THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Voices on US foreign assistance under challenge, part 1: U.S. leadership, fragile states, and ideas for reform

October 6, 2017

CONTRIBUTORS:

Host:
FRED DEWS

MADELINE ALBRIGHT
Chair, Albright Stonebridge Group

RICHAR C. BLUM
Founder & Chairman, Blum Capital

STEPHEN HADLEY
Principal, Rice Hadley Gates

GEORGE INGRAM
Senior Fellow, Global Economy & Development program

STEVEN KULL
Director, Program for Public Consultation,
School of Public Policy, University of Maryland

NANCY LINDBORG
President, United States Institute of Peace

CONTRIBUTORS (CONT.)

NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA
Chair of the Board, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

LIZ SCHRAYER
President & CEO, U.S. Global Leadership Coalition

(MUSIC)

KENNEDY: Political sovereignty is but a mockery without the means of meeting poverty, and illiteracy, and disease. Self-determination is a slogan if the future holds no hope. That is why my nation, which has freely shared its capital and its technology to help others help themselves, now proposes officially, designating this decade of the 1960s as the United Nations decade of development.

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. That was President John F. Kennedy addressing the United Nations on September 25, 1961. He went on to say that development should be a cooperative, and not competitive, enterprise.

Since just after the end of World War II, the United States has been a global leader in providing assistance to help other countries rebuild after war, strengthen economies, promote democracy, feed hungry families, alleviate sickness and poverty, spur development, and respond to natural disasters. These efforts not only help nations and their citizens, but also support global peace, economic development, and transnational security. And the U.S. government agencies do all of this work with only a very small portion of the federal budget.

In this episode of The Brookings Cafeteria, part one of two, you'll learn about current challenges facing U.S. development assistance, also known as foreign aid. These include what Americans think about U.S. foreign assistance programs, the role of U.S. leadership in an increasingly multi-polar world, concerns over fragile states, and then consensus ideas for reform in the U.S. foreign aid architecture. Part 2 will focus on the evolving global development landscape and how to make aid work for all, and we'll include stories of foreign assistance at work on the ground.

In both episodes you'll hear from top voices in the development community—people who are leaders in government, academia, NGO's, and the private sector. The experts featured in these episodes were some of the participants in the 14th annual Brookings-Blum Roundtable, a three day conference held in August that included nearly 50 of the most prominent policymakers, practitioners, academics and industry leaders.

The Roundtable was hosted by Richard C. Blum and the Global Economy and Development program here at Brookings. You can learn more about the Brookings-Blum Roundtable and the conference report now published on our website, Brookings.edu.

All right, let's dive in to us development assistance starting with a Brookings expert with whom I spoke about the context of U.S. foreign aid.

INGRAM: The challenges facing the U.S. and the world are very complex and very broad. And our foreign assistance really sits on a three legged stool. You mentioned one of them which is humanitarian assistance, which is urgent lifesaving relief that saves people from natural disasters and manmade civil conflicts. Secondly, we use the assistance for development to promote basic economic, social, political development in countries. And thirdly, we use it for security reasons, and this is military and other economic assistance that goes to bolster the security and stability of allied countries. I'm George Ingram and I'm a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

DEWS: George Ingram also serves as chair emeritus of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition and co-chair of the modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. During his extensive career in international economics and development, Ingram was principal deputy assistant administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development with primary responsibility for U.S. assistance programs in the former Soviet Union. I asked him to describe, at a high level, what is called the U.S. foreign assistance architecture. Here we begin to see what underlies one of the top challenges to U.S. foreign assistance.

INGRAM: Well the structure of U.S. foreign assistance architecture couldn't be any more complex. Some 25 agencies are involved in providing some form of assistance around the world. Nine of those agencies play a significant role. The U.S. Agency for International Development is the largest, the most important, and it basically provides assistance for humanitarian development. Secondly is the State Department, which gets involved in humanitarian assistance but also security. Then you have the Millennium Challenge Corporation which is really a sister organization to USAID. The Treasury Department provides multilateral assistance to the World Bank and other

international organizations. Department of Agriculture gets involved, Defense, the Center for Disease Control does a lot of health work around the world, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation provides insurance and financing for U.S. investment in developing countries.

DEWS: There's a lot more to be said about addressing this complexity in the U.S. foreign assistance architecture, and we'll come to that. But first I wanted to introduce Richard Blum, host of The Brookings-Blum Roundtable, and also an honorary and former trustee of the Brookings Institution. He is chairman and president of Blum Capital Partners, founder of the Blum Center for Developing Economies at U.C. Berkeley, and also founder and chairman of the American Himalayan Foundation.

He spoke over the phone with my colleague Merrell Tuck-Primdahl, who is director of communications for the Global Economy and Development program. Merrell, in fact, was in Aspen for the Roundtable and collected nearly all of the audio for these episodes. So unless I say otherwise it was Merrell who elicited these experts' commentaries, so to her I am grateful. She spoke on the phone with Mr. Blum about why he first became concerned about the issue of U.S. foreign assistance under challenge.

BLUM: It probably struck me when I first went to the Himalayas 49 years ago, and I got to know the people, particularly the Sherpas at that time, and I found them to be lovely, spiritual, soulful people but not much in the way of the things that you need in today's society even in terms of decent housing. And I saw the peace corps was active in Nepal even back then, and they were making a difference, and it just seemed to me that there was a lot more that could be done not just in Nepal but almost anywhere you went in the world because outside of Western Europe and a few other countries we saw more poverty than not.

DEWS: He continued to explain the partnerships he forged among philanthropists, private investors, and academics, including the Brookings Blum Roundtable.

BLUM: I started the Blum Center just about 10 years ago at the University of California at Berkeley. But we had been investing in the developing world as private equity investors, mainly in Asia, mainly in Eastern Asia, and we saw the difference of how good philanthropic organizations, and sometimes good investments, can help people lives be better.

And I just thought that we needed more to do that, and I've been on the board of Brookings going back a number of years and so Strobe Talbott, who is the CEO of Brookings, and I came up with the idea of the Brookings-Blum Roundtable where we discussed different subjects from time to time. Over a period of 14 years there has been a focus on dealing with global poverty issues, and the best one we ever had was the one we just completed where we had Bill Clinton come and be the sort of chairman of our group for three days, and Madeleine Albright, you know really other people who've been doing this stuff all her life.

DEWS: You'll hear more from Madeleine Albright later in this episode, and more from Richard Blum and the next one. Now let me outline the themes for the rest of this episode. First, what do Americans think about U.S. foreign assistance programs and how much is spent on them? Do we need to be so involved in the world? Second, what is the role of U.S. leadership as we enter an increasingly multi-polar world? Third, how does foreign assistance meet the challenge of democracy promotion in a world with an increasing number of fragile states? And finally, given the complexity of U.S. foreign aid architecture, what are some consensus ideas for how to reform.

KULL: A lot of people ask me whether the election of Donald Trump is an indicator that the public is going through an isolationist phase, that they want to disengage from the world. Well there's been a lot of trend line polling on this question, and the short answer is no. There is no indication that the public is going through an isolationist phase. Large majorities support U.S. engagement in the world.

I’m Stephen Kull, the director of the Program for Public Consultation at the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. Now in relation to the question of foreign aid, which is something that often comes up around the question of isolationism, it is not that people are negative about foreign aid. There is a perception that the U.S. is

overextended, that it does more than its fair share, that it plays the role of world policeman, that it is this kind of benign force in the world and it does the job but without the help of others. And Donald Trump very effectively spoke to that feeling that the U.S. is overextended.

Some of that perception that the U.S. is doing more than its fair share is based on some accurate perceptions, but it is also based on some very inaccurate perceptions. One that's particularly prominent is that if you ask people what percentage of the budget do you think goes to foreign aid, the median estimate has been 20 percent of the budget. And when you ask well what percentage do you think should be, the median responses, “oh let's get back to 10, 10 percent of the budget.” And if you ask “well how would you feel where 1 percent,” which is what it actually is, very few people say that's too much. So a lot of this feeling that the U.S. is overextended is based on these kinds of misperceptions.

DEWS: Kull added that there is some discomfort among Americans of the image of the U.S. playing the role of world policeman, but ask them about humanitarian aid and the response is different.

KULL: When you ask about humanitarian aid, people are very comfortable with that, very positive about that, and they do not want to reduce that. But when you look at things like military aid, or aid to governments that might be dictators and so on, that makes people feel uncomfortable. They feel like we're giving bribes, that we're basically being shaken down, and that whole model of the U.S. role in the world is one that they don't feel comfortable with.

And Trump spoke to that. You know, it's time for us to think about ourselves not the world. Which has a combination, this extension is seen as some kind of mix of humanitarian concern, but very linked to these hegemonic aspirations to do things in support of our interests which are heavily influenced by special interests, and corporations, and so on that are shaping policy. And so there's just this general dis-ease about that aspect of U.S. foreign policy that Trump spoke to.

DEWS: I had the opportunity to speak with Brookings-Blum Roundtable participant Liz Schrayer, who was president and CEO of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, a network of over 500 businesses and nonprofits that advocate for a strong international affairs budget. She also spoke to misconceptions many Americans have about the scope of U.S. foreign assistance spending, but also highlighted their support of such activities.

Schrayer: I run a coalition the Washington Post called “the strange bedfellow coalition,” and it's because we bring a pretty unique group of people together. We have over 500 businesses, and faith base, and NGOs that are involved with us that are our members. They run everything on the business side from Coca-Cola, to Wal-Mart, to Lockheed Martin and land O'Lakes. And on the NGO side, big national international NGOs like Save the Children, Bread for the World, Care, World Vision.

We have every former living secretary of state on our advisory council, it's run by Chairman General Colin Powell. Almost 200 retired three and four star military leaders. We're in every single state with business leaders, faith leaders, military veterans. And what brings them together is this belief that America not only needs to be engaged in the world, lead in the world, but do it not just through the military but also through our development and diplomacy tools.

One of the biggest challenges with debate on foreign aid is this wild misconception and misinformation about how much America actually spends on foreign aid. As it is often said for 40 years there's been a poll question where you asked the American public “how much do you think we spend on foreign aid?” And pretty much it comes back somewhere between, the American public, between 25 to 27 percent.

And they said “well how much do you think we should spend?” And most years it comes between five to 10 percent, and as most people know it's about 1 percent. And when you educate people about how much we actually spend people think that it's pretty realistic that that's what we should spend. But they want it to be effective. And there's no question that it needs to be effective, and what people don't realize is how much we actually have achieved with it.

DEWS: Americans in fact do want their government to have a meaningful role in the world in realms of development and diplomacy. As Schrayer explained, the U.S. global leadership coalition works in communities across America to have conversations with citizens about these issues.

Schrayer: In August this summer, when Congress was in recess, they go back and they spend time with their constituents. And one of the things that a lot of them want to do is talk about America's role in the world. So the U.S.G.L.C. hosted a number of forums. I went to a lot of them. I hosted one in Atlanta, Georgia with Senator Perdue. We had about 600 constituents of his constituents and from Atlanta, and he talked about the importance of development and diplomacy.

A day later we were in Indiana with Senator Todd Young, a freshman member on the Foreign Relations Committee, having a similar conversation with the Hoosiers of Indiana. Talking with a business leader from Land O'Lake. In Atlanta we were with a business leader from Coca-Cola on the panel and military leader and one of them.

And they're incredibly engaged constituents that want to talk about America's role in the world, why it matters to our national security, why it matters to our economic interests, why it matters to our humanitarian values. So I think there is an enormous opportunity for constituents around the country to get involved in a conversation about these very issues.

DEWS: This attitude represents a big change from the pre-9/11 world. After the end of the Cold War when, as Schrayer described, there was a question about America's role in the world when America was in her words pulling back and there were decreasing budgets for foreign aid and the State Department. But that's changed.

Schrayer: I think today the reason we're seeing this chorus of voices that are out there making it loud and clear that America needs to be engaged in the world is because it's not just the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do. We know that we need to be engaged because we're a compassionate nation as the president Trump described at the U.N. General Assembly, but also that it's the smart thing to do for national security and economic interests.

DEWS: Schrayer went on to address the long term question of what is America's role in the world.

Schrayer: How are we going to engage with the rest of the world, and are we going to engage only through military, are we going to engage also through defense and diplomacy?

Some of the best advocates have been the generals, one of the most significant advocates has actually been our current secretary of defense. When he was in service he testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and one of most famous quotes is he was asked whether or not he thought we should cut funding to the State Department, he said very clearly “if you cut funding to state department I would need more ammunition.”

DEWS: The United States has long been involved in developing diplomacy around the world, and Americans support that role, but is American involvement sufficient? The U.S. took a lead in establishing the post-World War II architecture for multilateral develop. Today, our country disperses and 36 percent of its official development assistance through multilateral institutions like the World Bank.

Participants in the Brookings-Blum Roundtable discussed U.S. leadership with respect to multilaterals, recommended reforms that would generate more bang for U.S. bucks, and pondered the need for overhauling multilateral institutions more broadly.

Okonjo-Iweala: Let me just say that we're collective action is needed, where the U.S. leads, and other countries are also members of a coalition to achieve result or impact on development it's important not to lose that leadership. Because once the U.S. signals that it's no longer interested or tries to withdraw, it also sends a signal to other countries that may not be all that beneficial.

My name is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chair of the board of GAVI.

DEWS: GAVI is the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, also called the GAVI Alliance. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was previously finance minister of Nigeria, managing director of the World Bank, and a senior fellow at Brookings.

Okonjo-Iweala: I think it's important to talk about the issue of the United States importance to multilateral affairs because of the issue of collective action. Multilateralism requires everyone working together to deliver on an objective. For instance, when you talk about global public goods like health, work in to stop pandemics, working on issues of climate change, you need everybody to come together.

And so we think that the role the U.S. has played in the past, and could still play in showing leadership in these areas, is very important. Because when one party, especially a party in a leading role withdraws from this leadership role, it does send a signal to others in the collective action that has a detrimental impact I would say on their own contributions. So that's one way to look at it. So the U.S. role multilateralism is vital because it's their way of pulling others together.

Secondly, the U.S.'s contributions, in volume terms, the U.S. is the largest donor in the world. And therefore it's very difficult for others to make up what the U.S. cuts. And even though others might step up for leadership, which is welcome, they may not be able to fill the gap that the U.S. is leaving behind.

So I think it requires a lot of thought, you know, in seeing how can the U.S. meet its objectives of making sure that America's interests are safeguarded whilst also playing their role in making the rest of the world work. And I really believe that there are areas where interests coincide. And it doesn't have to be, you know, that one goal of meeting America's interests goes directly against the other goal. You know markets that are created where American companies can invest and take advantage, that's an important goal. It grows the countries they're working in and it also makes the market for American goods.

DEWS: But what if the United States does withdraw some from its leadership role in global development? Okonjo-Iweala continued.

Okonjo-Iweala: We shouldn't all be too pessimistic about the withdrawal of the U.S. from its role. It has its downside, but there are also some opportunities to think about. And those opportunities have to do with countries also stepping up to the plate, including the countries that are beneficiaries of U.S. assistance and take in more of a role.

And the world is changing. Many countries now realize that they have to depend a lot on their own resources. So they are stepping up, and saying we are going to do everything we can to try and generate more of our own resources to do more of our own development. And I can say that many leaders on the African continent, many policymakers, are thinking in this direction. And what we need to then also reflect on is how can the U.S. assistance, whatever is left of it, be used in a way that is impactful to help leverage up the work that these countries are willing to do for themselves?

DEWS: Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, now chairman of the National Democratic Institute and chair of the Albright Stonebridge Group, adds to this point about the U.S. working with other nations. She reflected on supporting governance in the countries of the former Yugoslavia after the Balkan conflicts, and noted that it is a long project.

ALBRIGHT: And as Americans, frankly we kind of think that we can check off something that we've already done, and we are the most generous people in the world with the shortest attention span. And what we have to do is realize that genuine change of societies takes a lot of time and effort and money.

But also in partnership with others. I think that one of the issues that we have to think about is I do think the United States is the indispensable nation, but there is nothing in the word indispensable that says “alone” –It's in partnership. And that's true in the Balkans in terms of getting other countries and international institutions to be there for the long haul.

DEWS: Development assistance in the context of fragile states is one of the most important challenges facing foreign assistance today. Participants in the Brookings-Blum Roundtable observed that a decade ago, state fragility was associated with the nation's ability, or inability, to respond to natural disasters. Today, however, fragility is linked to violence, internal and external migration, and security problems.

Here's George Ingram again.

INGRAM: Fragility is the big challenge the development today, and not just to development. Fragility is a challenge to our foreign policy, to our security interest, to our development interest, and we need a tripartite approach of bringing defense, development, and diplomacy together on approaching fragile states.

DEWS: The Roundtable conference report called state fragility the existential challenge to development. Developing coherent, comprehensive approaches that intertwined economic, political, and security solutions will be required to address fragility, the report says. Here's another Roundtable participant, speaking on the challenge of development in the context of violence.

LINDBORG: My name is Nancy Lindborg, and I am the president of the United States Institute of Peace, or USIP as it is commonly known.

We are seeing a significant uptick right now in violent conflict around the world and this conflict is resulting in the terrible specter of four famines; we're seeing four civil wars raging in the Middle East. Historic levels of displacement, 65 million people driven from their homes by violent conflict.

And what is really at the heart of all of these very difficult crises is the fact that you have countries with a frayed state-society relationship. The compact between a government and its people is destroyed or nonfunctioning. And we call this a state of fragility, that these are fragile states where the government is either illegitimate or ineffective in meeting the needs of their citizens.

So what I would contend is that we do have a refugee crisis, but what we really have is a fragility crisis. And the question is how do you harness the collective action of the United States and other international partners to better get ahead of these crises from turning into the kind of terrible violence and humanitarian crisis that we are seeing increasingly over the last few years?

And one of the really difficult issues is, is that this is not going to be solved either militarily, and it won't be solved only through diplomatic action, or development action. It really takes all of those capabilities working together to address the security crisis, the humanitarian crisis, and at the heart of it a governance crisis. And governance meaning the relationship between people and their government not just merely the institutions.

This is a different way of tackling the problem set than we typically do when we work in stovepipes where the diplomats, and the defense, and the development people maybe have different approaches, perhaps different time horizons for addressing a problem and a different understanding of what the end goal is. So one of the big challenges that we have before us, for the United States and I think for the world as a whole, is understanding the roots of these crises and organizing ourselves to more effectively get ahead of this crisis curve that is driving these other terrible, terrible problems.

DEWS: Madeline Albright also addressed this issue of governance. The National Democratic Institute that she chairs supports democracy and works with local populations in over 70 countries.

ALBRIGHT: I think that we know that elections are essential, necessary, but they are not the only part of good governance. And what we also do is try to develop rule of law, institution building, the role of their parliaments. And so it’s kind of full scope work. And what I'm troubled by is that all of a sudden democracy seems to be seen as a four letter word and not really mentioned enough in the support of values that the United States has represented and needs to continue to represent.

I have recently concluded a study on the Middle East with Steve Hadley. And one of the things that we've been talking about is the necessity for the United States to

support some of the trends that are coming out of the area that are positive in terms of working with youth and getting people involved in the governance of their own country.

DEWS: One roundtable participant emphasized that dealing with fragility means focusing on women, resiliency, inclusive governance, engaging local partners, and following a multilateral approach. Here's Stephen Hadley with more about that study with Madeleine Albright on getting people in the Middle East involved in the governance of their own countries.

HADLEY: I'm Steve Hadley. I'm chair of the board of directors of the United States Institute of Peace and former national security adviser under President George W. Bush. One of the things of course that's been very much in the news for the last five or six years is what we've seen in the Middle East. The fact that the Arab Spring of 2011 turned in to be, for many people in the Middle East, an Arab nightmare in terms of the dissolution of states and the rise of ISIS. And so Madeleine Albright and I undertook a study on behalf of the Atlantic Council to try to step back and try to understand what's really going on in the Middle East, and what is the right strategic approach for the United States.

And what we found is really that the underlying causes relate very much to failures of governance, the governments in the region able to meet the aspirations of their people for public services, for involvement in governance, for having a hand in their own future. And so that governance really was one of the underlying causes of that problem.

But in order to address these issues what we came up with was really a two pronged approach. The first prong is we've got to get the violence to stop. The civil wars need to be wound down. That is the only way you're going to be able to deal with the problem of al-Qaeda, to deal with the humanitarian disasters. And the countries of the Middle East are not in a position really to do that themselves they're going to need outside help.

So the first prong of our strategy is to provide assistance from the outside to try to wind down the civil wars. That requires actions within the countries, for example to

defeat ISIS and to defeat al Qaeda, but it also means getting outside actors like Russia and Iran and the like to support a process that can begin to bring social peace to those countries.

At the same time though, as we try to act with countries in the region, and actors within these countries themselves to bring down the civil wars, we need to support efforts that are going on in these countries of conflicts themselves to provide a more hopeful future for their people. And what we found was there is something for us to work with. There are bottom up activities among women, among young people, who are starting businesses, who are starting local community organizations to address local issues, who are taking some responsibility for defining their own future. And there are also governments in the region that are trying to adopt policies that would provide better governance, economic future, and hope to their people.

Governments like the United Arab Emirates or the crown prince of Saudi Arabia is doing in Saudi Arabia with the Saudi 20:30 plan, and also in Tunisia for example, and in Jordan. So these efforts by both governments and by individual citizens need to be supported if we're ever going to get to a more positive Middle East.

DEWS: The Roundtable conference report further recommends that one way to develop better policies to deal with fragility is to learn from experience, in particular in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Here's Hadley again.

HADLEY: Our country has been engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan now for a long time. And one of the things we have to do is take a step back and ask ourselves what worked and what didn't work in trying to bring a stability to these countries and help the people of these countries fashion a secure and prosperous future for themselves. And I think one of the things we've learned is that there were various lines of action going on at the same time, there were efforts to increase security, there were efforts to get economic activity going, there were efforts to get good non-corrupt governance able to provide services and meet the expectations of the people.

These were viewed as sort of separate lines of actions and what we found is some of the things we did in the name of security actually undermined the prospects for

economic prosperity, and some of the things we did to try to get economic prosperity going undermined the capacity of local governance and local governments to meet the expectations of their people. So one of the strategies we talked about is trying to get a framework in which all of these lines of action will be mutually reinforcing towards a shared outcome rather than being conflicting and in some sense undermining one another.

And in all of these efforts one of the things we found is that even in conflict zones there are people in these communities acting now to try to provide a better life for themselves and their children and their communities. So you will find young people or women who are found in companies, who basically say we don't want the government to give us a job, we want to found a business that will actually create jobs.

There is an enormous amount that young people and women in particular are doing with technology to change how services are being provided. Women are being able to use communication technology now to fund businesses in their homes which allows them to be entrepreneurs and to earn money for their families while being consistent with local traditions about what women's role in society should be. These are all very promising developments and what we need to do is find out how we can be respectful of local culture and support these efforts.

DEWS: In this episode we've covered some of the major themes that participants in the Brookings-Blum Roundtable discussed, and you've heard from many of them. The fourth and final theme in this episode explores exactly what it would take to restructure the entities that deliver U.S. foreign assistance in an era of budget cuts and in the face of considerable political headwinds.

Earlier, Brookings Senior Fellow George Ingram described the complex structure of U.S. foreign assistance architecture, from USAID, to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, to the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and beyond. Here's what he said next.

INGRAM: There's no coherence. Assistance is spread over twenty five agencies, there's duplication, there's actually contradictory policy sometimes, there's just no

coherence. And secondly, there's too much micromanagement; there's too much micromanagement from the bureaucracy in Washington, from the White House with presidential initiatives, with the Congress with earmarks. And so too many their decisions end up getting made in Washington which is a thousand or 3,000 or 6,000 miles away from the reality on the ground. And we need a structure that allows those decisions to be relevant to what's going on within a country.

DEWS: The roundtable participants in Aspen considered a wide range of proposals that exist for reorganizing US foreign aid agencies, including one plan to merge the Agency for International Development into the US Department of State. But as the conference report concludes, for U.S. foreign assistance to be effective and efficient, the lead aid agency must be independent but closely coordinated with the State Department.

As Ingram explains, the State Department and USAID have different functions and different cultures.

INGRAM: Diplomacy, Its function is to advance a broad range of U.S. goals around the world—economic, security, political. On the other hand development, its objective, its mission is to advance U.S. interest in helping other countries improve their own governance, economies, social structures.

What this results in is a totally different culture between State and AID. They are sister organizations. They need to work together. Sometimes they pursue similar objectives, specific objectives, but they have different priorities, different timelines, and different processes. The expertise required for development and diplomacy are very different, and they have different values.

DEWS: USAID, Ingram argues, should be the lead development agency for the US government, and he says there should be a consolidation of most or all of the development functions under AID.

INGRAM: USAID since 1961, since it was established by President Kennedy, has been the lead U.S. development agency. And what Kennedy did in 1961 was what we need today. He consolidated functions and programs across agencies into USAID;

for probably 20 years it played that leading role. But slowly its authority has been dissipated into other agencies. And what AID need today is it needs to be the repository of a global development strategy. It needs to be the repository of most development programs. And it needs to have clear lines of authority so it can be not just responsible for account, but accountable.

DEWS: The roundtable conference report also states that systems like information technology, human resources, and procurement in both the State Department and USAID urgently need an upgrade.

Attention to budgets, too, are an important component of reforming US foreign assistance architecture. As mentioned earlier, the US foreign assistance budget is a tiny fraction of overall US government spending, yet the returns on investment are tremendous. “It is pennywise and pound foolish,” the conference report says, “to shortchange the international affairs budget and costly to the national interest.”

INGRAM: In the first 20 years, AID had full responsibility for his budget. It would put together a budget. The budget would go to OMB. The president would reconcile differences if there were. But for the last 20 years its budget authority has been encroached upon particularly by the State Department. And now what you’ve got, is you've got these overlapping functions between the State Department and AID, and the problem is that AID is responsible for the programs it funds and for the results. But it doesn't have full authority on how to allocate those funds.

So what you have is you have the expertise and experience of AID, which is what should drive the allocation of the budget, not being able to do that. And you have a political overlay coming from the State Department which doesn’t always have the on the ground knowledge of the best way to utilize the funds.

DEWS: The Trump administration’s March 2017 budget proposal sought cuts of over 30 percent to the US diplomacy and foreign aid budgets, including cuts to programs that focus on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The president’s vow to put America First also included a plan to merge USAID into the State Department. However, policymakers have pushed back on the steep cuts.

As the roundtable conference report notes, there is a long tradition of bipartisan support for foreign assistance, and that hundreds of thousands of children's lives could be at stake. "For this, if for no other reason," the report says, "it is worth fighting forcefully against large aid cuts in the fiscal year 2018 budget."

When I asked George Ingram to summarize the consensus findings from the Brookings-Blum Roundtable, the first two items related to the budget, and to the need to maintain an independent USAID.

INGRAM: And this year because of the new administration and the challenges that they have thrown out for the foreign assistance budget and for the architectural structure we decided to take on that issue. And there was a lot of energy around those issues and a lot of consensus.

One, don't short change the budget. Don't shortchange foreign aid. Maintain it at a robust level that we've had in recent years. Secondly, we need an independent, strong development agency—USAID—and it needs full budget and policy authority.

DEWS: He continued on four additional consensus themes.

INGRAM: Three, assistance must be accountable and transparent. Four, assistance must be embedded in local priorities and objectives not driven from headquarters in Washington. Fifth, the private sector has an important role and we need to strengthen our development finance tools such as OPIC. Sixth, we need to review our multilateral assistance and how we advance U.S. interest in multilateral institutions. And finally fragility.

DEWS: As Ingram said earlier, fragility is the big challenge of development today, not only for development, but also for our national security interest. This is such a vital issue, in fact, that, according to the conference report, the Brookings-Blum Roundtable participants expressed interest in draft legislation that would require a strategic approach to state fragility.

In part two of this series on U.S. foreign assistance under challenge, you'll hear from more experts who participated in the Brookings-Blum Roundtable about the success of development aid, including progress on reducing poverty, raising school enrollment, tackling pandemics, and lowering maternal mortality, the efficacy of nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, and finally, a look at the future of development assistance.

Stay tuned in a moment to meet one of our new Rubenstein Fellows, whose work focuses on race and structural inequality, and community engagement, economic inclusion, and workforce development.

REAGAN: In the late '40s and early '50s, during the time of the Marshall Plan, we spent 11 cents of every federal dollar on foreign affairs. That figure has dropped to four cents on the dollar by 20 years ago, and has continued to fall until in recent years we've been spending less than two cents of each dollar to support our foreign policy. And that's money that gets a big return. Is there anyone who believes that we in America would live in as good a world and be as secure if we could turn back the clock and undo the Marshall Plan?

PERRY: I'm Andre Perry, I'm a new Rubenstein fellow for the Brookings Institution in the Metropolitan Policy Program. I specifically work on inclusion, race, place, a little bit of education, and always prosperity.

I grew up in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania which is right on the inside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's a small town that's under duress, and it's under the national spotlight. And how the story goes, because you never really know because parents are often elusive about growing up, when I was born a woman who was not related to me took me from the hospital and raised me from there.

My mother, who was abused, she was unable to rear me and so I was raised by this 63 year old woman and her daughter. My older brother came along with me. Along the way my younger brother came along with me. My mother had four children before

she was 21, and my father was murdered in jail. So I grew up in this small town and developed there.

Part of what inspired me to become a scholar is in how I was raised. When I went to school people would tell me that the person who reared me wasn't my mother, and for all intents and purposes she was. She took care of me, I lived with her, she was a part of every major life experience but she just wasn't a blood relative.

But I've always questioned, what does it mean to be a parent? And later on in life when I started getting into the issue of immigrant educational rights, I used to run camps for the children of migrant workers, many children were faced with a similar question, or challenge, in that they weren't considered citizens of the United States. And I was always befuddled by that because there were kids who lived like I did, did everything I did, and were not considered citizens.

So I then took up the issue of should undocumented immigrants receive financial aid, and that started me on this road to scholarship. But at the heart of it, my upbringing and those questions that inspire me, what does it mean to be a parent.

The most important issue we're facing today in my opinion is we're struggling with determining who's a member of society or not. And membership is important because it determines who we grant privileges and rights to.

I'm actually working on chocolate cities. I have the opportunity to focus on majority black cities and examine how they are doing relative to their peers and with other demographics. I get to see how folks of different ethnic backgrounds, racial backgrounds, are doing in majority black cities. And I'm really going to pay a lot of attention to mid-sized cities, smaller cities, places like Ferguson that often are obscured by the happenings in the larger city. And of course I get to examine where I grew up, Wilkinsburg, which is on the outskirts of Pittsburgh.

And so I generally work with this assumption that black cities are treated like black people. And if we're going to eliminate risk factors we better see racism as a risk factor as opposed to race is a risk fact. So that's what I'll be working on.

Typically we recognize membership as citizenship, but we know throughout history, women and blacks did everything required of citizenship, and did everything required of membership, but did not receive full citizenship.

Currently we have 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, and many of which are doing everything required of membership, but are not yet full citizens. We have to find a way to normalize their status, but more importantly, there is a fight among citizens that some people deserve certain rights and some people do not.

Our identity is largely predicated on a conception, a white conception, of America. And we know from the data that there is a browning of America, and we're struggling with that. So for me, there are serious membership questions that we're struggling with, and we've got to find a way to have a different American dream because it's rife with imagery that just does not reflect who we are as a country.

Before I came to Brookings I started rereading “The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual” by Harold Cruse. And the reason why I read that, it really put into perspective what my role is as a scholar, as an intellectual, how will I respond to the needs of the day. When the book was written in 1967, Cruse really questioned scholars taking on the affectations of the upright and respectable scholar because he felt that that wouldn't uplift a struggling people. And I think that reigns true today, that how I behave won't be because I fulfil societal norms and expectations, it will be because I really ask the real questions that are impacting the lives of those who are struggling.

DEWS: And that does it for this edition of The Brookings Cafeteria brought to you by The Brookings Podcast Network. Follow us on Twitter @policypodcasts. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo with assistance from Mark Hoelscher.

Thanks to Brennan Hoban and Chris McKenna for production assistance. Bill Finan does the book interviews. Our interns or Pamela Berman and Julian Chung. Design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone, Eric Abalahin, and Rebecca Viser. And finally, thanks to David Nassar for his support.

You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on Apple podcasts or wherever you get podcasts, and listen to it in all the usual places. Visit us online at Brookings.edu. Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.