization and reconstruction efforts in a whole-of-government manner.²⁶ Conflict prevention now became the priority.²⁷

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is almost exactly that of CSO.

The fallout from this turbulence led to a scathing, March 2014, U.S. Inspection General Report (OIG). The report identified forty-three formal operational organization deficiencies and five informal deficiencies, accompanied by recommendations for corrective action. Some of the identified problems follow; The OIG reported that it has no evidence that CSO "plays any interagency coordination role" with other national security government agencies whose purpose is related to conflict resolution. CSO has not had an interagency coordination meeting in Washington, DC since 2012.²⁸ In fact, CSO has done a poor job communicating its purpose internally and externally, let alone establish itself as "the locus for policy and operational solutions for conflict and instability."²⁹ Those bureaus and agency offices that do understand CSO's role do not accept it and see much of its mandate as redundant to the missions of their organizations.³⁰ Similar to that of S/CRS, numerous interagency organizations work identical issues to that of CSO. Additional redundant capabilities are found in the State Bureaus of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. It promotes democracy and rule of law, including free and fair elections; the Bureau of Near East Affairs' Middle East Partnership Initiative manages programs that

support democratic transition in the region; and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement trains police.

USAID has experience, infrastructure, and programs in place in most nations facing conflict.³¹ These programs include overseas development offices that produce five-year country development strategies. Complex Crises Fund monies are available for conflict prevention purposes and to react to unanticipated complex crisis situations. The funds focus on countries or regions that have a propensity for conflict, crisis, volatility, or atrocities. They may also be utilized for unforeseen occasions that arise in supporting democratization of historically insecure states.³² USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is almost exactly that of CSO.³³ Transition Initiative funding favors plans that address "political crisis, preventing and mitigating conflict, and stabilization needs in countries important to U.S. foreign policy."³⁴

Further hindering its effective functioning, OIG notes that CSO is not structurally organized well, which often creates situations where individuals find themselves reporting to multiple supervisors.³⁵ It is administratively inept, lacking fundamental standard operating procedures for securing and managing a wide array administrative functions. CSO is riddled with the mismanagement of personnel and financial resources. In 2013, CSO spent some \$450,000 of a two million dollar budget on the travel of twenty-eight staff members, over the course of a year, to Honduras in executing its non-violence campaign. Whereas, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives had three staff members orchestrating a \$12 million dollar budget for a similar program in Honduras—two in country and one back in Washington, DC.³⁶

In conducting engagements in foreign countries, CSO advertises quick results, activities requiring less than eighteen months. However, it has no exit transition planning procedures and often goes beyond the eighteen month

threshold.³⁷ CSO “has diminished, rather than enhanced, a whole-of-government approach, with few exceptions, most notable Syria has not engaged in recognized high-priority conflicts of national security interest.”³⁸ Other CSO actions replicated what USAID bureaus were already doing (e.g. in Kenya and Burma). CSO has merely been effective in supporting U.S. embassy country teams, as needed.³⁹ Finally, morale is poor and it suffers from a high turnover rate among its employees. For example, from February 2012 to August 2013, CSO lost 54 percent of its staff.⁴⁰ CSO has also had a number of Equal Employment Opportunity harassment and hostile work environment complaints waged against it.⁴¹

Exacerbating CSO’s situation is that stabilization and reconstruction activities are now competing with other U.S. foreign policy and security priorities within the interagency (e.g. preventing/combating terrorism, violent extremism, international crime, cyber-attacks, extreme poverty, human atrocities, human trafficking). Beginning with the Congressional Appropriations Act for 2014, CSO is no longer provided dedicated funding.⁴² It lives off Section 1207 money provided by the DoD.⁴³ As with its predecessor S/CRS, CSO has failed as a lead planner and coordination agent for stabilization and reconstruction activities.

Assessment

S/CRS was a commendable but ill-conceived and ill-fated idea. It was born out of the struggles and shortcomings of the military’s efforts in conducting stability and reconstruction operations in the early years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; missions the military was not prepared or equipped to do to the extent needed. The interagency institutions best suited to either orchestrate, lead, and/or execute these affairs were completely under resourced. Collectively, they were not manned, equipped, nor had the necessary funding to execute their steady state

mission, while conducting stabilization and reconstruction endeavors of such scale and intensity. S/CRS tried to work around this circumstance by establishing the CRC, but never received the necessary State, USAID, and Congressional support to effectively implement the plan. Even with the extensive funding support provided by the DoD to shore up its efforts, the interagency lack of capacity and appetite for committing large numbers of personnel for major stabilization and reconstruction missions meant the military was largely left in charge of organizing and conducting the stabilization and reconstruction phase of these wars.

...the establishment of CSO as a replacement to S/CRS now appears a superficial gap for State...

The Department of State certainly finds value in supporting as well as conducting stabilization and reconstruction activities. It does have a deeply rooted institutional investment in this realm recognizing the important diplomatic linkage stabilization and reconstruction has in executing its foreign policy mission. To this end, State does oversee U.S. embassies and their diplomatic efforts around the world. Each U.S. embassy possesses some semblance of a country specific integrated strategic plan and overarching policy goal that advocates such things as stable and secure partners. However, the establishment of CSO as a replacement to S/CRS now appears a superficial gap for State to keep its proverbial foot directly in the door of influence for the conduct of future stabilization and reconstruction operations. Not as a direct means to an end, but maybe even a power play of sorts between departments.

USAID with its dual-hatted Director of Foreign Assistance (DFA) is best positioned

to coordinate planning and executing efforts among interagency entities needed in conducting stabilization and reconstruction type activities. The DFA position provides an important authority that can bridge State and USAID focus of effort between their differences in operating time horizons while conducting stabilization and reconstruction. This cohesion is important beyond the obvious. It will ensure that State's fundamental shorter-term mission focus is appropriately aligned or nested with

USAID with its dual-hatted Director of Foreign Assistance (DFA) is best positioned to coordinate planning and executing efforts among interagency entities needed in conducting stabilization and reconstruction type activities.

USAID's innate longer-term mission focus. Additionally, "DFA provides strategic direction and guidance to all other foreign assistance programs delivered through various agencies and entities of the U.S. government."⁴⁴ DFA is also best postured to collaborate with other liked-minded countries such as Canada, UK, and Australia. The added advantage is that USAID has with its core economic assistance and innate conflict prevention components, forged in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961,⁴⁵ an inherent organization that collectively performs most of CSO's mission. Further solidifying its importance in leading the interagency effort.

Faced with so many competing priorities and a small operational footprint relative to its military counterpart, the interagency is not likely to be able to do much beyond providing applicable department planning expertise, a number of practitioners to perform department specific activities, and execution oversight in support of post-conflict stabilization and

reconstruction operations. This means many actionable stabilization and reconstruction functions will inevitably be performed by the military, supplemented by an array of contracted agents representing interagency entities, the military, non-governmental organizations, international partners and institutions, as was the case in Iraq and Afghanistan. This experience must be collectively leveraged for future planning.

A common ground of understanding and expectation management for participation in stabilization and reconstruction activities must be advanced. Regular structured means of collaborative dialog must become the norm between all parties with a vested interest in stabilization and reconstruction efforts. All entities must be prepared to make role and responsibility compromises for the collective good. The military must embrace a permanent, expanded stabilization and reconstruction role, including crisis prevention capability that is naturally interwoven as it is within State and USAID, yet with greater capacity. The military also must leverage its Geographic Combatant Commanders theater security cooperation programs in developing and advancing coordination of the building of necessary skillsets in preventing hostilities. It must include leveraging the Joint Interagency Coordination Group resident in each Geographic Combatant Command and the embassy country teams of those countries located in the area of operation of Geographic Combatant Commands. This will nest nicely with the defaulted role of "conflict prevention" CSO assumed as its capabilities and budget eroded.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that fragile states of vital national security interest to the U.S. and its allies reside all around the world. At risk states range from those on the verge of imminent collapse to those with warning indicators signaling a high

probability of internal conflict/crisis. The Fund for Peace 2015 Fragile State Index classifies 65 of 178 countries it tracks as ranging in fragility from “very high alert” to “high warning” countries.⁴⁶ The U.S. needs a comprehensive, responsive, flexible, and agile means to respond proactively to prevent situations from evolving into conflict, while maintaining a capacity to conduct post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. This must emerge from the impending ashes of CSO and be led by DFA in conjunction with its military counterparts, the primary actionable executors of stabilization and reconstruction activities. With certainty, the U.S. military will be called upon to conduct stabilization and reconstruction in future operations. This is a capability the military must readily embrace. By leaning forward the U.S. military will be much better postured to handle these activities when invariably called to do so. **IAJ**

Notes

1 Other interagency entities as a whole are involved in these activities, such as the Department of Justice and the Department of the Treasury. Their involvement, interests, and positions regarding stabilization and reconstruction is understood to be captured in general terms with that of State and USAID.

2 U.S. State Department. “Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization,” <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/crs/c12936.htm>. (accessed 16 November 2016).

3 Price, Heather. “The Future of S/CRS-What’s in a Name?” (Article excerpt) *Stability Operations*, <http://www.questia.com/magazine/1P3-2304323001/the-future-of-s-crs-what-s-in-a-name...> (accessed 25 November 2016).

4 McCannell, Ryan S., “The Fate of the Civilian Surge in a Changing Environment,” United States Army War College Press, PKSOI Paper, 2016: 4.

5 Buss, John C. “The State Department Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization and Its Interaction with the Department of Defense,” Issue Paper, *Center for Strategic Leadership*, U.S. Army War College, Volume 09-05 (July 2005): 2.

6 McCannell, 4.

7 Price, 3.

8 United States Government Accounting Office (GAO), Report to Congressional Requesters, “Stabilization and Reconstruction: Actions are Needed to Develop a Planning and Coordination Framework and Establish the Civilian Reserve Corps,” GAO-08-39. <http://gao.gov/assets/270/269092.html> (accessed 25 November 2016): 8.

9 USAID, “Bureau For Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance,” <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/burea-democracy-conflict-and-...> (accessed 27 December 2016).

10 USAID. “Who we are...,” <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization...> (accessed 27 December 2016).

11 GAO, 15.

12 GAO, 2, 14-16.

13 McCannell, 7.

- 14 GAO, 2 and 19.
- 15 Prevention and Protection Working Group (PPWG): (Friends Committee on National Legislation), “Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations,” Fact Sheet.
- 16 PPWG, 1.
- 17 Ibid, 1.
- 18 GAO, 13.
- 19 McCannell, 9.
- 20 Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, “The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review: Leading Through Civilian Power,” 2010.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 PPWG, 1.
- 23 114th Congress. House of Representatives, 2d Session, “State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2017,” Report 114:18.
- 24 McConnell, 10.
- 25 PPWG, 1.
- 26 McCannell, 10.
- 27 Miles, Renanah. “The Foreign Policy Essay: The (Many) Hurdles to U.S. Stabilization Operations,” *Lawfare*, 5 February 2014, <http://www.lawfareblog.com/foreign-policy-essay-many-hurdles-us-stabilization-operations...> (accessed 16 November 2016):5.
- 28 United States Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (Office of Inspector General), “*Inspection of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations*,” ISP-I-14-06 (March 2014):5.
- 29 Ibid, 3.
- 30 Ibid, 6.
- 31 Speroin, Domani. “QDDR II Walks Into a Bar and Asks, What Happened to the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations?” *Diplo pundit*, 6 May 2015: 9-10.
- 32 Department of State, “Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations, and Related Programs,” Fiscal Year 2017. <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/9276/252179.pdf> (accessed 23 December 2016): 151.
- 33 OIG, 13.
- 34 Department of State, 86
- 35 OIG, 7.
- 36 Ibid, 13.
- 37 Ibid, 12.

38 Ibid, 3.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid, 8.

41 Ibid, 9.

42 Miles, 2.

43 OIG, 17.

44 Agency for International Development, "A Brief History of U.S. Diplomacy," <http://www.usdiplomacy.org/state/abroad/udaid.php> (accessed 9 December 2016).

45 University of Colorado, Geography Department, "USAID History," www.colorado.edu/geography/class_homepages/.../History%20of%20USAID.doc (accessed 18 January 2017): 3-4.

46 The Fund for Peace, "Fragile States Index 2015," <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015> (accessed 13 January 2017).

GET YOUR COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE CLASS RING AT THE CGSC FOUNDATION GIFT SHOP



Prices start at \$305 for metal alloy. 10K Gold & White Gold, 14K Gold & White Gold and 18K Gold & White gold available • 13 stone colors to choose from • Initials engraved free; full name \$15 extra
Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery • Visit the gift shop for more information and to place your order

Visit the CGSC Foundation Gift Shop in Room 1149 (next to the barber shop) in the Lewis and Clark Center to order your ring today.

Stay connected with your U.S. and International classmates... Sign up for the free alumni outreach website at <http://alumnioutreach.cgscfoundation.org> or just click on Alumni Outreach from www.cgscfoundation.org to get started.

Call 913.651.0624 to order TODAY!

Or come by the CGSC Foundation in The Lewis and Clark Center, Suite 1149 during normal business hours.

100 Stimson Ave., Suite 1149 • Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027 • ph: 913-651-0624 • fax: 913-651-4519 • email: office@cgscf.org • www.cgscfoundation.org
[facebook.com/CGSCFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/CGSCFoundation) • [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com/company/CGSC-Foundation)>>CGSC Foundation, Inc.