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“Penny Wise, Pound Foolish”

Tammy S. Schultz

“Efficiencies” is the new Washington watchword as U.S. government departments, agencies, and the Congress have begun slashing budgets. Unfortunately, some of these cuts are not being made with surgical precision, but with rusted hacksaws, specifically in the national security realm.

Two areas in particular that we cut at our peril are preventative/shaping operations and stability/counterinsurgency operations (or “phase zero” and “phase four” as they are called – although the military has smartly moved away from this linear paradigm). Cases abound, but just three cases are illustrative of this “penny wise, pound foolish” mindset: The desire to cut or eliminate the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

USIP, a unique organization funded by Congress, serves U.S. interests to prevent or manage conflict where possible, as well as to help stabilize conflict situations faster to save lives and dollars. Whether behind the scenes with the Afghan and Iraqi ministry of defense training or in countries that never reach the front pages because a conflict is prevented, like in Nigeria, USIP is there on the ground. When the U.S. government (USG) could not (or would not) produce strategic doctrine on stability operations, USIP stepped in to fill that void (important both for current operators and policymakers as well as for future operations so we don’t have to recreate the wheel). This is not a Republican or Democrat issue – or at least it wasn’t when President Ronald Reagan signed USIP into law. Politics should stop at the water’s edge once again today as the United States is engaged in two small wars, hoping to find a way out. That “way out” will only come through work like that supported by USIP.

The Army almost cut the U.S. Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute right after the United States got into Iraq, and thankfully reversed that decision. Yet the word on the street is that PKSOI faces being eliminated, or at least severely cut, once again. One of the Army’s arguments is that PKSOI is redundant with the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA). This is incorrect and shows that the entire USG has more to learn in this area.

JCISFA operates largely at the operational and tactical – not strategic – level. If Iraq and Afghanistan have taught us anything, it should be the critical importance of having the right strategy. Tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), a large part of JCISFA’s focus, are

important for security foreign assistance, but so are strategic lessons. Security force assistance is important, but it is not PKSOI's focus, nor should it be – that's what JCISFA does. PKSOI looks at a wider range of missions to include security force assistance (at the strategic level), but also stability operations, counterinsurgency, and peacekeeping. PKSOI helps infuse the field and DC policymaking circles with the right strategic best practices. PKSOI compliments JCISFA (and vice versa) – they do not duplicate one another.

Furthermore, PKSOI is the only USG institute that looks not only deeply at stability operations, but widely as well. From doctrine to organization, personnel to leadership, PKSOI covers it all. Located in Carlisle, PA, PKSOI is completely plugged into both the USG interagency as well as the United Nations. At \$2 million and a mere 40 people, PKSOI is a bargain for the U.S. taxpayer *and* for the U.S. Army.¹

That's not to say that there are no champions of preventative and stability operations at the Pentagon or Army. Last week, Department of Defense (DoD) Undersecretary of Policy Michèle Flournoy, DoD's number three man, as well as General David Petraeus, tried to persuade Congress not to cut funding...for USAID. Said General Petraeus in last week's Congressional testimony, "The holding, building, and transition [in Afghanistan] cannot possibly succeed unless we have enough investment on the civilian side." USAID's operating budget in 2010 was only \$1.65 billion (to put this in perspective, USAID operations gets 2 cents for every 10 dollars that DoD receives). USAID is still an anemic version of what it used to be forty years ago, when it was on the ground helping soldiers and Marines in Vietnam. USAID is working to transform the Agency back to its operational roots (many argue that it has been turned into a contracting agency) to include doing development under fire, but this transformation cannot continue without the resources to do so.

The USG *should* look at squeezing more out of every dollar, but it should not do so by cutting programs that ultimately make Americans safer at less cost. The efficiencies argument breaks down when one looks at the second and third order effects of cutting these institutes and agencies. First, if just one conflict breaks out because we have cut those who would have been actively working to mitigate the crisis, we have not only lost dollars but lives. Yes, this is hard to prove as the proverbial "dog that did not bark" – did the conflict not occur because we were on the ground trying to stop it, or was the conflict not going to break out in the first place? Even if just one conflict out of a hundred is prevented, and USIP, PKSOI, or USAID are directly or indirectly involved in mitigating efforts, these programs are worth the cost.

Second, arguments for cutting such programs are not new. They are voiced every time wars wind down, like they were after World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The United States hopes to be out of Iraq by the end of this year and by 2015 in Afghanistan. As Libya should remind us, however, as a global leader, the United States cannot stop the world from spinning and just get off – with global powers come global responsibilities. Better we engage "left of the bang" (before the shooting starts) than right of the bang (afterward the crisis becomes kinetic). And if we do have to engage after the fighting starts, we need to do so in the most effective way possible. We owe it to those who have paid for these best practices in blood that we don't

¹ Full disclosure: I served as PKSOI's Director of Research & Policy from 2005-2007, but it is in part because of this experience that I understand and appreciate the work that they do.

destroy the keepers of these lessons, let them work to reduce the number of future conflicts, and ensure that when conflicts do arise, the cost in life and treasure was less than we paid today.

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