

## Global Development: Views from the Center

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### Sen. Kerry Champions Development In Knock-Out Speech

By [Sarah Jane Staats](#)

Sen. John Kerry called for a grand new vision to put diplomacy and development alongside defense at the heart of America's foreign policy in a knock-out [speech](#) at the Brookings Institution last week. Sen. Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, spoke of a new generation of global challenges—ethnic tension, religious extremism, financial crises, climate change and poverty—that require a dramatic overhaul of U.S. foreign policy to protect our common security and prosperity. In delivering the speech, Sen. Kerry puts himself at the forefront of a growing list of congressional champions and constituents eager for better, stronger U.S. global development policies and programs.

Sen. Kerry recognized that there are both long-term and short-term needs, but said we can't afford to wait to strengthen our civilian institutions of development and diplomacy to adequately address the challenges of the 21st century. He called for urgent actions in our diplomatic corps, including more resources and personnel, better training and education, and greater flexibility at the State Department.

On the development side, he outlined five steps to rebuild USAID and other foreign assistance programs:

- . **Clarify the policies and goals.** He noted there is currently no overarching policy for U.S. foreign aid and development and the current Foreign Assistance Act lists over 150 policy directives and goals.
0. **Bring greater coordination to our aid efforts.** Sen. Kerry said the twenty-some agencies implementing U.S. aid programs often have diffuse and conflicting goals and that while 60 percent of foreign aid goes to 10 countries for political/military, counter-narcotics and HIV/AIDS, the other 40 percent is spread thin in 140-plus countries. He called for a comprehensive development strategy to determine which agency is in charge, what we hope to achieve and how best to accomplish our goals.

0. **Strengthen professional expertise and capacity.** Sen. Kerry spoke of the need for training and recruitment of highly skilled public servants and technical experts which depends on restoring intellectual capacity, and policy and strategic planning to ensure that USAID is a place where innovative ideas can take shape.
0. **Streamline outdated laws and heavy bureaucracy to untie the hands of aid workers.** Sen. Kerry again cited the confusing directives, reporting requirements and procedural roadblocks that exist in the Foreign Assistance Act, last authorized the year Kerry arrived in the Senate—1985.
0. **Rebalance the relationship between Washington and the field.** Sen. Kerry said country teams need to have more power to shape programs, determine needs and take calculated risks when they see real strategic opportunities.

Readers tracking these issues will spot the parallels to a host of reports and advocacy efforts. The [Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network](#) should be pleased and proud to see their call for a national strategy on global development, a new foreign assistance act, streamlined bureaucracy and more resources with greater flexibility and better accountability reflected in Kerry's remarks. Many of these arguments are also found in CGD's White House and the World chapter on "[Modernizing U.S. Foreign Assistance for the Twenty-first Century](#)" by Steve Radelet and Sheila Herrling, in Steve Radelet's congressional testimonies [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) and even our entertaining [Foreign Assistance Act video](#). In a recent *Wall Street Journal* [op-ed](#), former Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright and Colin Powell, co-chairs of the [Initiative for Global Development's Leadership Council](#), spoke of the organization's many business leaders committed to smarter foreign aid strategies, continued economic engagement and trade as part of the U.S. national security and economic interest.

Speaking after Sen. Kerry, Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat referred to the CGD commission report [On the Brink: Weak States and U.S. National Security](#). Eizenstat, who co-chaired the bi-partisan commission with John Edward Porter in 2004, recounted the report's call to strengthen civilian capacities to manage security risks, including the recommendation to establish an integrated development strategy and implement it within a single, Cabinet-level development agency ([see page 30](#)).

Eizenstat also said that there should be a director for development issues at the National Security Council and that we need to preserve and expand programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) that, like the Marshall Plan, reflect the recipient country's

own priorities. (See also [Sheila Herling's memo](#) to National Security Advisor Jim Jones calling for the USAID administrator to be added to the NSC.)

CGD President Birdsall said that most of the recommendations in *On the Brink* were “a matter of political will and political capital more than of money.” Sen. Kerry echoed the sentiment, saying these issues “are mostly a challenge to political will and to leadership.”

As I listened to Kerry's remarks, I kept thinking that the rhetoric was great but how was he going to do all this? Before my Washington-cynicism could get the best of me, Kerry provided some concrete answers.

He vowed to work with Sen. Richard Lugar to introduce two pieces of legislation: a State Department authorization act and an initial foreign aid reform bill to provide a blueprint for comprehensive reform of U.S. diplomacy and development. He also said he would focus on fostering a modern personnel system to hire and retain top talent in our civilian agencies and support legislation to promote accountability and transparency to ensure that the U.S. funds development programs that work.

With these steps, Sens. Kerry and Lugar join House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman in a shared commitment to restore the role of congressional authorizers in guiding and strengthening U.S. diplomatic and development policy (see also CGD's commentary on this issue [here](#)). They are moving forward with the same approach: starting with a State Department reauthorization bill that has already been approved by [Berman's committee](#), and moving toward a more comprehensive rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act next year in cooperation with the administration (they are, however, still waiting for signals from the White House on these issues, including nominations of USAID and MCC heads).

It is encouraging that Sens. Kerry and Lugar, chair and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, share a common vision, agenda and approach on these issues. The same degree of bipartisanship does not exist, however, on House Foreign Relations Committee where Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and several other Republicans have not yet supported (and in some cases tried to obstruct) Chairman Berman's efforts on a National Strategy for Global Development and deeper foreign assistance reforms.

Sen. Kerry's speech puts him in good company with Sen. Lugar, Rep. Berman, [hundreds of businesses and non-governmental organizations](#), and a growing number of Americans who believe, as Sen. Kerry said, that:

History teaches us that America is safest and strongest when we understand that our security will not be protected by military means alone. It must be protected as well by our generosity, by our example, by powerful outreach, and by instilling a palpable sense in the people of the world that we understand—and share their destiny. That has always inspired people, and it always will. It undercuts our enemies, it empowers our friends—and it keeps us safer.

Here's hoping the congressional leaders keep championing these issues and that they will enjoy both continued support from their constituents and leadership from President Obama. (And three cheers for the congressional staff in these offices who work tirelessly on the issues and help make things happen: Steve Feldstein, Connie Veillette, and Diana Ohlbaum.)