

# Security By Other Means: Foreign Assistance, Global Poverty, and American Leadership

Edited by Lael Brainard

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## Reviewed by SEAN PEOPLES

The calls for a more effective U.S. foreign assistance framework have been deafening lately. Although official foreign aid has increased substantially over the last five years, its fragmented organization and lack of clear strategic objectives have come under fire. Many prominent voices in the development community argue that substantial reform is needed to effectively alleviate poverty, strengthen security, and increase trade and investment in developing countries (e.g., Sewell, 2007, Sewell & Bencala 2008; Patrick, 2006; Desai, 2007). CARE International's announcement that it would forgo \$45 million a year in federal funding is a clear indication that our development strategy is still plagued by significant problems (Dugger, 2007). In *Security By Other Means: Foreign Assistance, Global Poverty, and American Leadership*, several leading scholars—including Steven Radelet, Charles Flickner, and Lael Brainard—offer innovative approaches to reforming U.S. foreign assistance.

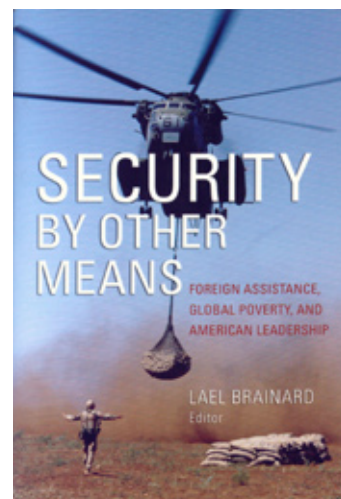
This Brookings Institution volume, edited by Lael Brainard, joins the growing chorus of criticism of foreign assistance reform in offering a clear set of first steps. In his 2007 paper for Brookings, Desai recommends consolidating the numerous aid agencies and departmental programs into one cabinet-level department for international development. Stewart Patrick (2006) advocates a complete overhaul of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act, given the outmoded law's lack of clarity. In another report, Patrick and his former colleagues at the Center for Global Development analyzed President Bush's FY2008 budget and found that "the U.S. continues to devote a relatively small share of its national wealth to alleviate poverty and promote self-sustaining growth in the develop-

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ing world" (Bazzi, et al. 2007, p.1). In the first chapter of *Security By Other Means*, Brainard explains that aid is not distributed purely on the basis of need: "In dollar terms America continues to place far greater emphasis on bribing non-democratic states than on promoting their democratization" (p. 18).

The inefficiency and fragmentation of the current U.S. foreign aid structure stems from several cumulative factors, including: numerous competing strategic objectives; conflicting mandates among government and non-governmental organizations; congressional and executive branches jockeying for control; and countless organizations with overlapping efforts. Wading through the web of legislation, objectives, and organizations comprising U.S. foreign assistance efforts is a dizzying exercise.

Helping us untangle this confusing web is *Security By Other Means*, which compiles the findings of the Brookings Institution-Center for Strategic and International Studies Task Force on Transforming Foreign Assistance in the 21st Century into a manual of sorts for reforming foreign assistance. Not shying away from the nitty-gritty of foreign assistance policy, the book's contributors delve deep into the current development assistance framework and





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recommend valuable reforms, which include: integrating strategic security concerns; formulating clear objectives; understanding recipient country capacities; and building effective partnerships that exploit comparative advantages.

Covering a wide range of development challenges, some chapters offer prescriptions, while others provide case studies or context. In his chapter on strengthening U.S. development assistance, Steven Radelet, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, rightfully highlights how poorly U.S. assistance is allocated: “Significant amounts of aid go to middle-income countries that have access to private sector capital and have graduated from other aid programs” (p. 100).

As food insecurity, violent conflict, and natural disasters wax and wane, humanitarian assistance continues to expand in scale and scope. Steven Hansch’s sobering chapter provides a blueprint for the ways the United States can draw on its military’s comparative advantages and more effectively coordinate the world’s donors for emerging humanitarian needs. Patrick Cronin argues that conflict prevention can be integrated into development reform: “A serious—but realistic—capacity to turn swords into plowshares and prevent conflict before it begins must be a core mission of the U.S. government in the twenty-first century” (p. 161).

Building and strengthening the capacity for creativity within the legislative branch is also critical. Charles Flickner, former staff director for the Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs in the U.S. House of Representatives, acknowledges the resource and cultural challenges (especially congressional committee culture) faced by those in charge of appropriating foreign assistance (p. 238).

*Security By Other Means* successfully provides a realistic assessment of the challenges to strengthening U.S. leadership in development assistance. The book, along with the Helping to Enhance the Livelihood of People Around the Globe Commission report, encourages a much-

needed discourse not only on foreign assistance, but also on U.S. foreign policy in general. The authors provide a timely service for the new presidential administration by taking an integrated look at development challenges and discouraging the use of cookie-cutter approaches to foreign assistance allocation and humanitarian interventions.

Some readers may find *Security By Other Means* lacking. For instance, Capitol Hill staffers would likely find a condensed and more visually stimulating version of greater utility. Policy wonks would benefit from several more case studies peppered within appropriate chapters. Prominently placed case studies strongly support Cronin’s chapter on development in conflict contexts, but other chapters did not give cases the same emphasis, even though successful reform requires learning from past mistakes and successes.

At a July 2007 Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on foreign assistance, then-Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Henrietta Fore committed to simplifying the process and integrating the numerous spigots of money flowing outward. Brainard and two other leading experts on foreign assistance—Sam Worthington, president and CEO of InterAction, and Radelet—testified that rapid globalization and the inevitable integration of international economies are the impetus for a more unified and harmonized foreign aid structure. A clear consensus emerged from their recommendations: promote local capacity and stakeholder ownership; favor long-term sustainability over short-term political goals; and encourage the consolidation and coordination of the disjointed U.S. foreign assistance structure.

While federal aid flounders, private foundation donations are growing steadily and are poised to overtake official governmental aid. Moreover, businesses have steadily expanded the scope of their humanitarian work. Private businesses and foundations can avoid much of the bureaucratic red tape that strangles

government aid. Nevertheless, an attempt by business interests, private foundations, and federal foreign assistance to integrate their approaches and build technical capacity could only be a positive step.

The authors of *Security By Other Means* successfully parse the many challenges and opportunities posed by U.S. foreign assistance reform. Along with a growing number of critical voices, this book provides a basis for further discussion and action on a number of fronts, including integrating diverse donor funds, seriously deliberating the comparative advantages of various organizations, and streamlining competing foreign assistance mandates.

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## The Shape of Things To Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World

By Elizabeth Leahy, with Robert Engelman, Carolyn Gibb Vogel, Sarah Haddock, and Tod Preston  
Washington, DC: Population Action International, 2007. 96 pages.

Available online from <http://www.populationaction.org>

### Reviewed by JOHN F. MAY

In the past two decades, the study of the world's evolving demographic trends has led population scholars to reassess two classic paradigms. The first paradigm held that the theory of demographic transition—a country's transition from high mortality and fertility to low mortality and fertility—was a set of hypotheses regarding fertility with limited predictive value, and far from a universal model encompassing mortality, fertility, and migration. The second paradigm—held by many economists until quite recently—

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was that population growth and demographic trends have no impact on (or, at least, are "neutral" to) economic development.

Recent demographic trends appear to have ended the period of intellectual doubt first

