
Biden Addresses Military's Expanding Role in U.S. Foreign Policy

**By
Senator (Vice President-Elect) Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

[The following are excerpts from a press release from the office of Senator (Vice President-elect) Biden, July 31, 2008.]

Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Joseph R. Biden, Jr. held a hearing entitled "*Defining the Military's Role Towards Foreign Policy*." At [the] hearing, committee members examined the Department of Defense's greater role in delivering foreign aid, the increasing prominence of regional military command posts, the effectiveness of civilian and military coordination on policies and programs, and the policy implications of broader military engagement in sectors that have been traditionally run by civilians.

Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman testified before the Committee. [Note: An excerpt from Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte's testimony before the committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Republican leader Dick Lugar's opening statement at the hearing immediately follow this article.] A second panel of experts and NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] representatives and practitioners followed, including Dr. George Rupp, President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee; Dr. Reuben Brigety, Director of the Sustainable Security Program at the Center for American Progress; Mary Locke, former senior professional staff for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Robert Perito, Senior Program Officer for the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at the United States Institute of Peace.

Senator Biden's Opening Statement

We are here today to discuss an important trend affecting this country — the expanding role of the military in U.S. foreign policy.

The events of September 11th made it clear that our armed forces could not focus solely on traditional challenges — threats from traditional states with traditional military capabilities. This new world we have found ourselves in has compelled us to think in a very different way.

In response we have given our military greater funding flexibility and more resources. The Administration is trying a new model for an integrated combatant command for Africa. The military is much more deeply engaged in stabilization activities, humanitarian assistance, and foreign aid programs.

In fact, there has been a migration of functions and authorities from U.S. civilian agencies to the Department of Defense.

Between 2002 and 2005, the share of U.S. official development assistance channeled through the Pentagon budget surged from 5.6 percent in 2002 to 21.7 percent in 2005, rising to \$5.5 billion. Much of this increase has gone towards activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it still points to an expanding military role in what were traditionally civilian programs.

I share the concern that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently raised. "The military," he said, "has become more involved in a range of activities that in the past were perceived to be the exclusive province of civilian agencies and organizations... This has led to concern... about what's seen as a creeping 'militarization'... of America's foreign policy. This is not an entirely unreasonable sentiment."

This is problematic for several reasons.

First, the increasing dominance of the military in our foreign policy may inadvertently limit our options — when the military is the most readily available option, it is more likely to be used, whether or not it is the best choice.

Second, how we balance economic and military aid to a country influences perceptions about U.S. priorities and how we choose to project our power. A foreign policy that overemphasizes the military runs the risk of displacing or overshadowing broader policy and development objectives

Third, focusing on the immediate military dimensions of combating extremism instead of pursuing a long-term strategy in vulnerable countries could have the unintended consequence of purchasing short-term gains at the expense of long-term stability and sustained development.

Finally, militaries are good at winning wars and training armies. But, in my view, we do not want soldiers training lawyers or setting up court systems or instructing health-care workers on HIV/AIDS prevention or running a micro-finance program. Out of necessity, our men and women in uniform have gotten very good at this. But it is not their primary mission; war-fighting is.

The question before us today is simple: in expanding the role of our armed forces, have we diminished our civilian capabilities — our diplomatic and development assistance institutions — and have we done so in a way that undermines our national security? I have called this hearing so we can get a better understanding of the policy choices we have made — and continue to make — to reshape our civilian agencies and the military.

In this hearing, I hope to focus on the following issues:

First, why is this expansion of the military's role happening? Secretary Gates provides one answer. He argues that our civilian institutions of diplomacy and development have been chronically undermanned and underfunded for too long. They cannot fulfill the responsibilities and challenges to our national interests around the world, absent change. If that is true, then from the military's perspective, what reforms and changes do we need so civilians can once again be effective counterparts? From the civilian side, what is required so they can support our national security priorities? What is preventing these reforms from taking place? Next, is the military the appropriate institution to implement foreign aid programs? What are the foreign policy implications of DoD's expanding foreign aid role? Does the military even want this responsibility? Third, many claim the real crux of the issue lies in the field, within Embassies and regional Combatant Commands. Combatant Commands — led by AFRICOM [Africa Command] and SOUTHCOM [Southern Command] — are assuming new roles and responsibilities that are not well understood but have broad foreign policy implications. This includes everything from strategic planning to undertaking foreign assistance programs. With funding and manpower that far exceed civilian resources, are military commands becoming the central organizing point for U.S. foreign policy in these regions?

Finally, [regarding] interagency coordination, by law, the State Department plays the primary role in overseeing foreign assistance activities. In practice, the Department of Defense is taking on more and more responsibility for [traditional] foreign assistance programs. How can we ensure that State plays its proper and necessary role?