

SUMMARY

CSIS-WWC Event

“Reconstruction and Stabilization: Enhancing U.S. Post-Conflict Capacity”
with Ambassador Carlos Pascual

October 20, 2004

On Wednesday, October 20, Ambassador Carlos Pascual, the first Coordinator for the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization at the U.S. Department of State, presented his strategic vision for enhancing U.S. post-conflict capacity before an overflow crowd of close to 300 people at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Ambassador Pascual’s talk, co-sponsored by CSIS’s Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, served as an initial public introduction to his Office, which has been charged by the National Security Council with leading, coordinating, and institutionalizing U.S. civilian government capacity to prevent and prepare for post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization efforts. The Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) is the latest instrument of U.S. preventative diplomacy designed to address the unpredictable nature of foreign policy making in the post-Cold War world of failing states and global terror.

Ambassador Pascual underscored the unique interagency mandate of S/CRS in both character and function. At present, S/CRS is comprised of 30 staff members from a diverse assembly of US government agencies including DOS, DOD, CIA, Treasury, USAID, and the Army Corps of Engineers. In addition, Ambassador Pascual’s Office will coordinate reconstruction and stabilization efforts among and between the civilian and military arms of the US government, as well as between the U.S. government and international organizations. The Office’s goal is to gain the institutional capacity to manage 2-3 reconstruction and stability operations simultaneously by forging key partnerships and developing a management structure that allows for rapid deployment as well as rapid phasing out. Although S/CRS is not active in either Iraq or Afghanistan, the Office will work with the National Intelligence Council in order to select which countries pose the greatest risk of future instability., in the hopes of improving the U.S. civilian capacity to plan for contingencies. Ambassador Pascual explained that planning for specific country interventions rather than generic emergencies, obliges officials to make trade-offs they otherwise would not be forced to make, exposing the gaps behind false assumptions.

S/CRS seeks to add value to U.S. post-conflict capacity in five key areas: 1) Monitoring and Planning; 2) Mobilization and Deployment; 3) Preparation of Resources and Skills; 4) Application of Lessons Learned; and 5) Coordination with International Partners. Ambassador Pascual emphasized the importance of civilian participation in DOD’s post-conflict planning activities. “If we can figure out how to embed CNN reporters [with military units],” the Ambassador quipped, “we ought to be able to embed State Department officials as well.” During mobilization, S/CRS plans to stress both speed and effectiveness, combining their Office’s own technical skills with regional bureau expertise. Along these lines, S/CRS will create and co-chair an interagency Reconstruction and Stability Group that will take the lead in particular post-conflict efforts. With regard to training, S/CRS intends to increase four core capacities: leadership, diplomatic operations on the ground, technical programming, and implementation. All of these activities, Ambassador Pascual explained, require funding such as that proposed in the Lugar-Biden bill. Even with legislation and money, however, restructuring the U.S. government’s response to reconstruction and stabilization efforts will take considerable time. One of the greatest challenges his Office will face is to think in the long-term without losing effectiveness in the present. Doing so will require close collaboration both inside and outside the U.S. government.

-Craig Cohen

Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project

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