Do Three Ds Make an F?

The Limits of "Defense, Diplomacy, and Development"

BY ETHAN B. KAPSTEIN

In Washington, clever turns of phrase can be easily confused with deep analysis. One such phrase that has entered the Beltway's intellectual echo chamber is the "3Ds" of defense, diplomacy, and development. But despite the numerous speeches and policy papers written on this topic, a simple question has been left dangling: does anyone *really* know what the phrase means in terms of the formulation and execution of U.S. national security policy?

On its surface, the notion of joining the 3Ds into a more comprehensive whole-of-government strategy toward the world's trouble spots is more than enticing; it seems downright obvious. After all, did the United States not match the Soviet threat in postwar Europe through the purposeful employment of all three tools, as exemplified by the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)? Why, we may ask, are we not executing a similarly holistic approach toward the challenges we face in such places as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen?

Unfortunately, the idea that the arrows of defense, diplomacy, and development can be joined into one missile, much less hit a single target, may be misleading. To the extent that this concept seeks to replicate the contours of American foreign policy in the late 1940s, it suggests the limits of historical knowledge in the U.S. Government, for it is solely with the benefit of hindsight that a narrative of a seamless and coherent U.S. approach to the bipolar world can be constructed.

More instructive, perhaps, is the American experience in Vietnam. There, the Johnson administration announced grandiose plans to transform the Mekong Delta into a new Tennessee Valley

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Authority, while making endless diplomatic overtures to the regime in Saigon—and to America's allies—in the hope of bolstering the Saigon government's credibility, legitimacy, competence, and authority. Needless to say, there was little absorptive capacity in South Vietnam for these diplomatic and developmental initiatives, which in any case were not integrated with the American military strategy of fighting a conventional war rather than a prolonged counterinsurgency campaign.

Rather than promoting the comforting hope that defense, diplomacy, and development can be unified, the Obama administration would better advance its foreign policy objectives if it spoke the hard language of priorities, requirements, tradeoffs, and *limitations*. Such language, for example, is sadly missing from the Pentagon's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, which states that "America's leadership in this world requires a whole-of-government approach that integrates all elements of national power" but nowhere acknowledges America's myriad deterrence failures since the end of the Cold War and the reasons for them. As we will see, each of the 3Ds operates with its own objectives, incentive systems, and time horizons.

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Conflicting Objectives

Since the 3Ds *sound* as if they should go together, it is worth recalling what each tool seeks to accomplish. A bit of reflection should help clarify why bringing them together is much harder than it seems.

Briefly, the purpose of American military power is to deter and, if necessary, defeat our nation's enemies. That the United States has failed to deter—much less defeat—at least some of its enemies since the Vietnam War (including, inter alia, such adversaries as Somali warlords and pirates, drug runners and international criminal gangs, and al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations) is a disturbing point that should nonetheless remain at the forefront of our minds. Why is that the case? Is it because the United States has failed to use the appropriate diplomatic and economic tools, or is it because the Nation has failed to understand the new enemies it is facing and their objectives and systems of motivation? These may seem like straightforward questions, but they get to the heart of a most crucial issue: why has the United States failed to achieve its security objectives in several prominent cases?

Unlike defense, diplomacy requires engaging with friends (and in many cases foes as well) in *negotiations* aimed at finding common ground over shared interests. Basically, diplomacy is about dividing a pie in such a way as to make each consumer believe there is no way he will get more, even through the use of violence. But the problem here is that the presence of American military power in a given setting—say, in Afghanistan or Iraq—can undermine rather than support a given set of negotiations, such as those aimed at promoting "postconflict" resolution. It is obvious that each party to a set of talks will seek to manipulate the American military presence to its benefit, as the Shia did with some success in Iraq. This, of course, increased Sunni distrust of the settlement process, fueling the insurgency.

Finally, development is fundamentally concerned with establishing the conditions that bolster long-term economic growth.

Unfortunately, nobody knows precisely what those conditions are; it is commonly agreed, however, that development is the result of many decades of institution-building and human capital formation that promote the kinds of investments that raise labor productivity.

These institutions can certainly be supported by the international community through some combination of aid and trade. There is little doubt, for example, that a friendlier trade regime would bolster the economies of many developing nations. But a moment's reflection reminds us that such a regime is politically infeasible, since American and European farmers have proved quite adept at protecting their agriculture sector from developing world imports of cotton and grain.

As a consequence, the industrial world's development policies resemble the benefactor who endows a scholarship to Harvard but then refuses to hire the recipient upon graduation because of race or gender. Even more pernicious, the use of "tariff escalation" (meaning tariffs are higher on finished products than on raw materials—for example, on instant coffee versus coffee beans) by the United States and European Union (EU) creates disincentives for many developing nations to make value-added investments. Through such policies, we limit the creation of a moderate business class that views sustained economic growth as a promising and feasible policy objective.

Some readers will undoubtedly assert that the picture being painted is deliberately gloomy for the sake of provocation. After all, did the United States not succeed in uniting the 3Ds in postwar Europe? Who could deny that American policies encouraged the birth of a united, secure, and prosperous European community? And what about the combined efforts of the United States and European Union to bring former Warsaw Pact countries into the EU and NATO? Indeed, is the sweep of postwar history not a great testimony to Western policy coherence?

To be sure, America's heroic accomplishments during the Cold War era and its aftermath cannot and should not be denied. But it would be a mistake to argue that they were the result of a coherent grand strategy. Instead, the United States emphasized economic statecraft during the postwar era because the other tools at its disposal—diplomacy and defense—were either ineffective or unavailable. Joseph Stalin had shown soon after Yalta that he had no intention of keeping the agreements he reached with his wartime allies, while the American people showed the White House that they would not support keeping millions of troops on European soil after the war's end. Rather than reflecting a grand strategy, the Marshall Plan was pretty much all the United States had left to offer in 1947—and even that was hotly contested. In fact, had Stalin not overthrown the government of Czechoslovakia in 1948, it is quite likely that Congress would have rejected Secretary of State George Marshall's call for increased foreign aid!

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The United States was similarly hamstrung with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Europeans were unwilling to move quickly to expand the EU, leaving a policy vacuum that had to be filled by NATO lest the former Soviet colonies adopt potentially ugly forms of

The U.S. 3D approach in Afghanistan lacks indications that Afghans are investing in their own future

U.S. Army (Teddy Wade)

governance. On the foreign aid front, Russia was encouraged by the West to engage in the "mass privatization" that created today's oligarchy, seriously retarding broad-based economic development. In many Eastern European countries, problems of corruption and poor governance remain pervasive.

Whither the 3Ds?

If the idea of defense, diplomacy, and development rests on shaky foundations, how should the United States advance its objectives in such places as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen? In all these cases, America's enemies will only be defeated through some combination of military power, state-building, and the deepening of diplomatic and economic relations. Should these policies be pursued separately and sequentially? Is there any hope of a coherent strategy that can focus all of America's tremendous resources on the problem at hand?

In most cases, the answer (surely a tough one to swallow) is: probably not. The United States has a poor record of state-building, and that should come as no surprise; nations must be built and maintained by the people who call a certain place "home." There will undoubtedly be disputes about the nation's new or rebuilt architecture, but these will only be resolved peacefully when each party recognizes that it is better off inside rather than outside the tent. Again it must be emphasized that the incentives America provides to this process, be they economic or military, could easily be misinterpreted as a sign of favor to one party over another, undermining rather than supporting conflict resolution. As difficult as it may be to accept, superpowers are sometimes better off when they devote their militaries strictly to the killing and/or containing of the nation's enemies rather than as

mediators or balancers in internal conflicts. The United States, for example, painfully learned this lesson in Lebanon during the administration of Ronald Reagan.

However, there will undoubtedly be occasions in which the United States is determined to utilize the 3Ds more holistically to advance its interests. In all such cases, the deployment of these instruments must be guided by some causal theory that links inputs to outcomes. In Afghanistan, for example, NATO forces are combining military power with Provincial Reconstruction Teams and foreign aid in the hope of fusing counterinsurgency with economic development. These teams and aid agencies are building schools and hospitals in the hope of demonstrating to the Afghan people that a better, post-Taliban future is possible. But do we have any sound way of judging whether we are succeeding in that endeavor?

Unfortunately, the one thing that is lacking in America's 3Ds approach to Afghanistan is any indication that the Afghans themselves are investing in their future. Surely, one significant proxy measure of how a people perceive their fate is the amount of investment they are putting into their country. The level and type of investment are suggestive of the time horizons people have: lumpy capital investments demonstrate that people are committed to their country or region for the long run. The question then arises: is NATO's counterinsurgency strategy motivating greater investment on the part of the Afghan people, or is it displacing such investment? To date, we have little hard data with which to answer that question, but the anecdotal evidence is not promising. As a recent World Bank report puts it, "Investment has been limited relative to Afghanistan's potential."

With the end of the Cold War, the United States has found itself in one mess after the other: Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, just to name the most prominent. Many more likely await the international community as weak states fall prey to warring divisions. Rising to the challenge of these conflicts will require something deeper than phrases such as "defense, diplomacy, and development." Instead, American policy must be guided by a clear-eyed recognition of what is truly at stake in a given crisis, and deploying only those resources that are best suited to the problem at hand.

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Concretely, this means analyzing who the enemy is in a given conflict, what it is fighting for, why the United States is involved, and what the endgame requires. For example, in Afghanistan, the United States is now at war with at least two distinct enemies—the Taliban and al Qaeda—which may have different motivations for fighting the United States and two very different endgames. With al Qaeda, it is quite possible that we are in for a long-haul military struggle that simply will not be resolved through diplomacy and development in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast or Southwest Asia, or the other regions where that organization has found refuge (and, indeed, it is quite possible that military and intelligence support to those nations that contain al Qaeda elements could be more useful in this war than development assistance). With

the Taliban, in contrast, it is possible that a "deal" exists that could curb their interest in prolonged conflict.

The nature of the emerging international system, with its many weak states, terrorist and criminal organizations, and transnational economic and environmental shocks, also poses any number of challenges that the United States will not be able to solve on its own, much less with the cooperation of friends and allies, each of whom will undoubtedly have its own preferences and interests with respect to each issue area. Instead, the best the United States can hope for may be some form of managed containment. Facing this new environment, it is useful to remember that realism dictates not only the careful application of power, but also its stewardship over the long run. PRISM