

MOVING MOUNTAINS:  
CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. FOREIGN AID IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-DISASTER HAITI

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By

Elizabeth J.C. Cutler, BA.

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THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY U.S. FOREIGN AID IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-DISASTER  
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Elizabeth J.C. Cutler, BA

Thesis Advisor: Barak D. Hoffman, PhD.

ABSTRACT

The devastating earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010 demanded a tremendous international foreign aid effort from around the world, including great leadership by the United States in immediate disaster relief and planning for long-term development work. Already one of the most fragile countries in the world, Haiti has long relied on countless NGOs in addition to considerable aid from the United States and an ongoing United Nations mission to fill significant gaps in its institutional capacity to provide basic public services such as healthcare, security, and education for its people. With the added layer of post-earthquake disaster relief, whose timing has been particularly salient in the midst of Haiti's third democratic Presidential election ever, the island nation has become a valuable microcosm of challenges and issues facing U.S. foreign aid today. To that end, this paper examines the evolution of U.S. foreign aid through the lens of the past year and half of post-disaster aid to Haiti. In synthesizing academic research and commentary on both Haiti itself and the study of foreign aid, historical narrative, official reports to Congress, and personal interviews with experts in the field, this paper demonstrates the undeniable need for addressing some of U.S. foreign aid's greatest challenges.

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Many thanks,  
**ELIZABETH J.C. CUTLER**

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper was born out of a single statement. On July 12, 2010 the Center for Strategic and International hosted a panel discussion regarding the post-disaster situation in Haiti exactly 6 months after the earthquake occurred. In the course of the panelists' discussion, Lt. General Keen commented that in the immediate weeks and months following the earthquake, "NGOs were the real scouts and soldiers" of the relief effort. Rooted in curiosity about why this might be the case, this paper examines the current challenges to U.S. foreign aid and how they have materialized in U.S. post-disaster aid to Haiti.

In the year and half since the earthquake, ample examination of U.S. aid to Haiti has revealed key realities of contemporary U.S. foreign aid that will only continue to be problematic as foreign aid remains central to ongoing debates about what to cut in federal spending. Indeed, the small island nation represents two key issues: the consequences of a fragile state becoming reliant on U.S. foreign aid as well as the lessons that can be applied from expedient disaster aid to the slow bureaucracy of the overall U.S. foreign aid infrastructure. Essentially, over the past fifteen months and counting, Haiti has become the foreign aid mirror that the United States cannot ignore.

It is strange to realize that a single minute could irrevocably change the nature of US foreign aid, but the tremendous damage caused by the earthquake on January 12, 2010 demanded a kind of hybrid disaster, emergency, and long-term institutional rehabilitation aid that presented numerous challenges and questions to the way that US foreign aid previously existed. Moreover, that Haiti has long been known as the "republic of NGOs" makes it an especially probative case study for the design and implementation of foreign aid. US foreign aid towards Haiti is

particularly intriguing because of the physical proximity between the two countries, high Haitian immigration to the US, and rocky relations between the two in the 1980s and 1990s. The convergence of these factors, coupled with the heightened significance of disaster relief work after the Asian tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, makes the current situation in Haiti extremely useful for analyzing the ins and outs of US foreign aid today.

As the world of foreign aid is fraught with ambiguity and competing definitions, this paper will first explicate the key debates and set up the descriptive parameters for the rest of the paper. This paper will pay special attention to differing aspects of implementation of foreign aid among USAID at large, the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives as an example of expedient disaster relief, and private implementations of foreign aid. This paper will then explore what the situation in Haiti demonstrates about US foreign aid processes, budgeting, and foreign aid philosophy before concluding with final reflections and recommendations as the Haiti rebuilding efforts move forward.



*“Beyond mountains, there are mountains.”  
~ Haitian saying<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Haitian proverb that references the country’s ongoing cycle of insurmountable social, economic, and political challenges that seem to come one right after the other. Inspiration for the title of Tracy Kidder’s 2003 book about Dr. Paul Farmer, international humanitarian and expert on aid to developing countries, including Haiti.

## **BELTWAY BUREAUCRACY AND BUDGET BATTLES:**

### **HOW U.S. AID CAME TO LOSE HEARTS AND MINDS AT HOME AND ABROAD**

Foreign aid itself is a tricky concept to define, particularly when juxtaposed with its cousins foreign assistance, development assistance, development aid, and so forth. This ambiguity comes partly from actual disagreements within U.S. policymakers and policy wonks as well as among their international counterparts regarding the definition, but also from the incredible dispersal of aid sources and implementing actors that have emerged over the past quarter of a century. When considered most broadly, the understanding of foreign aid used henceforth in this paper will encompass commonly accepted understandings of foreign assistance, development assistance and aid within it. This understanding of foreign aid is based on Roger C. Riddell's definition, which states that it

... consists of all resources—physical goods, skills and technical know-how, financial grants (gifts) or loans...transferred by donors to recipients...[including] resources to address humanitarian and development and poverty needs in the poorest of countries...[including] resources provided to further the political and strategic interests of either the donor or recipient, or both, and would also include resources provided to help achieve military aims and objectives.<sup>2</sup>

The humanitarian type of foreign aid, likely its most commonly visualized form, especially includes post-conflict and/or post-disaster recovery aid.

In addition to debating its meaning on paper, the actual actors involved in the carrying out of foreign aid further complicate its basic meaning. Before President Kennedy created the Peace Corps, implementers of foreign were typically limited to official USG work (primarily through the State and Defense departments) and religiously affiliated philanthropic work. Prior to the institutionalization of foreign aid through the establishment of USAID, the Peace Corps,

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<sup>2</sup> Roger C. Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* New York City: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 17.

and its myriad offshoots, the image of non-governmental foreign aid in action was limited to the archetypal church mission trips to hand out blankets and Bibles in Burundi. Since the FAA of 1961, however, and even more so since the end of the Cold War, the influence and prominence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) grew exponentially. Riddell conceptualized foreign aid as consisting of three spheres: official development assistance or official foreign aid (i.e. directly disbursed by a given government), aid provided by NGOs and PVOs,\* and humanitarian and emergency aid provided by NGOs, governments, and intergovernmental institutions such as the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> Concurrent with a tremendous increase in total money spent worldwide on foreign aid,<sup>4</sup> these three spheres have become increasingly interlinked. As Landrum Bolling pointed out as early as 1982 these links have grown to be so inextricable that sometimes “private aid organizations function in such close coordination with governmental agencies, drawing their financial support extensively, if not completely from U.S. tax funds, that they almost seem to be official arms of the government.”<sup>5</sup> With the added growth of private, for-profit international development government contractors, USAID and other government departments contracting much of their international projects to nonprofit and for-profit organizations has become the norm.

As aid specialist William Easterly summarized today’s central challenge to the basic concept of foreign aid, “one would think that giving away money ought to be easy...yet, rather remarkably, we seem to have arrived at a point where more or less everyone agrees that aid

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.

\*Riddell actually cites *civil society organizations (CSOs)* which are comparable to the previously mentioned PVOs, for the sake of consistency in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD-DAC. “Development Aid Reaches an Historic High.” [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org). April 6, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Landrum R. Bolling, *Private Foreign Aid: U.S. Philanthropy for Relief and Development*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982. Pp. 4.

giving is not working the way it ought to.”<sup>6</sup> This problem is multifaceted, consisting of big picture problems of muddled motivation for dispensing aid in the first place, along with more micro level bureaucratic issues that have, especially for the U.S., led to an extremely disorganized aid infrastructure. One of the most useful ways to understand the U.S. policy priorities is to, so to speak, follow the money. Looking at the way that foreign aid spending is spread across numerous departments, programs, and accounts reveals the incredibly dispersed nature of U.S. foreign aid. Foreign aid is part of the Function 150 (International Affairs) budget which, though primarily comprised of the State and USAID budgets, has come to include approximately 20 relevant budget accounts across the federal government overall. This diffusion of foreign aid-oriented programs has led to a “complex architecture of foreign assistance planning and implementation which has not been centrally planned or coordinated throughout much of U.S. post-war history.”<sup>7</sup> This is why “giving away money” is not nearly as simply as it may seem. The diffusion of spending is indicative of a diffusion of policy planning, strategizing, and coordinating, all of which speaks to an overarching loss of control and, ultimately, accountability for achieving policy objectives.

Although the State Department has made strides towards coordinating the numerous spigots of funding that collectively comprise U.S. foreign aid, they remain fairly disparate from one another, risking contradictory foreign policies and poor oversight. Looking solely at foreign assistance, the Economic Support Funds from State, Development Assistance from USAID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, international bank funds from the Treasury Department, and

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<sup>6</sup> William Easterly. *Rethinking Foreign Aid*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. Pp. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon Adams and Cindy Williams, *Buying National Security*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Pp. 33.

Foreign Military Financing from State and DOD comprise five separate spigots.<sup>8</sup> Including foreign aid-based programs coming out of departments including the Department of Justice, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services, however, the U.S. has been demonstrated to have as many as sixteen distinct funnels for foreign aid.<sup>9</sup> (See Appendix A for one such interpretation)

In addition to losing accountability, this dispersed spending indicates a broader issue of mission creep at the federal level: spreading foreign aid activities across several accounts, projects and departments has eroded the lines that were previously meant to delineate mission jurisdiction between departments/agencies such as State, USAID, and DOD. Without those clear lines, clarity over who is responsible for what becomes difficult to achieve. Moreover, as the budgets and the programs they support become increasingly overlapping and complex, a reverse ripple effect emerges going back to the original policymaking and strategizing level—the vaguer the lines between mission turf and strategic capacity, the more challenging is for the American foreign policy system to conceptualize workable strategies.

United States foreign aid has experienced transformations in its philosophy, goals, composition, and political connotation reflective of broader international debates on the topic. Just as the past year and a half of U.S. aid to Haiti epitomizes the state of U.S. foreign aid today, similarly, recent events in U.S. foreign aid are emblematic of the aid's own history. In 1961, after years of post-World War II changes in the U.S.'s somewhat ad hoc foreign aid

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Pp. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Cutler, "In the eye of the beholder: Development Aid." TheWillAndTheWallet.org, Stimson Center. [www.thewillandthewallet.org](http://www.thewillandthewallet.org) . October 12, 2010. Center for Global Development, Quality of ODA (QuODA) Assessment, release event. Washington, DC. [www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org). October 5, 2010.

infrastructure, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act. Under the guidance of President John F. Kennedy and his administration, the FAA marked a major turning point in the history of U.S. foreign aid. In addition to institutionalizing many of the economic and military support-based programs that had emerged in rebuilding Europe after World War II, the FAA created the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Under the Eisenhower administration, however, developing countries supplanted post-war Europe for U.S. assistance funds, further necessitating comprehensive legislation to create some semblance of organization for numerous, amorphous sources of aid funding. Regarding the FAA and establishment of USAID, President Kennedy described the previous state of U.S. foreign aid as a

... multiplicity of programs [that was] bureaucratically fragmented, awkward and slow, its administration is diffused over a haphazard and irrational structure covering at least four departments and several other agencies...based on a series of legislative measures and administrative procedures conceived at different times and for different purposes...its weaknesses have begun to undermine confidence in our effort both here and abroad.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, in justifying the creation of an agency solely for the development and disbursement of foreign aid, President Kennedy relied on the widely accepted moral justification for why engage in foreign aid at all. He stated that

... there is no escaping our obligations: our moral obligations as a wise leader and good neighbor in the interdependent community of free nations—our economic obligations as the wealthiest people in a world of largely poor people, as a nation no longer dependent upon the loans from abroad that once helped us develop our own economy—and our political obligations as the single largest counter to the adversaries of freedom. To fail to meet those obligations now would be disastrous; and, in the long run, more expensive... [aid] to the underdeveloped nations must continue because of the Nation's interest and the cause of political freedom require it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> USAID, USAID History Summary. [www.usaid.gov/about\\_usaid/usaidhist.html](http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/usaidhist.html) . 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

These sentiments comprised the philosophical and pragmatic underpinning of what was intended to be the foreign aid “home base” for the United States, though it has certainly gone through its own institutional evolution in the half-century since its inception. Of course, the irony of President Kennedy’s initial rationale for creating USAID—to streamline the disorganized array of aid programs—is apparent now in comparison to the incredible dispersal of U.S. foreign aid today.

Containing the communist threat largely defined U.S. foreign aid objectives for the next three decades. As with overall U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, foreign aid operated in a far more black and white “us versus them” paradigm than we have today. During this time, democracy promotion became an integral component of U.S. foreign policy and foreign aid. Defined loosely here as those policies seeking to promote democratic growth, leadership, and governance in another country, democracy promotion was initially very much associated with the anti-Communist goal that characterized U.S. foreign policy overall during the Cold War. Through programs ranging from explicit political party strengthening to less overt literacy and basic education programs in developing countries, U.S. foreign aid funding sought to foster democratic growth that would not only contribute towards greater international stability, but specifically combat the spread of Communism.

Accordingly, the end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union left the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure (i.e. USAID, the State Department, and Department of Defense) without a “strategic focus on a global scale and instead [foreign aid bodies and programs] responded to

regional issues...without an overarching theme, foreign aid budgets decreased in the 1990s.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition, foreign aid has become a divisive partisan pawn in American politics. General support for foreign aid as a legitimate national security tool is typically associated with the political left, while conservatives typically portray it as primarily philanthropic in nature and therefore expendable when it comes to fiscally austere times such as the current day. Between changes in partisan power in Washington and fiscal ups and downs that have demanded intense scrutiny of controversial parts of the federal budget, support for funding foreign aid has waxed and waned over the years (See Appendix B).<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, that the foreign aid budget relies so heavily on political support that changes from year to year has made consistent institutional development very challenging. Indeed, it seems that just as soon as one administration sets a policy in place with the hope of streamlining part of the foreign aid and foreign policy apparatus, the next has changed it before the people and processes affected have had time to adjust.

As Hyman observes in detail, USAID experienced considerable political tension during the Clinton administration. The rift between State and USAID—and its leadership—deepened between Secretary of State Warren Christopher and USAID administrator Brian J. Atwood. A legislative battle waged by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms against USAID’s sovereignty and standing vis-à-vis State further jeopardized USAID’s future. After years of ambiguous hierarchy, the “dotted line” between USAID administrator and Secretary of State was officially changed to a “solid line,” meaning that USAID and its administrator would

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<sup>12</sup> Curt Tarnoff and Marian Leonardo Lawson, “Foreign Aid: An Introduction to U.S. Programs and Policy.” Congressional Research Service. April 9, 2009. [www.opencrs.com](http://www.opencrs.com).

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that while overall support for foreign aid is often associated with political liberals, in recent years Republican representatives have strongly supported international public health initiatives. Most notable among these is President Bush’s \$15 billion HIV/AIDS initiative PEPFAR.



formally report to the State Department and its leadership. The premier international development agency officially became a component—albeit a large one—of the State Department. Atwood is credited with fiercely protecting the agency but, even so, its political clout and interagency relationships were irreparably damaged.<sup>14</sup>

The next U.S. President, George W. Bush, was highly critical of democracy promotion and, like most conservatives, considered foreign aid to be a low budget priority. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the global policymaking context dramatically. Addressing the statelessness of terrorists demanded a multifaceted approach that came to rely just as much on long-term preventative strategies that prioritize education and job creation for youth in vulnerable parts of the world as it does on the more immediate, triage approach traditionally associated with the military.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the typical conservative perspective on funding massive international development work, President Bush created two high-profile foreign aid agencies outside of USAID: the MCC and PEPFAR (President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). Though PEPFAR in particular has proven itself to be relatively successful thus far in its efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, the administration’s decision to place these two entities outside of the auspices of USAID was significant both pragmatically and symbolically. Rather than address the growing issues of bureaucracy and thematic problems within USAID, President Bush and his advisors opted to, in a sense, start from scratch. The creation of PEPFAR in particular was

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<sup>14</sup> Hyman, 11-15.

<sup>15</sup> Curt Tarnoff and Larry Nowels. “Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of U.S. Programs and Policy.” Congressional Research Service. [www.opencrs.com](http://www.opencrs.com) . April 15, 2004. Pp. 14-16.

fraught with interpersonal Washington politics and sent a loud and clear message that fixing USAID's numerous issues was not going to happen.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, USAID the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure as a whole has reached an impasse. Decades of bureaucratic messes, political turmoil, and a series of administrative choices have put the formerly "undisputed home for virtually all U.S. foreign assistance programs"<sup>17</sup> in a very difficult position. Moreover, what has transpired over the past decade or so with USAID is indicative of what Gerald Hyman called the "sociology of bureaucratic [organizations] more generally throughout government. They exemplify the laws of unintended consequences. Structure and process are not independent of one another."<sup>18</sup> As a result, USAID's recent trajectory holds value not only for the field of foreign aid, but for our understanding of USG institutions overall. In the midst of a fiscal crisis that will have lasting impact on USG budget procedures and politics, of which foreign and defense spending are central, it is especially vital to consider issues such as those currently facing USAID.

Numerous experts have generally agreed upon the central challenges facing U.S. foreign aid, simply phrasing and organizing them a little differently. Nancy Birdsall, President of the Center for Global Development, examined key aid donor shortfalls through the lens of the original seven deadly sins, all of which continue to appear in U.S. foreign aid:

Impatience (with recipients' institution building), Envy (collusion and coordination failure), Ignorance (failure and/or refusal to conduct sufficient evaluations, Pride (failure to exit a recipient country when it is evident that aid/programs are not achieving intended goals), Sloth (falsely pretending that minimal participation is the same as true country

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Green. Classroom lecture, Government 538: Democracy Promotion/Democratic Theory. Georgetown University, April 18, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald F. Hyman. "Foreign Policy and Development: Structure, Process, Policy, and the drip-by-drip erosion of USAID." Center for Strategic & International Studies. September 2010. [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org). Pp. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ownership), Greed (unreliable and/or stingy transfers of funds), and Foolishness (underfunding of global and regional public goods).<sup>19</sup>

The only issue not explicitly addressed by Birdsall here is the incredible bureaucracy within USAID that others including Hyman, Easterly, and Riddell have included along with those challenges that Birdsall discussed. Since USAID contracts out so many of its projects, complex proposal, budgeting, and reporting processes intended as valuable steps in the foreign aid cycle have instead become obstacles to its efficient delivery.

In many ways, the lack of these very challenges within NGOs<sup>20</sup> is what helps them become the effective “scouts and soldiers” to which Lt. Keen referred regarding the post-earthquake relief effort in Haiti. Depending on their funding sources, private humanitarian NGOs are typically free of the political and diplomatic concerns that can complicate U.S. foreign aid to a given country. Furthermore, while USAID and its contractors frequently have to contend with maintaining a relatively low, non-invasive profile in a host country, NGOs are typically more “people-to-people contact” oriented to begin with, often facilitating an organic relationship with local communities that is conducive to its programming. As will be discussed further in the Haiti case study, the embedded nature of many NGOs’ work in developing countries can prove invaluable in responding immediately to a crisis situation such as the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. Even large NGOs are significantly smaller in size than the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure which, as we already know, is incredibly diffused across departments that go beyond the traditional State/USAID structure.

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Birdsall, “Seven Deadly Sins: Reflections on Donor Failings.” Center for Global Development Working Paper Number 50. [www.cgdev.org](http://www.cgdev.org). December 2004. Pp. 5.

<sup>20</sup> This is an intentionally broad generalization for the sake of discussion—it is assumed that every organization, large or small, faces its own bureaucratic procedures.

Just as Birdsall examined the key problems with foreign aid through the lens of the seven deadly sins, former USAID administrator Andrew Natsios laid out nine ideal principles for reconstruction and development, which generally reflect the same problems identified by Birdsall and others. Natsios identifies the nine principles as ownership, capacity building, sustainability, selectivity, assessment, results, partnership, flexibility, and accountability.<sup>21</sup> Although, as Natsios points out, these are ideals ,and as with any multifaceted strategy, it is inevitable that not all nine principles can be achieved to the same full extent at the same time. We can, however, aim to do so and perhaps in doing so, improve the effectiveness of U.S. foreign aid and the quality of its creation dramatically. Examining a timely case study that incorporates a multitude of issues central to the study of foreign aid—tremendous poverty, complicated relations with the U.S., and a post-disaster context—thus provides valuable insight into the consequences of the dispersed nature of U.S. foreign aid.

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew S. Natsios, “The Nine Principles of Reconstruction and Development.” *Parameters*, U.S. Army War College Quarterly. Autumn 2005, Vol. 35, No. 3. Pp. 4-20.

## CASE IN CONTEXT:

### HAITI, THE UNITED STATES, AND RELYING ON THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS

Known as the “republic of NGOs,” Haiti has long suffered from extreme poverty and political instability and uncertainty that has made it a hotspot for international NGOs for decades. In many ways, this can be construed as a positive because so many NGOs were already on the ground and able to mobilize for immediate relief work when the earthquake first hit the island nation. Otherwise, however, this nickname points to an endemic problem with the way that Haiti operates that makes authentic recovery and institutional rebuilding extremely difficult. Between extensive foreign assistance from other countries, the U.S. in particular, as well as ongoing support from nonprofits and faith-based charities, Haiti has become the Blanche DuBois of the developing world—always depending on the kindness of strangers.

Haiti’s history is one marked by violence, political conflict, and power struggles. It was a French colony until 1838, when it gained its independence after more than 13 years of internal strife and civil war between the north and the south. Although it is notable for successfully separating itself from French control, Haiti actually paid the \$22 million that France demanded as compensation for its loss of the island nation,<sup>22</sup> which marks an early point in Haiti’s history of being almost subservient to larger and more powerful countries. Although the era of European colonization was officially over, Haiti maintained a sense of subservience and susceptibility to outside influence and even control that persists through today. Popular Haitian journalist Konpè Filo recently observed that the war “against [Haiti] never ended when we got our

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<sup>22</sup> Terry F. Buss with Adam Gardner. *Haiti in the Balance: Why Foreign Aid Has Failed and What We Can Do About It*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. 2008. Pp. 22.

independence.”<sup>23</sup> Demanding that the already-weak Haiti compensate France set Haiti up at major disadvantage, one from which they arguably never really recovered.

The subservient relationship that 19<sup>th</sup> century Haiti had with France and, to a degree, the United States, had significant social and cultural ramifications as well. It has been said that “Haiti’s political history tends to reinforce the racist notion [that] Haiti...is a black republic and hence unable to govern itself. Consequently...Haiti is the product of its own self-made destiny.”<sup>24</sup> Through internal social and cultural forces, Haiti has retained the personality of a colony even over a century after becoming an independent nation. Over decades of minimally successful foreign assistance and international philanthropic work that runs the gamut from feeding Haiti’s poor to providing healthcare in its slums, the Haitian people as a whole has developed what can only be described as an assumption or even an expectation of continued help from the outside world. Propping itself up on the pillars of other countries—especially the nearby United States—has become normal.

Indeed, the U.S. has long expressed its stake in Haiti’s welfare through military intervention, behind-the-scenes political manipulation, and extensive financial support through multiple strands of foreign assistance and foreign aid. Much of American intervention in Haiti during the twentieth century stemmed from a desire to “protect” Haiti from whatever the fear of the time happened to be: first keeping the Germans out in pre-World War I days and later protection against the spread of Communism. The 19-year U.S. occupation of Haiti began in 1915 under with the goal of shielding Haiti from German control and attempting to “teach the

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<sup>23</sup> Beverly Bell. “Is Haiti Poor? Its People Respond.” The Huffington Post. March 21, 2011. [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com).

<sup>24</sup> Buss, 5.

Haitians democratic governance.” Although the U.S. successfully kept the Germans at bay and helped to develop the Haitian army over nearly two decades, during their occupation the U.S. opted to appoint Haitian leadership (including the President) rather than hold democratic elections.<sup>25</sup> This inherent paradox in U.S. policy in Haiti—intervening under the guise of promoting democracy and then appointing its own leadership for nearly 20 years—set the tone for U.S.-Haiti relations that continues today. The U.S. occupation was a time of an extremely paternalistic policy on the part of the U.S., as evidenced by its skepticism in Haiti’s ability to elect its own leadership. This marked a turning point in Haiti’s history of not only relying on others, but lacking faith in its own capacity to function. Clearly, numerous factors large and small shaped this era of Haitian history, but it is difficult to believe that without the top-down American intervention and control of the country, it would have continued so severely down the path of external reliance and internal weakness.

In addition to imposing rather than fostering governance, the American approach to “helping” Haiti during its formal occupation did little to promote local economic or social development. When the formal occupation ended in 1934, Haiti was ill prepared to function on its own. Moderate social and political turmoil followed, but the situation took an extreme turn with the start of the “Papa Doc” (real name: François Duvalier) era in 1957. The U.S. government supported his election and continued to support him even after he declared himself a lifelong president because Duvalier was a staunch anti-communist. Like the fear of German intervention before it, the threat of communism proved more potent than Duvalier’s dictatorial

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 23.

policies.<sup>26</sup> These policies included the institutionalization of violent thug gangs, a paramilitary-style police force known in French Creole as the *Tonton Macoutes* (“bogeymen”), which used violence and brutality to keep order and quiet acquiescence to Duvalier’s rule.<sup>27</sup>

When Duvalier died in 1971, his son Jean-Claude (known as “Baby Doc”) became President, though his hold on absolute power proved to be less ironclad than that of his father and he was pushed out in a grassroots uprising—with some extra nudges from then-U.S. President Reagan, who also offered the dictator political asylum—in 1986. Four years of military control and military-controlled elections before the ostensibly democratic election of Jean Bertrand Aristide, arguably an even more severe dictator than his predecessors.<sup>28</sup> Before examining the Aristide era, it is important to note two key points of American involvement in the Papa Doc and Baby Doc years: first, the U.S. financed the election that originally brought the elder Duvalier to power and continued to support his leadership, in spite of his repressive regime that openly violated international human rights norms, as part of its overall efforts to contain the spread of Communism. Secondly, the U.S. intervened in Haitian politics again when it encouraged Jean Claude Duvalier to leave office after he turned out to be extremely unpopular, the opposite of his populist politician father. In many ways, the U.S. was trying to fix what it had started years earlier when it helped put François Duvalier in power in the first place—but it was already too late. When the younger Duvalier fled to France in 1986, he flew out of Haiti a U.S.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23-26.

<sup>27</sup> John Moody et al. “Haiti Bad Times For Baby Doc,” *Time*. February 10, 1986. [www.time.com](http://www.time.com).

<sup>28</sup> “Legacy of Papa Doc Duvalier Continues in Haiti,” Morning Edition. National Public Radio. Washington DC, October 20, 1993. [www.npr.com](http://www.npr.com)  
John Moody et al. “Haiti Bad Times for Baby Doc.”



Air Force plane,<sup>29</sup> perhaps epitomizing the American hovering over Haitian politics that was well underway and continues now.

The 1990s saw a renewed level of contentious politics and violent altercations for Haiti. Jean-Bertrand Aristide of the dominant Lavalas party was first elected in 1990, “democratically” with 70% of the vote, after running on a successful populist-style platform that targeted the working class and pitted his supporters against Duvalier supports, the military, and the wealthy.<sup>30</sup> This rift deepened to the point of great violence throughout the country and the military overthrew Aristide in a coup d’état less than a year after he took office. In another pragmatic and symbolic move, the Aristide eventually accepted the U.S.’s offer of political asylum until 1994, when President Clinton spearheaded an international effort to push out the military regime and reinstate Aristide as Haiti’s President. In addition to extensive diplomatic massaging and coordination with the international community, the U.S. sent 20, 000 Marines into Haiti to stabilize the country and help smooth the re-entry of Aristide as its president. Aristide’s Prime Minister, René Préval, was elected President in 1995.

After his 5-year term ended in 2000, however, Aristide once again ran for President, though his second win was less jubilant than his first. During Préval’s presidency, the former political partnership between the two leaders fell apart amidst divisive political manipulation. In 1997, Aristide established the Fanmi Lavalas party, building off of the Lavalas Movement that had emerged from the Struggling People’s Party in years prior. It is important to note that Aristide did not make Lavalas an actual political party, but instead clearly wanted its members to have allegiance to him as a person instead of a political party. The U.S. as well as France and

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<sup>29</sup> Tim Padgett. “Who Let ‘Baby Doc’ Duvalier Back into Haiti?” *Time*. January 17, 2011. [www.time.com](http://www.time.com).

<sup>30</sup> Buss, 29-31.

Canada were well aware at this time that such a move was typical of would-be dictators seeking to foster personality-driven politics and loyalty to an individual person over philosophy or values.<sup>31</sup>

The next three years saw further fracturing of political parties, particularly among Aristide's followers. Haitian citizens became more and more disenchanted with their government and electoral boycotts became a tool of protest among opposition groups.<sup>32</sup> When Aristide won the 2000 presidential election, his victory emerged amidst considerably more reports of election fraud than ever before, including confusion over how many legitimate votes were even cast (estimates ranged from 5 to 60% of the voting population) and later, tangible proof of election tampering investigated by the Organization of American States, leading then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to condemn the election and its results.<sup>33</sup> In hindsight, the 2000 election marked the beginning of the end of Aristide's legitimate claim to upholding shreds of authentic Haitian democracy.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the U.S. held steadfastly to its hope that Haiti would improve its own lot, with Aristide communicating promises of political and economic growth to outgoing President Clinton in 2000 and incoming President George W. Bush in 2001. Demands from within Haiti for a do-over of the controversial election led to one of the bloodiest eras in Haiti's history. As public policy scholar Terry F. Buss recounted, from 2000 to his forcible expulsion in 2004,

... Aristide purposefully reignited class warfare, especially against the aristocracy, whom many poor Haitians blamed for their poverty. Like his predecessors Papa Doc and Baby

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel P. Erikson, "Haiti after Aristide: Still on the Brink." *Current History*. February 2005. Iss. 104, Vol. 679. Pp 84.

Doc, Aristide encouraged paramilitary groups who were loyal to him to intimidate opponents, often violently. On occasion Aristide encouraged the Chimères [prominent Haitian gang] publicly, who were much less organized than the Tontons Macoutes and whose behavior was perhaps more random and uncontrollable...Aristide's government did nothing to prevent partisans from firebombing radio stations and murdering journalists, which prompted international condemnation by freedom-of-the-press groups.<sup>35</sup>

After years of pushing, pulling, and prodding Haiti through political intervention, diplomatic maneuvers, and a jagged history of foreign aid and assistance peaks and valleys,<sup>36</sup> the U.S. made significant changes in its policies towards Haiti in an effort to turn the Aristide administration into the peaceful hub of democracy that it had hoped for. Haiti also seemed to rise on the internal political radar during this time period as well due to the growing political divisions over Haiti policy in terms of financial cost to the country and partisan disagreements over the U.S. role in the world in terms of humanitarian, political, and strategic intervention. In 2000, President Clinton “redirected U.S. humanitarian assistance through NGOs rather than through the Haitian government,” a choice which was upheld by the incoming Bush administration.<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that this is not the same as cutting funding to Haiti, which is often misrepresented in mass media—in taking this action, President Clinton openly acknowledged a lack of trust in the Aristide administration to use U.S. humanitarian assistance and foreign aid effectively. Moreover, the move represented reversal of earlier Clinton administration policy towards Haiti. Instead of trying to work in tandem with Aristide, the administration had to adopt an approach that undercut rather than underpinned the despotic

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<sup>35</sup> Buss, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Although unpacking the complete, complex history of US foreign aid and assistance to Haiti is not possible in this space, to put this particular time period into perspective it is important to note that, according to the Congressional Research Service, FY 1996-1999 saw \$100 million in US foreign assistance (primarily via the State Department and USAID) in addition to \$868 million from the Department of Defense go to Haiti.

<sup>37</sup> Maureen Taft-Morales and Clare Ribando Seelke, “Haiti: Developments and U.S. Policy since 1991 and Current Congressional Concerns.” Congressional Research Service. January 25, 2008. [www.assess.openscrs.com](http://www.assess.openscrs.com). Pp. 18.

leader. Rather than choosing carrot or stick, “foreign aid served as both carrot and stick: its restoration would reward political compromise, and its denial constituted punishment for undemocratic behavior.”<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, this seemed to fan the flames of Haiti’s internal tumult rather than motivate President Aristide and his opponents to attempt a compromise. While he “vowed to finish his five-year term [something he had not achieved the first time around], and his opponents refused to accept any political solution that left him in power. Meanwhile, Haiti’s nascent democratic institutions crumbled, poverty worsened, and the modest progress that had been achieved by greater international engagement in the late 1990s quickly evaporated.”<sup>39</sup> Social and political divisions deepened and grew increasingly violent until an uprising of numerous sources and motivations led to his second forcible expulsion from power. As Buss wrote, this resulted from the

... interplay of a complex set of forces [that were] all aligned against him. The ex-military, Tontons Macoutes, and neo-Duvalierists were against him. The Democratic Convergence saw an opportunity to take over the country. Many Chimères had become disenchanted with Aristide. The United States feared another extreme undemocratic, left-wing government and lost patience with inept attempts to interdict drug traffic.”<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, once again a Haitian dictator was flown out of Haiti on an American aircraft, symbolizing the exhausting commitment of the U.S. to maintaining some sort of hand in Haitian affairs. Aristide eventually settled into exile in South Africa. Ironically, he later claimed that the U.S. actually orchestrated his “kidnapping,” though those claims have little to no support from

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<sup>38</sup> Erikson, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Buss, 38.

the international community and foreign policy specialists.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, as the post-earthquake period and 2010-2011 electoral cycle have demonstrated, Aristide's populist roots remain strong in Haiti and he retains a significant level of support, particularly among Haiti's poorest citizens.

Even before the devastating earthquake on January 12, 2010, Haiti faced an uphill battle. Not only was it the poorest country in the Western hemisphere and one of the poorest countries worldwide, Haiti has long suffered from one of the most tremendous nationwide income distribution gaps in the world. Nearly three-quarters of Haiti's national income revenue goes to the richest 20% of the population.<sup>42</sup> Prior to the earthquake, more than half of the 8+ million population lived on less than \$1 a day. In 2007, the Congressional Research Service reported that

... in order to reach Haiti's goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, its GDP would have to grow 3.5% per year, a goal Haiti is not considered likely to achieve. In the past 40 years, Haiti's per capita real GDP has declined by 30%. Therefore economic growth, even if greater than population growth, is not expected to be enough to reduce Haiti's endemic poverty.<sup>43</sup>

Before the earthquake of January 12, 2010 even hit, the Haitian people lived in daily desperation. From a monitoring and evaluation perspective, this makes it difficult to assess what problems (homelessness, disease, etc) is an effect of the earthquake and what is simply a progression of endemic challenges. From a foreign aid policy perspective, this demonstrates what we already knew: the earthquake could not have destroyed a more fragile society.

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<sup>41</sup> Nick Miroff, "Haiti braces for deposed president Aristide's return as election nears." *The Washington Post*. March 27, 2011. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

<sup>42</sup> Maureen Taft-Morales and Demond Alexander Drummer. "Haiti's Development Needs and a Statistical Overview of Conditions of Poverty. Congressional Research Service. [www.opencrs.com](http://www.opencrs.com). May 30, 2007. Pp. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

**SYMBOL OF FUTILITY:  
POST-EARTHQUAKE U.S. AID TO HAITI**

Immediately after the earthquake struck (See Appendix C), President Obama made an initial pledge of \$100 million in aid money (plus the deployment of 10,000 U.S. troops) to Haiti. In many ways, this was more symbolic than pragmatic—in comparison to the estimated \$9 billion in total damage,<sup>44</sup> \$100 million is barely a drop in the bucket. It did, however, serve as a starting point for President Obama to encourage Americans to donate through a variety of organizations. Although Americans (as well as populations worldwide) donated in record numbers through traditional nonprofits such as the Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and Doctors Without Borders,<sup>45</sup> the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund became the central avenue through which a tremendous level of rebuilding work has been achieved.<sup>46</sup> Although this paper focuses on official U.S. foreign aid to Haiti after the earthquake, especially aid aimed at institutional (re)building and political work, it would have been remiss to overlook the incredible outpouring of charitable donations made by the general public.

The FY 2010 Supplemental for Wars, Disaster Assistance, Haiti Relief, and other Programs (H.R. 4899 in the House of Representatives, S. Rept. 111-188 in the Senate) passed in the Spring of 2010 with the House voting on March 24 and the Senate on May 27. The

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<sup>44</sup> Ingrid Arnesen. “Haitians Vote in Critical Election.” *The Wall Street Journal*, online edition. March 21, 2011. [www.online.wsj.com](http://www.online.wsj.com).

\*Earlier estimates of the total damage costs ranged from \$7-13 billion, depending on methodology and scope of research. Although these numbers serve as usual points for context, it will take years to establish the most accurate numerical reflections of the overall damage caused by the earthquake.

<sup>45</sup> Judy Keen. “Haiti donations on track to break records.” *USA Today*. [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com). January 14, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Anita Sachariah, personal interview. Washington, DC. March 3, 2011.

Supplemental allocated \$1.9 billion in additional FY 2010 funding<sup>47</sup> for the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense for Haiti disaster relief, unspecified “foreign aid activities,” and diplomatic operations in Haiti.<sup>48</sup> The \$1.9 billion was primarily divided between State and USAID together (receiving \$1.6 billion) and the Department of Defense (\$1.3 billion). \$1.2 billion of this funding was specifically pledged at the international donors ‘conference, co-hosted by the U.S. and the United Nations, on March 31, 2010.<sup>49</sup> In terms of U.S.-owned efforts, however, as part of the FY 2010 supplemental the Obama administration requested \$1.5 billion to reimburse U.S. government agencies for emergency relief work carried out immediately after the earthquake took place. Although susceptible to political scrutiny later during deficit discussions, pertinent agencies’ capacity to move quickly and count on reimbursement after the fact is a crucial tool in combating the bureaucratic slowdown that has become so characteristic of federal agencies.

These three primary agencies of international action were not the only ones involved in post-earthquake work in Haiti, however; also important here is that departments including Homeland Security and Health and Human Services participated in the broader U.S. relief mission in Haiti. This is not to imply that, substantively speaking, they did not play a logical and vital role—it does, however, point the broader issue of the dispersion of U.S. foreign aid across numerous agencies and, within agencies, myriad accounts and funding mechanisms (See Appendix D). In addition to presenting a very basic challenge of project management at a very

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<sup>47</sup> An additional \$1 billion in the Supplemental was allocated for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

<sup>48</sup> Amy Belasco et al, “FY 2010 Supplemental for Wars, Disaster Assistance, Haiti Relief, and Other Programs.” CRS Report. August 6, 2010. [www.opencrs.com](http://www.opencrs.com). Pp. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 51.

Note: Nearly \$10 billion was pledged collectively by 48 countries at the UN conference.

complex level, this dispersion is perhaps the key factor in poor budget oversight for Haiti's reconstruction from the U.S. side as well as others.

That this aid money has been slow to materialize has been well-publicized. The Office of the UN Special Envoy for Haiti reported that 63.6% (\$1.28 billion) of the money pledged at the UN conference was actually disbursed in 2010. Moreover, of the total \$4.46 billion internationally pledged to Haiti across 2010-2011, over \$3 billion would have to be disbursed in 2011 to fulfill that pledge.<sup>50</sup> Disbursing \$3 billion in aid money in one calendar year, of course, is nearly impossible, so it is safe to presume that Haiti still will not have received all of its pledged aid money by the second anniversary of the earthquake.

An important factor often glossed over by scathing reports on the limited delivery of aid money to Haiti is the false assumption that Haiti was even prepared to absorb billions of dollars of international aid. With government buildings decimated and its civil service depleted, Haiti was not in a position to receive and use a lump sum of foreign aid.<sup>51</sup> In this way, a vicious cycle emerges that is representative of broader foreign aid issues: ideally, a country struck by a disaster as colossal as the earthquake in Haiti would have the structural capacity to make its own plans for using foreign aid money effectively. Haiti, however, is still very much in the midst of ongoing governance and economic growth programs—perpetuating its “Republic of NGOs” identity—that are intended to foster the very institutional strength necessary to absorb an influx of international disaster aid. As did other major donors, the U.S. faced a catch-22 situation in terms of how, when, and in what way to disburse the aid money it had committed to Haiti.

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<sup>50</sup> Talea Miller. “Haiti Reconstruction Aid Falls Short, New Figures Show.” PBS Newshour. January 10, 2011. [www.pbs.org/newshour](http://www.pbs.org/newshour) .

<sup>51</sup> Sachariah, personal interview.  
Christy Martins, personal interview. Bethesda, Maryland. February 25, 2011.



Indeed, one U.S.-based development expert who is Haitian himself observed that, on a macro level, the immediate reaction seen in Haiti after the earthquake was to turn to the U.S., not to its own government and institutions. To see Haitian leaders, particularly on the sub-national level, pause and take the time to independently articulate Haiti's long-term reconstruction needs before receiving an influx of aid, would have been shocking—but encouraging.<sup>52</sup> As we well know, however, this was the not the case and the U.S. and the United Nations have remained the key architects of the reconstruction effort since the beginning. This directly contradicts the goal of “country ownership” espoused by numerous development experts and sets Haiti up to continue on its path of dependence on others.

In terms of quick on-the-ground action, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in USAID provides a valuable microcosm of how U.S. foreign aid can not only operate, but actually function extremely successfully. Unlike the majority of its parent agency, OTI is funded through a contingency fund and is explicitly designed to respond quickly to crises that typically have to do with natural disasters, political turmoil, or both.<sup>53</sup> The use of Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IQCs) is a major part of how OTI is able to achieve its fast responses; an IQC operates as an umbrella contract under which several countries may be grouped in case of future emergencies. Government contractors bid on IQCs that include several countries so that, in the event of a major crisis, firms are already in place to begin relief work. The Support Which Implements Fast Transitions (SWIFT) IQC included Haiti and thus became the starting point for the work of OTI and its contractors in Haiti immediately after the earthquake. Within 24 hours of

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<sup>52</sup> Patrick Fn’Piere, personal interview. Bethesda, Maryland. March 2, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Adams and Williams, 44.

Special Note: The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, also part of USAID, is the other valuable example of speedy on-the-ground action in disasters such as this. Time and space have allowed for focus on just one example.

the earthquake, OTI met with representatives from several contractors that had bid on the original SWIFT IQCs and tasked the two who already had projects running in Haiti—Chemonics and DAI—with jumpstarting short and long-term recovery projects on the ground in Haiti.<sup>54</sup>

As articulated in the State/USAID congressional budget justification for the supplemental funding, OTI prioritized three objectives: community stabilization (\$48.3 million), rebuilding the Haitian government’s capacity (\$10 million), and enhancing citizen participation in the relief and recovery effort (\$10 million).<sup>55</sup> The first and largest portion of USAID/OTI’s recovery plan, community stabilization, focuses on creating employment opportunities for Haitians that will theoretically lead to more long-term economic growth on a local level. By employing as many Haitian citizens in active recovery work—rubble removal, conducting surveys, etc—OTI seeks to not only foster economic growth, but contribute to its third goal of engaging Haitians in their own country’s recovery at the same time.<sup>56</sup>

From the beginning, the U.S. prioritized search and rescue assistance, medical assistance, emergency food provision, and crucial infrastructure and logistical operations (including rubble removal, setting up temporary shelters, etc) for the first several weeks and months after the earthquake. To this end, the Department of Defense played a central role, utilizing military operational style and pre-existing tools to restore Haiti’s main airport’s capacity for air traffic control (crucial for the delivery of aid supplies), distribute food and medical supplies, and re-establish Haiti’s capacity for radio transmission so that vital information could be communicated

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<sup>54</sup> Full disclosure: the author began a job with the DAI home office in January 2011, working for the Afghanistan portfolio and not with any projects related to its Haiti portfolio.

<sup>55</sup> United States Department of State & U.S. Agency For International Development. FY 2010 Haiti Supplemental Budget Justification. April 28, 2010. [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov). Pp. 30-31.

<sup>56</sup> Sachariah, Personal Interview.  
Martins, Personal Interview.

to the masses of displaced people more effectively. In addition, and perhaps most unique to the military, DOD provided “aerial reconnaissance” to the overall U.S. relief mission. DOD established a formal operation titled Operation Unified Response to fulfill its role in the U.S. relief effort and also tasked the pre-existing U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) with supervising DOD’s participation in the relief efforts.<sup>57</sup> It is important to note, however, that DOD’s role was intentionally intense but short: with the exception of \$13 million of continued humanitarian assistance, SOUTHCOM officially withdrew from Haiti in June 2010,<sup>58</sup> leaving the bulk of the long-term recovery work to State, USAID, and the additional agencies that have since developed recovery projects in Haiti.

The role that DOD played in the immediate U.S. relief work in Haiti sheds light on the issue previously discussed with regard to State-USAID-DOD turf battles when it comes to what constitutes foreign aid and who, of the USG, should oversee it. Quite simply, the armed services are intended to deploy swiftly and operate quickly and effectively. Clearly subsets of State/USAID are also designed to function under fast turnarounds, particularly OTI and OFDA as previously discussed, but DOD remains distinct in this regard. Consequently, it is not so difficult to understand why and how, in dire situations such as post-disaster Haiti, it is useful for the military to play a significant role in traditional aid activities, thus contributing to the militarization of aid that has many humanitarian experts concerned about mission creep and vague divisions of labor at the federal level.

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<sup>57</sup> Rhoda Margesson and Maureen Taft-Morales. “Haiti Earthquake: Crisis and Response.” CRS Report for Congress. February 19, 2010. Pp. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Lisa Daniel, “Southcom Completes Haiti Disaster Response.” American Forces Press Service. June 1, 2010. [www.defense.mil/news](http://www.defense.mil/news) .

In addition to actual U.S. soldiers taking a lead role in coordinating the first several days and weeks of relief work, the “scouts and soldiers” to which Lt. Keen referred on July 12, 2010 shouldered a great deal of the responsibility for organizing immediate relief work. In using this phrase, Lt. Keen summarized the high level of involvement already operationalized by countless NGOs in Haiti. Five years earlier, the World Bank had conducted a comprehensive study of the total NGO presence in Haiti, concluding that upwards of 10,000 distinct NGOs were actively working in Haiti at that time.<sup>59</sup> While many rebuked the study’s broad definition of NGOs, more narrow interpretations still reported the number of separate NGOs in Haiti to be around 300.<sup>60</sup> After the earthquake, approximately 900 NGOs were registered with the United Nations for recovery work.<sup>61</sup> This number ranges from NGOs that are small in number and unknown to the general public to large, high-profile organizations including the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and World Vision. Many focused almost exclusively on agriculture and economic growth, while others yet provided medical care, supplemental education, and water and sanitation infrastructure. In light of Haiti’s long history of interventions from the U.S. and Europe, that the island nation had come to rely so much on outside NGOs for its very survival is not surprising. When the earthquake hit, countless NGOs and individuals stepped up to collaborate on basic relief work (emergency medical care, rescuing survivors from collapsed buildings, setting up temporary shelters, etc). By maximizing personal relationships and applying

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<sup>59</sup> “Unthinkable? Curb aid in Haiti.” Editorial. *The Guardian*, March 27, 2010. [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk).

<sup>60</sup> Mark Schuller, “Invasion or infusion? Understanding the role of NGOs in Contemporary Haiti,” *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2. 2007. Pp 96.

<sup>61</sup> “Unthinkable? Curb aid in Haiti.”

knowledge gained from years of working in Haiti already, these NGOs filled the “scouts and soldiers” role articulated by Lt. Keen.<sup>62</sup>

It is essential, however, to note that although NGOs contributed invaluablely to the relief effort in Haiti, considerable concern exists over the long-term effects that they have had on Haiti’s self-sufficiency. Even before the earthquake, Haiti was known as the “republic of NGOs,” reflecting its reputation worldwide for depending so largely on outside assistance. This reputation has presented the U.S. and other major donors with a serious conundrum: how does one promote good governance and institutional capacity exogenously without superseding the nascent governance and capacity of that very state? This is a question that went unanswered before the earthquake and remains unanswered today. Looking only at the history of U.S. foreign aid to Haiti, this may seem to be a rhetorical question. For many, however, it is a very real question for which the earthquake may have offered a renewed opportunity to find an answer—or for Haiti to become even more reliant on outside aid than it was before. This is where Haiti’s colonial history comes up; centuries of outside control and deferential relationships with global superpowers have fostered a national identity rooted in dependence on the international community and an assumption that they will take the reins in daily survival and post-disaster recovery. This is how Haiti has come to be a “symbol of futility”<sup>63</sup> for the foreign aid community.

Adding Haiti’s planned presidential election into the mix further complicated the situation because the U.S. had to contend with the political realities that will shape Haiti’s future capacity to handle the ongoing influx of aid money. In addition, the U.S. had to decide how it

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<sup>62</sup> Sachariah and Martins, personal interviews.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Fn’Piere, personal interview.

was going to support a transparent democratic process without becoming as involved as it had in previous decades in Haiti's internal political dynamics. The presidential election that Haiti had scheduled for February 28, 2010 had to be postponed, drawing further international attention to what would already be a crucial test of Haiti's capacity for free and fair elections as well as the results of the election itself.

Although the United States limited its direct engagement with the intense campaigns and elections—perhaps having learned from past experiences—supporting technical capacity and good governance ranked first and foremost in the State Department's official long-term strategy document for Haiti's recovery. As only the third democratic election in Haiti's history, the election was already significant in light of the political instability that the country has faced over the past several years, but the earthquake and its aftermath changed the context of the election considerably. The new President will, in essence, be the architect of Haiti's own recovery and how it would absorb and handle incoming international aid. International donors thus had a far larger stake in the election's operations and outcome than they had prior to the earthquake. The U.S. identified “[supporting] credible electoral and legislative processes” as its chief objective in the State Department's fundamental Haiti strategy document, updated one year after the earthquake initially struck. In this document, the United States pledged to

... provide long-term technical assistance to Haitian electoral institutions, as well as support for international and domestic observation, capacity building for political parties, and civic education. The USG will also contribute to election security and logistical support through MINUSTAH. These efforts, combined with critical electoral benchmarks and long-term electoral reforms linked to the legitimacy and cost-effectiveness of elections will seek to increase the chances of elections that reflect the popular will. After the 2010-11 electoral cycle, the USG will assist the GOH [Government of Haiti] in building a new social compact between citizens and the government, and provide support to parliament to represent constituent interests, oversee GOH reconstruction efforts, and

draft and enact effective reform legislation supporting Haiti's development across all sectors.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, the U.S. sought to balance its efforts to foster the kind of transparent, democratic election that has eluded Haiti in its young democratic history thus far, but avoid the interventionist approach that ultimately failed in the 1990s.

Congress as well as State/USAID were mindful of Haiti's political reality and thus worded their commitments to the recovery effort very carefully. The official State Department strategy for rebuilding Haiti, re-released and updated in January 2011, specifically stated that the transparency of Haiti's post-earthquake elections would directly affect the future of U.S. recovery aid, particularly that which is focused on more deeply rooted and long-term development. The strategy document stated that the "success of USG strategy in Haiti is predicated on a credible, legitimate counterpart in the GOH...in light of the notable irregularities and allegations of fraud during the first round of national elections, the nature of USG support to the GOH will be intrinsically tied to the outcome of the 2010-11 elections."<sup>65</sup> At this time, the final outcome of pop star Michel Martelly has been questioned (especially his opponent, Maripat Manigat) but thus far seems to be on track to assume the presidency in May 2011. For now, the United States and fellow key donor countries will have to wait to see how Martelly approaches the rebuilding of Haiti's government institutions with regard to handling the influx of international aid money.

The crux of the problem with post-earthquake aid to Haiti is that as much as we want to turn tragedy into opportunity for improved long-term political, social, and economic growth , the

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<sup>64</sup> "Post-Earthquake USG Haiti Strategy: Towards Renewal and Economic Opportunity.". United States Department of State. [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov). January 3, 2011. Pp. 64.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

truth is that if there was a better way to do that, we would not need an earthquake to bring it to fruition in the form of actual policies and programming. “Build back better” became a popular foreign aid catchphrase after the earthquake, but it is simply not feasible. Haiti’s myriad challenges, ranging from streets literally still filled with rubble to weak governance and national and sub-national levels, layer on top of each other and leave little room for outside actors to solve one issue before moving on to the next.

In this way, the past fifteen months of U.S. aid to Haiti in its post-disaster context epitomize the challenges inherent in U.S. foreign aid overall. We don’t know where to start, so we start everywhere at once. Sometimes a crisis situation such as an earthquake demands such an approach, but it is well-known that this was already the strategy in Haiti beforehand. In doing so, we have fostered Haiti’s reliance on the U.S. and other international donors because we have made it impossible for them to survive without it. We give them fish for a day; we do not teach them to fish.<sup>66</sup> Short-term “band-aid” solutions, ranging from emergency food delivery and paying for basic electoral supplies, allow the country to function as best as possible. But generations of such temporary measures have created an impossible cycle in which minimal space exists to implement a true long-term approach, one that would prioritize self-sustaining economic growth, grassroots democratic development, and a national identity based not on relying on the U.S. to carry Haiti up the mountain, but on itself instead.

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<sup>66</sup> Nicholas Kristof, “Ladders for the poor,” *The New York Times*. January 6, 2011. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).  
Laura Freschi, “Following the money, from DC to Haiti and back again.” Aidwatchers blog, Development Research Institute, New York University. December 16, 2010. [www.aidwatchers.com](http://www.aidwatchers.com).



## FROM PROBLEMS TO SOLUTIONS:

### SCALING THE MOUNTAINS

There are two central ironies in contemporary U.S. foreign aid. The first appears Gerald Hyman's observation that foreign aid spending has grown while, simultaneously, the quality of organization and bureaucratic efficiency deteriorated. In many ways, foreign aid suffered from the curse of too many blessings: its proponents had long argued in favor of more funding and attention, but concurrent with that increased funding came scrutiny and a series of ostensibly well-meaning measures that have ultimately led to its fragmentation and disorganization. In short, the U.S. foreign infrastructure has developed an ad hoc internal governance that survives without thriving. This leads to the second inherent irony, which is that U.S. foreign aid so often seeks to foster the kind of effective governance in weak countries that, paradoxically, persistently eludes the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure itself.

Dispersing U.S. foreign aid to Haiti since the earthquake in early 2010 has resulted in a complex array of objectives, priorities, and implementation. This, in turn, leads to weak transparency and limited accountability of American funds spent thus far. As a result, the general public, specialists, scholars, and elected officials alike are exasperated with the moderate progress that has been made.<sup>67</sup> Six months after the earthquake, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voiced a sentiment shared by many in the U.S. aid and foreign affairs community, stating that "Haiti needs to be rebuilt in a sustainable way that considers the long-term future of the country and the people. This needs to be a Haitian-owned process... [though] circumstances

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<sup>67</sup> Samantha Nadler, "Haiti One Year On: Chronic Challenges," *Washington Report on the Hemisphere*. Vol. 31, Iss. ½. February 3, 2011. Pp. 1-4.

demand strong and strategic support from the donor community.”<sup>68</sup> This could easily be repeated today and ring equally true. Though certainly not the only factor—European and Canadian involvement merit just as much scrutiny—the impact of the dispersed nature of U.S. foreign aid in post-earthquake Haiti cannot be ignored. Rather than addressing the problems directly, past administrations and Congresses have opted instead to apply innovative ideas to external entities (PEPFAR, MCC, SEED, etc) that add to the confusion. This innovation, such as the incentive-based grants of the MCC, could have been applied to USAID itself, but it was not. In this way, the issues that have emerged thus far in U.S. foreign aid to Haiti serve as a microcosm of broader issues in the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure.

It is important to note that lack of coordination and accountability thus far in Haiti does not mean that, on the ground, significant progress has not been achieved. On the contrary, the speed with which U.S. forces, NGOs, and international relief workers deployed to Haiti is tremendous. Moreover, the advanced level at which ad hoc coordination operated undoubtedly contributed greatly to their success thus far. It is from these “scouts and soldiers” that the executors of the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure can learn—and benefit—so much.

Although contemporary U.S. foreign aid addresses a broad range of issues, an overall shift in our fundamental approach to aid has emerged over the past two decades. Easterly posited that there are two main development philosophies, as represented by the people who espouse them. He theorized that *searchers* approach aid with questions about how the world works, they are honest with themselves and others about how little they truly know and thus seek to gain just as much in learning for next time as they seek to give in aid. *Planners*, on the other hand,

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<sup>68</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “Haiti At a Crossroads: A Report to the Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, June 22, 2010. [www.foreign.senate.gov](http://www.foreign.senate.gov) . Pp. 1.

approach aid with answers and operate on the assumption that “poverty is a technical engineering problem that [their] answers will solve.”<sup>69</sup> Planners view the world’s problems as black-and-white with clear, top-down solutions; aid is perceived through its purest definition, which is that it is essentially the transfer of goods, services, and/or money from one country to another that will then achieve stated goals. Searchers, however, take a more organic approach to foreign aid planning and implementation that is not predicated on already knowing all the answers.

If there is one takeaway from the plethora of literature that skewers USAID for its numerous shortfalls, it is that somewhere between its creation in 1961 and today in 2011 we went from searchers to planners. In spite of blanket commitments to “country ownership” vocalized by USAID and many of its contractors, as Birdsall discussed, merely incorporating a superficial level of participation by the host government and its citizens is not the same as true country ownership of a given endeavor. The official State Department strategy for rebuilding Haiti after the earthquake is known to have been largely drafted prior to the earthquake—and then amended to reflect the changed post-disaster context. This is not authentic disaster aid policymaking. Among the numerous challenges (and solutions) discussed by Birdsall, Natsios, Thomas Carothers, and others, the failure to genuinely commit to context-driven, country-owned measures to build local capacity from the ground up ranks highest.

As Natsios articulated, “what the people of a community want ultimately counts a great deal, since the community belongs to them and not to external aid agencies.”<sup>70</sup> The lengthy history of U.S. aid to Haiti, however, does not reflect this ideal. Indeed, its identity as the “republic of NGOs” is indicative of the great extent to which Haiti’s welfare and future stability

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<sup>69</sup> Easterly, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Natsios, 7.

depend on outside NGOs and government aid. As the earthquake created even more abject poverty and despair than before, fostering authentic partnerships with Haitian officials (many of whom died in the earthquake as well), organizations, and individuals was even more difficult. At the same time, as numerous reports indicated before and after the quake, even prior to January 12, 2010 Haiti lacked sufficient capacity to stand on its own. Its government, banks, and public goods were weak and essentially stalled after the earthquake hit the island. The U.S. and other major donors were thus in the classic catch-22 of foreign aid: how to dispense aid in a way that builds internal capacity without paradoxically prolonging Haiti's incapacity to function independently. This has become a common dilemma in foreign aid and the way in which the U.S. moves forward (or not) with addressing it in Haiti stands to dramatically affect how U.S. foreign aid is implemented in the future, particularly with regard to emergency relief and institutional rebuilding.

It is difficult to examine the state of U.S. foreign aid, especially with regard to the current situation in Haiti, without feeling pessimistic. Truth be told, Haiti and international players contributing to its recovery (State/USAID, private contractors, NGOs, the UN mission MINUSTAH) still have a tremendous amount of work to accomplish before the country has a chance of surviving independently. Over a year after the earthquake, approximately 680,000 Haitians still live in temporary shelters for displaced persons and thousands more live in fragile, makeshift homes.<sup>71</sup> With reports rampant disease, violence, and electoral fraud populating international news, the American public's frustration at not seeing the results they expected to see from the nearly \$3 billion spent in FY 2010 alone on Haiti relief efforts is understandable.

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<sup>71</sup> Randal C. Archibold, "Haitians Forced Out of Tent Camps Remain in Limbo," *The New York Times*. April 23, 2011. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

Fully accurate details of how much the U.S. has spent on post-earthquake aid to Haiti will take several more months to emerge due in part to the time required for audits and budget analyses, but also due to the incredible diffusion of aid and aidlike programs (such as security assistance,<sup>72</sup> funneled through DOD though considered to be a form of foreign aid) across numerous departments and programs. Loss of accountability and speedy transparency is a primary consequence of the dispersed nature that is now an inherent part of how U.S. foreign aid operates.

The problems facing foreign aid to Haiti—slow transfer of funds, lack of visible progress, minimal country ownership—are thus a direct result of the challenges to U.S. foreign aid that have unfolded over the past two decades. These challenges do not, however, have to be as insurmountable as they may seem. Although Hyman described many of the measures taken by the last three (four, counting the current Obama administration) administrations as seemingly “inconsequential” and it is their combination that has led USAID to where it is today, some of those measures were more consequential than others. The Bush administration’s creation of the MCC and PEPFAR, both considered to be innovative initiatives with great potential for long-term success, demonstrated an institutional stubbornness to apply the same level of innovation and resources to rehabilitating USAID itself. Between agency leadership and budget battles involving State and DOD, USAID has become unnecessarily politically charged in a way that undermines its potential and jeopardizes its future.

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<sup>72</sup> Gordon Adams and Rebecca Williams, “A New Way Forward: Rebalancing Security Assistance Programs and Authorities.” Stimson Center. March 2011. [www.stimson.org](http://www.stimson.org) .

If the current administration genuinely wants to elevate the purpose and planning of U.S. foreign aid to the level of diplomacy and defense,<sup>73</sup> then the discussion needs to move beyond petty interagency dynamics and political scapegoating of the small sliver of the federal budget that foreign aid absorbs. Rather than accepting the diffusion of foreign aid spending across several spigots of funding, including the plethora of development contractors, as an unavoidable challenge, the administration would be wise to revamp the structure of U.S. foreign aid so that it can capitalize on the potential benefits of the dispersed nature of foreign aid today. Moreover, it ought to look at prime examples of great achievement within USAID from which it can glean lessons in operational capacity that can be applied elsewhere in the U.S. foreign aid infrastructure. The effectiveness and efficiency demonstrated by OTI and OFDA in the weeks and months after the Haitian earthquake are prime examples of such an achievement.

From Landrum Bolling's study of NGOs and foreign aid nearly thirty years ago to Lt. Keen's statement on the 6-month anniversary of the Haitian earthquake, the desire to compare government and private organizations' implementation of foreign aid work has remained strong. Particularly in situations such as post-disaster Haiti when the speedy effectiveness of NGOs is evident, the urge to use this as grounds for further criticism of USAID and U.S. humanitarian work widespread. Rather than pit public and private implementations of foreign aid against each other, however, a comprehensive examination of how each approaches the same foreign aid issues would be extremely useful for both. In addition to private contractors like DAI and Chemonics that bid on USAID contracts, many NGOs receive some form of public funding for their work overseas. A deeper and more nuanced understanding of how each operates—

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<sup>73</sup> One of the goals of the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, available in full at [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

potentially executed by a task force of practitioners and experts and/or overseen by a nonpartisan think tank—would greatly reduce the friction between private and public implementers of foreign aid. Moreover, such a study would identify sources of wasteful spending or budget overlap in a way that is conducive towards improving the transparency of foreign aid spending.

Of course, the practical applications of such a study will only go as far as the Obama administration is willing to take them. The QDDR was a promising first step towards revamping the defense, diplomacy, and development spheres of foreign policy, but it stopped short of making any major strides towards streamlining the bureaucracy that has generated so much criticism. Furthermore, although the on-the-ground coordination among State/USAID, DOD, and NGO staff that transpired in the days and weeks immediately after the Haitian earthquake was impressive, its lessons have yet to be applied to long-term interagency coordination and positive relationship building. Rather than standing at odds with another, particular when it comes to federal budgeting, the White House needs to foster a dynamic between the Secretaries of Defense and State and the USAID administrator that is based on open lines of communication and clearly defined missions.

Haiti exemplifies how weak governance and limited internal capacity lead to dependence on international aid. Paradoxically, the U.S.'s own foreign aid structure clearly suffers from governance problems of its own that have complicated the post-earthquake aid process in Haiti. On the first anniversary of the earthquake, President Obama said that “still, too much rubble continues to clog the streets, too many people are still living in tents, and for so many Haitians

progress as not come fast enough.”<sup>74</sup> The calls to foster self-sustaining capacity in Haiti with regard to its government and financial institutions are valid, but we must address the capacity of U.S. foreign aid in order to do so in Haiti. Only by tackling the challenges facing our own aid infrastructure will we be able to promote a comparable level of institutional sophistication and innovation successfully in Haiti.

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<sup>74</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. Statement by President Barack Obama on the One Year Anniversary of the Earthquake in Haiti. January 11, 2011. [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) .



APPENDIX A:

DISPERSED INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS BUDGET

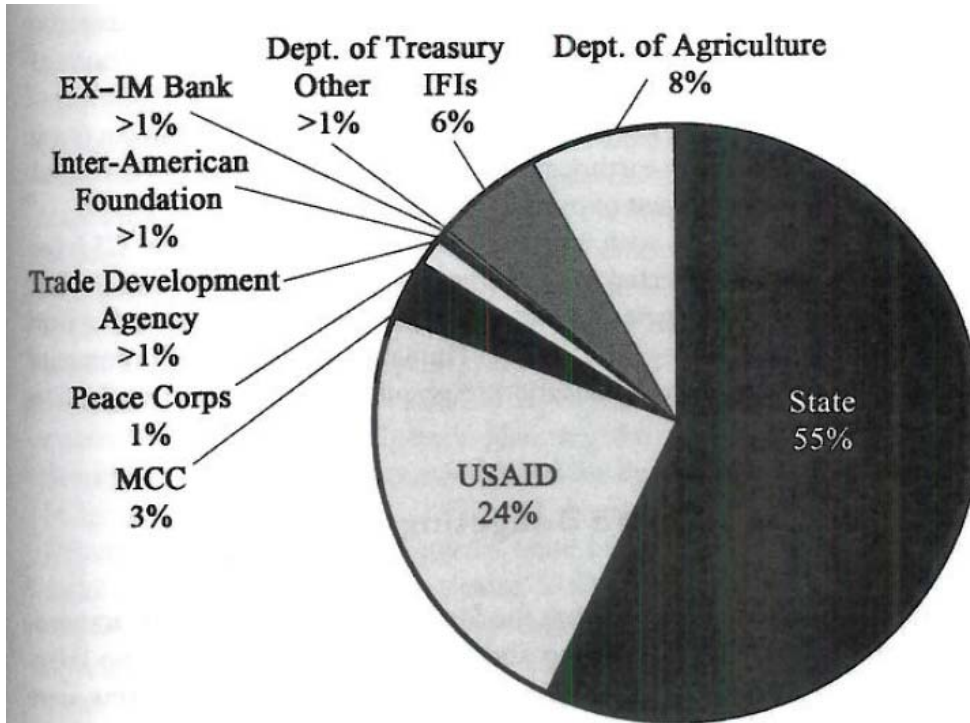
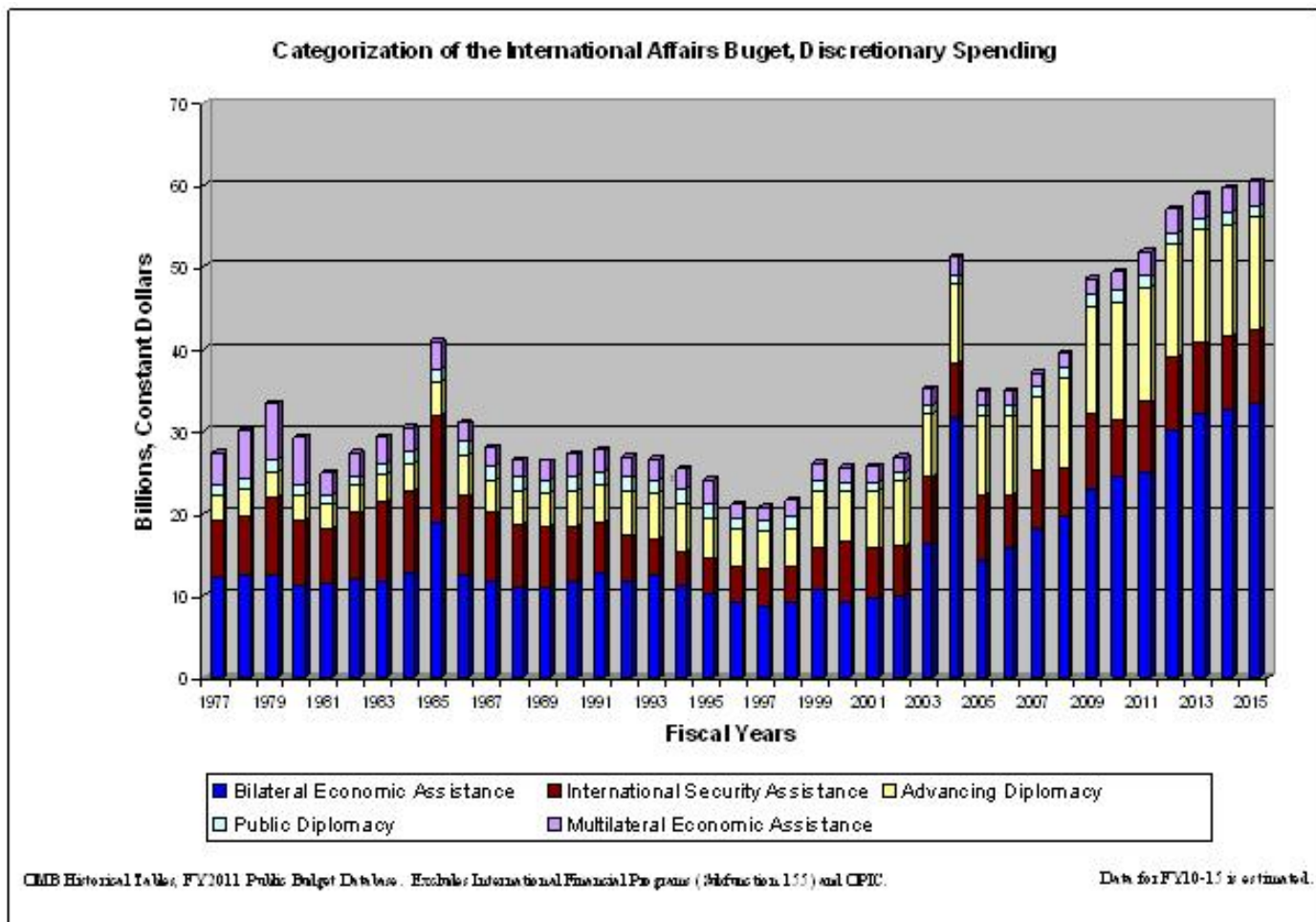


Figure 3.2 Function 150 diaspora: FY 2009 estimate (source: US Department of State, FY 2010 Congressional Budget Justification (Washington, DC: May 2009)).

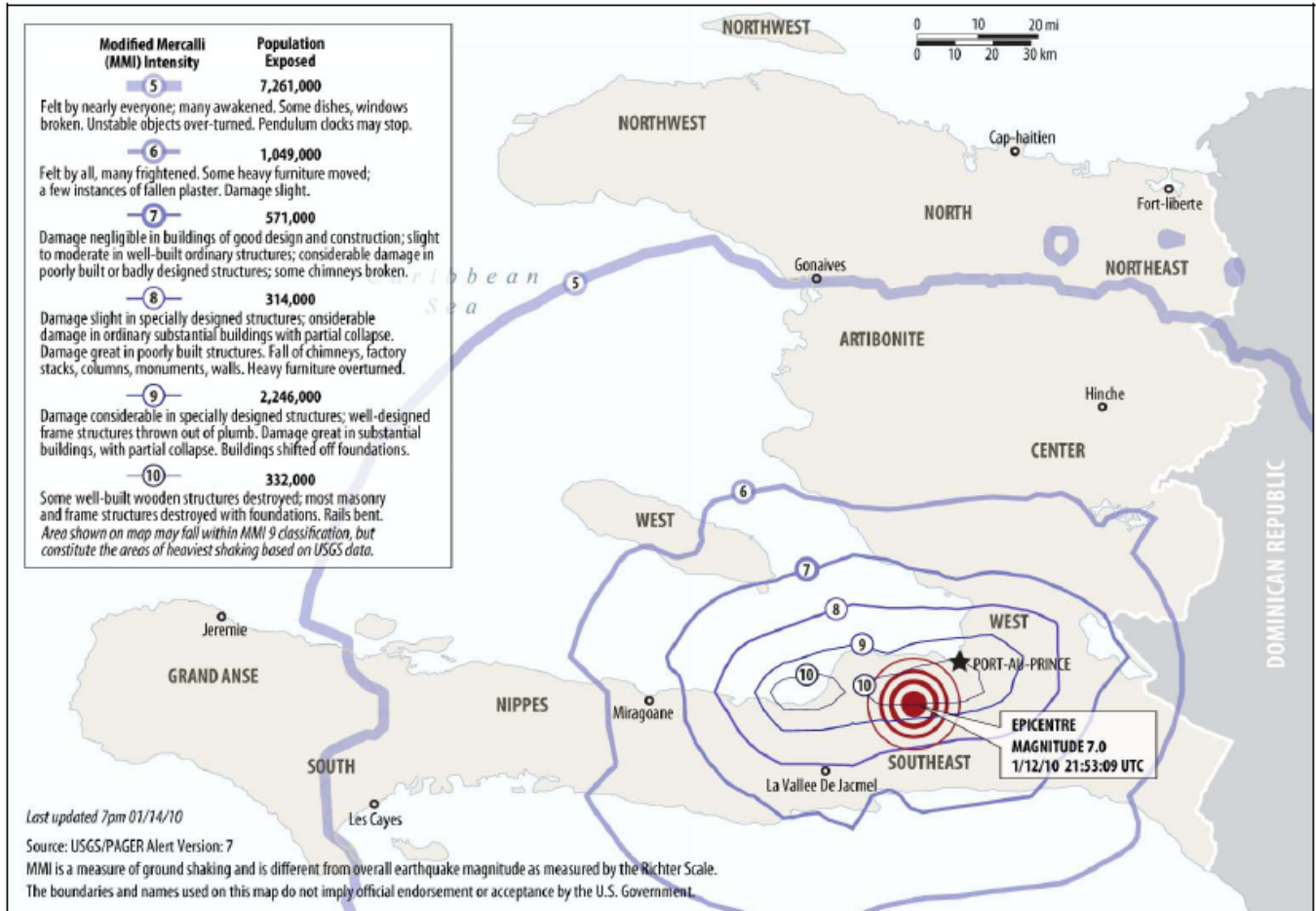
Image courtesy of Gordon Adams and Cindy Williams, Buying National Security (page 33).

**APPENDIX B:  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS BUDGET 1977-2015**



*Table courtesy of the Budgeting for Foreign Affairs & Defense project at the Stimson Center, data courtesy of the Office of Management & Budget (thewillandthewallet.org).*

## APPENDIX C: VISUALIZING THE EARTHQUAKE ON JANUARY 12, 2010



*Image courtesy of the Congressional Research Service, Haiti Earthquake: Crisis and Response, March 8 2010, pp 7. (www.opencrs.com)*

## APPENDIX D: INITIAL U.S. DISASTER AID RESPONSE



Image courtesy of the Congressional Research Service, Haiti Earthquake: Crisis and Response, March 8, 2010, pp 44 (openers.com).

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