TIME TO REASSESS CANADA'S FOREIGN AID

Sean M. Maloney

Canadians need to be more concerned about how their bureaucrats spend their money, especially money in support of international development. Indeed, the whole concept of international development has been examined only by insiders who have repeatedly made decisions that are questionable and not necessarily in Canada's national interest. The lack of strategic thinking in Canada in this field has led to outright manipulation to convince us to spend money on dubious projects in countries controlled by repressive regimes. The negative effects of a lack of long-term vision and coordination are emerging, as public scrutiny of CIDA's operations in Afghanistan increases.

Les Canadiens doivent s'intéresser de plus près à la façon dont les fonctionnaires dépensent leur argent, et tout particulièrement dans le domaine de l'aide au développement international. Le concept même de développement international n'a en effet été analysé que par des « initiés », qui ont pris à plusieurs reprises des décisions discutables et qui n'étaient pas nécessairement dans l'intérêt du pays. La conséquence du manque de réflexion stratégique en cette matière, au Canada, est que l'on nous manipule pour nous convaincre qu'il est souhaitable de financer des projets douteux dans des pays contrôlés par des régimes répressifs. Les effets négatifs du manque de vision à long terme et du peu de coordination des politiques sont d'ailleurs de plus en plus évidents, au fur et à mesure que les citoyens s'intéressent de plus près aux opérations de l'ACDI en Afghanistan.

In 1988, several waves of Canadian Forces C-130 Hercules transport aircraft arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, chock-full of famine relief supplies and medical personnel. These aircraft were requested after the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and others convinced the Mulroney government that Ethiopia needed Canadian help. Members of CIDA, who had already been working closely with the Ethiopian government for several years, were determining how to spend an increasing amount of development assistance monies provided by the Canadian taxpayer. At the same time, Ethiopia's East German-trained secret police were torturing members of the Eritrean resistance in the basement of their headquarters down the road from the airport, while Cuban-piloted Mi-24 HIND gunships and MiG-23 fighter-bombers, some operating from the same airfields as relief aircraft, attacked targets in order to deliberately drive the civilian population from rebel-backed areas into the famine zones. One observer said that Communist forces used "nerve gas and anti-personnel bombs disguised as children's toys." It is difficult to conclude that there wasn't a serious breakdown in the coordination of Canadian government policy, a breakdown aggravated by CIDA's divergent outlook on how the world functions. Unfortunately, it is one of several such breakdowns.

Criticism of CIDA's performance in Afghanistan in the Manley report has focused public attention on the operations, rationale and structure of the agency, to wit:

> *[The] Canadian aid program in Afghanistan has been impeded…by CIDA's own administrative constraints. More than half of CIDA funding in Afghanistan flows through multilateral agencies, and another 35 per cent is channelled through national programs administered by the central government in Kabul. This leaves little for locally managed quick-action projects that bring immediate improvements to everyday life for Afghans, or for "signature" projects readily identifiable as supported by Canada...[T]he Canadian-led PRT [provincial reconstruction team] in Kandahar also displays signs of the fragmentation and uncoordinated effort that prevail throughout the programming of international development aid in Afghanistan. Effectiveness would be enhanced by aligning national and departmental priorities and operations more closely — and more collaboratively.*

Such attention is long overdue, and needs to be directed at other aspects of CIDA's structure and modus operandi. CIDA's inability to explain why it hasn't effectively coordinated with other Canadian departments and, more importantly, what the specific effects have been of the expenditure of vast amounts of Canadian taxpayers' dollars reflects long-standing institutional and philosophical problems that existed well before the current government was elected.

The problem with critiquing an organization like CIDA is challenging what appears to be its litany of good works: it's like challenging Canada's involvement with UN peacekeeping or akin to Christopher Hitchens taking on Mother Teresa. The working assumption is that CIDA is helping poor people in the Third World, now called the developing world, and that Canadian tax dollars are going to support a good cause. This endeavour is good for the recipients and Canada's image, therefore challenging it is not permitted.

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Such an approach, however effective it might be in deflecting uninformed criticism, does not stand up to sustained scrutiny. In a democracy like Canada's, where our financial resources have in the past been poured away with little serious accountability, it is not acceptable that CIDA's record remains unexamined or unchallenged.

There is no comprehensive history of Canadian development aid, though a few people, for example David R. Morrison, have conducted serious academic research into the topic. As with Canada's peacekeeping history, when it comes to CIDA we have a series of assumptions, wishful thinking and myths, on the basis of which policy has been constructed. We are living with the long-term effects of this state of affairs, particularly when CIDA was called upon to perform in Afghanistan and only reluctantly engaged in the mission (as an institution — there are some very dedicated CIDA field people who are morally and physically brave and I have nothing but the utmost respect for them).

What are some of these assumptions? How can we characterize CIDA's relationship with National Defence or even as an agency of Canadian global engagement? Should we perhaps re-examine the mandate, the structure or even the continued existence of CIDA in light of them?

The assumptions surrounding Canadian development assistance are remarkably similar to those underpinning the Canadian peacekeeping mythology and, not coincidentally, they emerged at the same time. Indeed, as CIDA was formed in the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s, it became part of the baby-boom-era zeitgeist alongside Katimivik. Hordes of Canadian university students clamoured to "make a difference" in the world. (One of these, for example, was a future deputy minister of national defence who played a role in committing the Canadian Forces to expeditions in Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s.)

All forms of development assistance were inherently good and were therefore pursued. Any other policy was inherently racist, especially in the era of decolonization. Development assistance, like peacekeeping, played into the "Canada is disinterested and neutral on the world stage" school of thought. Or how about this: Canada is exceptional because it is a caring nation. As the Trudeau-era bureaucrats put it in a public document, the just Canadian society can exist only in a just world, and development aid is an extension of Canadian domestic policy and not purely foreign policy. Unlike nasty, self-interested America, Canada implements aid activities without prejudice and without linkage, thus distinguishing Canada from the United States, another key feature in the development assistance assumption.

So what are the real origins of Canadian development assistance? Shockingly for some, Canadian assistance programs actually predate the Trudeau era. Canada cared even during the St-Laurent and Diefenbaker eras. The difference was that Canadian development aid had an explicit Cold War context that virtually disappeared under Trudeau. Again in parallel with the real Canadian peacekeeping history, development aid was seen in the 1950s as a means to compete with Communist influence in the decolonizing world. The first Western expression of this was of course the Marshall Plan, but Canada was deeply involved in the Colombo Plan for Asia, which had similar objectives — keep the Soviets and their minions at bay. Communism, of course, attached itself to economic grievances and exploited them for Moscow's (and Beijing's) purposes. Addressing economic inequalities through direct aid and development could keep that influence at bay. (This is similar to what we are trying to accomplish in Afghanistan at present, except the enemy has changed from Communist totalitarianism to Islamist totalitarianism.) An additional

aspect of development aid was to generate trade by expanding the markets available to Canada. If we improved the economic circumstances in the post-colonial regions, Canadian trade relations would benefit. Fundamentally, however, development aid was a Cold War construct.

And Canada wasn't alone in this endeavour. Canada's closest Cold War allies took several uncoordinated steps in the 1950s, and by 1961 both the United States and the United Kingdom had established overseas development agencies. The US Agency for International Development and the UK Ministry for Overseas Development were geared toward addressing development needs to counter Communist penetration in critical areas. Both nations wielded development assistance and aid alongside existing military equipment and training programs as part of this effort.

Under the Diefenbaker government, Canadian development assistance activities were supplemented by a number of Canadian army training schemes in Commonwealth African and Caribbean countries: Nigeria, Guyana, Tanzania and Jamaica were the most prominent recipients. The idea was to professionalize the security forces and forestall or compete with training teams from Communist countries that were interested in generating military dependence as a first step to gradual absorption of the security forces and then eventual regime change. (This, incidentally, is what happened in Afghanistan, whose government invited in Soviet trainers in the 1950s and then was confronted with a Communist coup by its own soldiers in 1974.) Canadian development assistance and military training missions were not coordinated, however, but the general intent of the exercise was understood to be the same: generate stability and foster a pro-West orientation. Again, this is similar to what we are trying to accomplish in Afghanistan presently. On the balance sheet, only Tanzania shifted seriously into the Communist camp — and only after Canadian military aid was precipitously withdrawn.

After Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba, there was an increased focus on how Canadian development assistance and military aid could contribute to offsetting potential Cuban adventurism in the Caribbean. Canada already possessed a pseudo-colonial relationship with the Caribbean — the Royal Canadian Navy had conducted gunboat diplomacy for years in the region, and Canadian banks and, especially, Canadian corporations had substantial investments in Guyana, Jamaica and elsewhere. The expenditure of Canadian aid monies to construct large airfields in most of the Commonwealth Caribbean states to improve tourism and the annual deployment by air of Canadian infantry battalions for exercises and training was not coincidental. For the most part, however, there was only a general understanding on the part of the Canadian government of this linkage and not explicitly stated public policy. We can probably argue that Canada's approach to the Caribbean was successful, with the exception of Grenada, which went Communist and invited Cuban forces, using the CIDA-funded airport.

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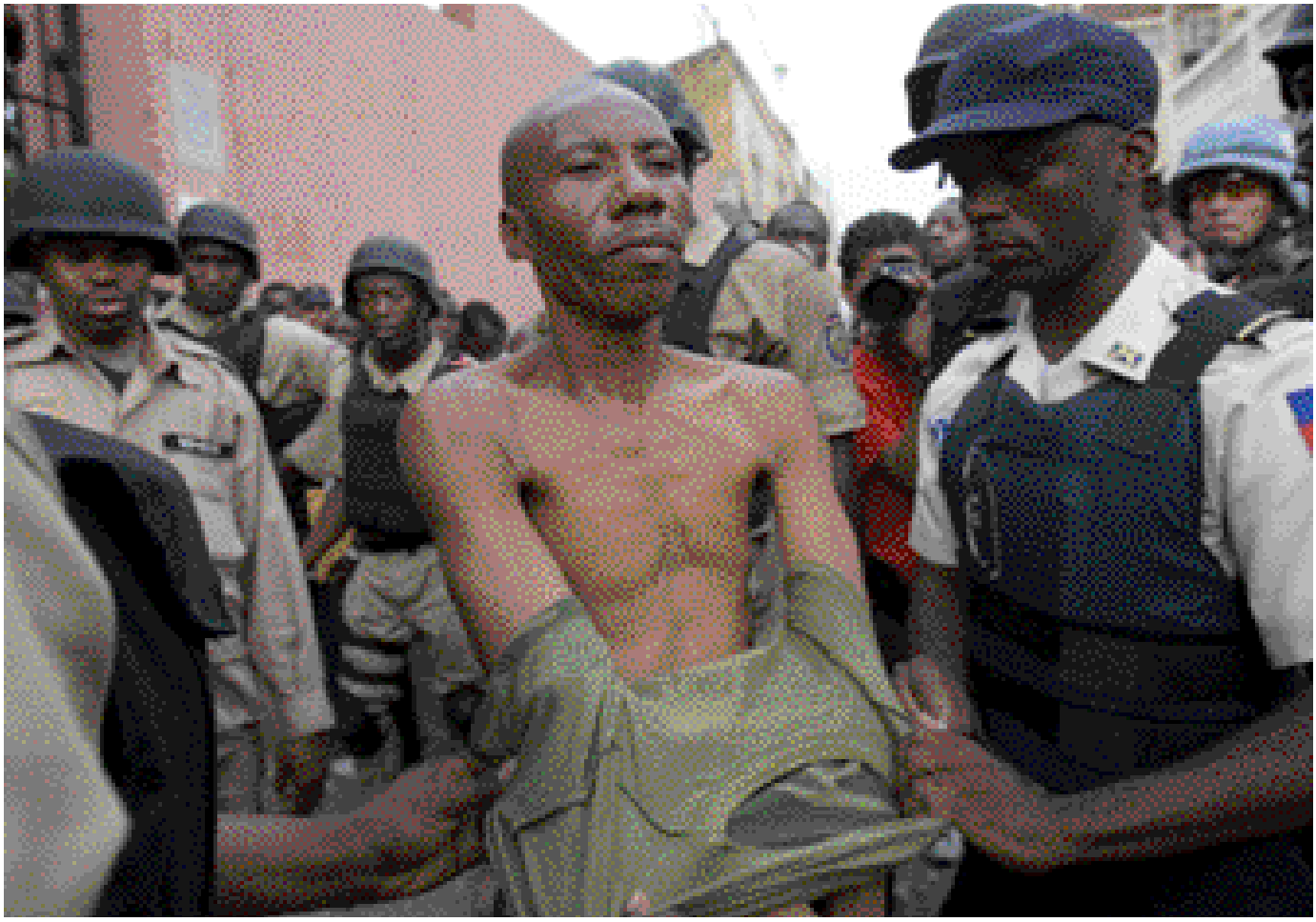
Ambiguous linkages between Canadian national objectives and humanitarian aid also emerged by the 1960s. During the Biafran War Canadian policy was to not recognize the breakaway state because of the similarity to the Quebec situation. That said, the Biafran humanitarian aid effort was initially supported by an Air Command C-130 transport. When that proved to be too overt, the government turned a blind eye to the use of two surplus Canadian Lockheed Super Constellations flown by Canadian crews and owned by CANAIRELIEF, an NGO formed by Oxfam Canada and the Canadian Presbyterian Church. It is not clear what the effects of Canadian involvement in Biafra were: the country ceased to exist, and few in the aid community like to talk about Biafra, even today.

It was only during the formal process that created CIDA in the late 1960s that detailed and specific questions about the linkages between strategic goals, development assistance and humanitarian aid had to be asked — and answered. A 1969 internal CIDA paper that was prepared for a series of reviews of the purpose of Canadian development assistance stated that Canadian priorities should be the following:

- a political objective to establish within the recipient countries those political attitudes or commitments, military alliances or military bases that would assist Canada or Canada's Western allies to maintain a reasonably stable and secure international political system
- the establishment of markets for Canadian products and services
- the relief of famine and personal misery

As Morrison noted:

Although perhaps subsumed under "common ends of developed countries" the use of aid to promote global peace and security received only a fleeting reference in the white paper. Political sensibilities may account for the absence of any mention of the Cold War, although it was still prominent



(AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos)

Haitian police help a former soldier remove his camouflage t-shirt after a standoff between former soldiers and government officials in Cap-Haitien in July. Former soldiers took over a former prison to demand back-pay and reinstatement of the country's armed forces. The former soldiers left peacefully, ending a tense standoff of nearly 24 hours after negotiations with government officials. Haiti's poverty and political instability have long hampered CIDA's efforts there.

in the earlier summary discussion paper, which had talked about the "desire to thwart the expansion of unwanted political ideologies and systems."

This is where the linkages between Canadian Cold War global strategic objectives and development aid started to break down. CIDA, as it emerged into the 1970s, tended to have an arm's-length relationship with the Canadian government, unlike, say, that between USAID and the American government, where USAID supported covert policy in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Over time, CIDA would increasingly resemble a neutral non-governmental aid organization and not an arm of Canadian global policy.

Why was this the case? We must look to the Trudeau government for the basis of the shift. The Trudeau government established its dubious Third Option policy by 1972. In effect, Canada started to behave like a Cold War neutral. The overseas military training teams were shut down, and Canada's nuclear forces were seriously degraded. NATO and NORAD were of decreasing importance. A concerted effort was made to increase Canadian connections with the Caribbean, Asia and Africa, supposedly to try to offset Canada's economic dependence on the United States. Development assistance was a key aspect of this. CIDA's 1975-76 annual report implied that Canada should depict itself as a Third World nation in order to strengthen Canada's appeal in the developing world.

The Third Option policy led to several dubious and morally questionable Canadian engagements. In an ironic twist, a Canadian naval task group supported CIDA's efforts in Haiti in 1974. The operational support ship HMCS *Protecteur* and its helicopters acted as a mobile clinic, sailing around the Haitian coast supporting CIDA-funded medical programs. On the surface, this appears to be an unquestionably laudable effort. The population received some (limited) medical care, people were helped and so on. It may have looked good for the cameras, but what about long-term

care? What was the follow-on program for it?

And then there is a question of who exactly was being assisted by CIDA in the Trudeau years. The Haitian government was not some benign democracy. It was led by Baby Doc Duvalier, the son of Papa Doc, who dressed his secret police, the Tonton Macoutes, in fedoras and Ray-Bans and then told the superstitious rural population they were zombies sent to control them. At what point was CIDA activity a humanitarian effort and at what point did it support the continuation of a psychotic and violent regime, a regime that Canadian naval and military forces were poised to intervene against back in 1963 when its leaders threatened to kill Canadians on the island? Was it really enough to help some people temporarily without a long-term or consistent program in place? Did anybody question this at the time? Probably not — all aid was good aid, apparently.

Another example was Mozambique. After the Portuguese turned the country over to Soviet- and Chinese-backed insurgents in 1974, the violent backlash of the new Communist elite in a wave of payback helped stimulate the creation of a resistance movement. CIDA initiated a series of programs to support the new government, which included assistance to the Mozambican rail system. The justification for this was undoubtedly related to economic development —goods and people could use the rail system to move through the irregularly-shaped country more efficiently. Clearly those Canadians who agreed to support the Mozambican rail system didn't understand that military forces also use rail systems. Communist Mozambican rail-based counter-insurgency forces conducted offensive after offensive against the resistance movement, so attacks were directed by the resisters to disrupt the system, which in turn resulted in more CIDA money expended to maintain the Mozambican rail system. *Cui bono*?

Part of the now declassified written justification to deploy Canadian soldiers with the UN to the ONUMOZ mission in 1992 stated, "Through CIDA, Canada has invested heavily in the railway infrastructure…In dollar terms, Mozambique receives a major portion of Canadian aid to Africa…In 1990/91, the most recent year for which figures are available, [Canadian] assistance totalled $46 million from all sources."

How did Canadian development assistance go from helping to stave off Communist totalitarian influence in the Third World during the 1950s and 1960s to supporting Communist insurgent and other openly repressive regimes in the 1970s and 1980s? The mind boggles. In the case of Haiti, National Defence was drawn in as a CIDA accomplice; in Mozambique, National Defence was expected to help clean up the mess to which CIDA contributed.

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The use of Canadian Forces resources to support CIDA objectives in a fairly uncoordinated fashion continued into the 1980s and 1990s. The long-term effects of these Canadian efforts do not appear to have been seriously questioned then, and nor are they now. The first of these egregious missions was Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). CIDA was one of several entities demanding Canadian aerial support for famine relief. Air Command C-130 transports were employed as part of OLS. Again, on the surface, it looked good: the Maple Leaf and UN symbol intertwined, saving starving children.

The reality was much more complex, and did not inform the decision-making process that sent Canadian Forces personnel into harm's way. Depicted as a natural humanitarian disaster, the famine in the Sudan was deliberately implemented as part of the government's strategy directed at insurgent forces. The OLS intervention didn't take this into account. As Alex de Waal notes,

> *The diversion or taxation of relief supplies becomes a major way for belligerents to provision themselves, and, in time, the very command structures and military strategies themselves will come to reflect the availability of external aid and the means whereby it is delivered. Relief agencies have increasingly accommodated to violence, in the context of assistance programs that are integrated into the cycles of violence in internal conflict.*

Canadian diplomats and development aid specialists could smugly boast in their circles that Canada delivered X tons of relief, and Y thousand children were saved. Certainly Canadian aircraft delivered the aid, but where did it go? Who did it sup-

port? What effects did it have? Who was accountable?

Exactly the same situation prevailed in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. Famine was also used as a counterinsurgency weapon by the Cuban-backed Communist government (note that Cuba was also receiving CIDA aid while Cuba was assisting Ethiopia in its repression). Instead of being billed as an atrocity, the event was publicly labelled a natural disaster, which it wasn't. The famine was, according to Robert Kaplan, "deliberately perpetrated by a Marxist Ethiopian government, much like the famine that Stalin had inflicted on the Ukraine in the 1930s." CIDA programs continued in Ethiopia, and in time, five Canadian Forces transport aircraft with their crews and support staff were deployed to conduct famine relief operations — but how do we know for sure where the aid went or how it was used? Or what the larger game was? It is a matter of record that the Ethiopian government of the day manipulated aid agencies so that their activities coincided with Ethiopian military objectives. As the Ethiopian foreign minister noted, "Food is a major element in our strategy against the secessionists." One observer of the effort concluded, "The humanitarian effort prolonged the war, and with it, human suffering." Canada unwittingly contributed to this state of affairs, and nobody seriously questioned what we were doing within the larger context of Canadian policy, the Cold War or long-term African stability.

In the cases of Ethiopia and the Sudan, repressive regimes banked on Canadian emotionalism and naïveté, and thereby exploited Canadian government agencies for their own purposes. CIDA today remains engaged in both countries, with even more Canadian financial resources trying to alleviate the effects of the situations they contributed to 20 years ago. *Cui bono*?

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Let's take all of this a step further. Throughout the 1970s, the annual public CIDA reports had a defensive tone to them, almost as if they were trying to pre-empt public criticism over the need or efficacy of international development programs. As Morrison has noted in his work, CIDA as an institution is extremely sensitive to any form of criticism, and has been since it was established. It is not surprising that CIDA as an institution today lashes out when criticized, and particularly after the Manley report was released.

CIDA is clearly unwilling to accept the increasingly documented critique of international development that emerged during the 1990s, as that critique is inimical to the continued existence of development aid programs and the organizations that deliver them. There are several aspects of that critique.

First, it is difficult to determine what the specific effects of assistance and aid are or have been, and then justify the expenditure of taxpayers' money on such programs. If you take a look at CIDA's 1970s and 1980s annual publications, CIDA struggled to do so, but it mostly amounts to numerical gibberish that could be manipulated in whatever direction necessary. Indeed, critics like Carol Lancaster bluntly state that aid, particularly in Africa, "has been remarkably ineffective" over the past 30 years. How exactly does development assistance contribute to stability or progress in country X or region Y? More importantly, how does CIDA prove and then explain it effectively to the Canadian taxpayers? Merely stating goals and amounts expended and then putting in a lot of pictures of smiling black or brown children is not enough, and it contributes to the suspicion that we are being deceived. When in doubt, deploy emotionalism coupled with the subtle implication that if we don't participate, we're racists. Would a historical search of CIDA "communications strategy" records uncover tacit approval for such a manipulative approach?

Second, CIDA has never seriously and publicly addressed a concern raised by those of us in the field but expressed best by David Rieff:

> *Aid workers can do great harm…Are they serving as logisticians or medics for some warlord's war effort? Are they creating a culture of dependency among their beneficiaries? And are they being used politically, by virtue of the way government donors and UN agencies give them funds and direct them towards certain places while making it difficult to go to others? As one senior UN official said to me, "Some of us think we are part of the problem, not part of the solution."*

The same goes for developmental assistance programs, not just for aid delivery in conflict zones. The simplistic assumption that all aid is good aid breaks down very quickly on the ground. Operating without effective coordination with other Canadian

departments and attempting to be neutral can lead to this state of affairs and can even result in CIDA working at cross-purposes to other government departments. As a character from the television program *The Wire* aptly puts it, "It's either play or get played." We, as a country, have been played time and again. Does this really benefit us?

Third, the emergence of what de Waal calls "the Humanitarian International" is perhaps inimical to Canadian government policy objectives, and it is possible that some CIDA personnel have been co-opted by this phenomenon. The Humanitarian International is defined as "the transnational elite of relief workers, aid-dispensing civil servants, academics, journalists and others, and the institutions they work for," which "is well defended against scrutiny or exposure, let alone public access." These people accept at face value that humanitarian activity in inherently "good," they brook no criticism and they tend to exhibit greater cooperation with their peers and their media supporters than with national institutions. De Waal also detected the emergence of an ideology of "humanitarianism" that transcends national allegiances. Not surprisingly, there is little or no accountability for those who hold allegiances to something other than the nation.

The Humanitarian International works informally and laterally, not vertically. Carne Ross's depiction of the diplomatic corps in *Independent Diplomat* is also applicable to the Humanitarian International: "The practitioners and analysts of this discourse love to pretend that it is complex and arcane, the better to preserve its privileges and power for themselves." How many CIDA personnel, or political supporters of CIDA, move on to high-paying jobs in the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross or any of the other high-profile NGOs, using their time with CIDA as the springboard and to network?

This is the same behaviour that the so-called "military-industrial complex" (MIC) is repeatedly accused of, and that behaviour has been excoriated by defence critics since Eisenhower gave his famous farewell speech in 1961. As an aside, the MIC critics argue that wars are perpetrated to keep arms manufacturers in business. Let's apply that to the Humanitarian International — crises in the developing world can't and won't be solved because there are too many individuals, governmental aid organizations and NGOs that profit from the perpetual instability and lack of development.

One effect identified by critics is "a powerful tendency [of aid and assistance workers] to go much further and conflate their own interests with those of the people they avow to help," rather than the interests of their institutions or governments. Attachment to a particular region or country may become too close, and when government policy shifts to another area, there may be a tendency to resist change. Or, to put it more bluntly, is it possible that there are elements in CIDA that are or have been affected with some form of "Stockholm Syndrome" (named after a Swedish robbery and kidnapping in which the victims became emotionally attached to their kidnappers) and have forgotten who they work for? More scrutiny should perhaps be directed toward this problem to determine how extensive it is.

The questions I would pose to those who control the disbursement of Canadian taxpayers' dollars to CIDA are the following:

- Where exactly should Canadian development assistance and aid fit within our national strategy for engagement with the world?
- How do we calibrate the effects of development assistance and aid to achieve our objectives and at the same time make the effects accessible to the Canadian people?
- How do we ensure better coordination of the Canadian development assistance and aid program(s) with National Defence and the Canadian Forces for regional and global effects?
- Is CIDA the right organization to carry out these tasks?

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We need to re-examine our expectations when it comes to development aid and assistance. Uncoordinated Canadian national policy has the potential to generate significant embarrassment for the Canadian government and Canadians in the international and domestic arenas, not only in the short term but in the long term as well. This will have negative consequences in both the strategic and moral spheres. Uncoordinated policy also permits our opponents or competitors to generate leverage in the cracks between government departments and exploit or otherwise interfere with our objectives. The situation can be aggravated by the lack of transparency and unwillingness to learn from past mistakes. The time for a serious reassessment of Canadian developmental assistance has come.

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