

The 2nd Annual Princeton Colloquium on Public and International Affairs

In the Service of All Nations? The Role of NGOs in Global Governance and Society

Executive Summary

The world has witnessed an explosion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the United States alone, there are over 1,230,000 nonprofits classified as 501(c) organizations with close to 700,000 of them classified as 501(c)(3) public charities. The nonprofit sector employs nearly 11 million Americans, about 7 percent of the workforce, and grows steadily at 4 to 6 percent a year.¹

NGOs come in every shape and size. At one end of the spectrum are the big eight humanitarian organizations that control half the \$8 billion (U.S. dollars) NGO market and include CARE, World Vision International, Oxfam, MSF (Doctors Without Borders), Save the Children Federation, CIDSE (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity), the Coalition of Catholic NGOs, APDOVE (Association of Protestant Development Organizations in Europe), and Eurostep (Secular European NGOs).² At the other end of the spectrum are tiny NGOs, some comprised of a handful of college students who organize themselves and obtain 501(c)(3) status as a tax-exempt organization.

The result is that for many individuals determined to make a difference in the world, public service has become much broader than government service. Indeed, many NGOs appear to do what governments do: provide aid to developing countries, respond to crises, protect the environment, and work to establish and preserve the rule of law. In domestic society, however, NGOs and governments must co-exist. In global society, by contrast, no unified government exists. NGOs thus appear to many as a vital component of an emerging system of global governance. Is this perception correct? And if so, what are the implications for governments and the international system as a whole?

To address the growing NGO phenomenon and to answer these questions, the second annual Princeton Colloquium on Public and International Affairs *In the Service of All Nations? The Role of NGOs in Global Governance and Society* convened on April 23-24, 2004. The Colloquium invited debate and exchange on the role of non-governmental

¹ The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organization, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Based on 1997 IRS data. The IRS acknowledges, though, that an unknown number of the organizations are inactive and still accounted for. Further, the totals do not include either churches, which do not have to file, or active small non-profits, which due to the size of their program are not officially required to register their tax-exempt status.

² See also The New Independent Sector Almanac in Brief – 2001 – Facts & Figures on the Independent Sector; the National Center for Non Profit Boards, and the National Center for Charitable Statistics, part of the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at The Urban Institute.

organizations in international affairs, framing the inquiry with in-the-field examples of the critical role NGOs play in the battle against the AIDS epidemic and the ever-increasing involvement of NGOs in national building, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Fourteen panels and keynotes gathered representatives from government, military, academia and an array of non-governmental organizations from across the world. A rich collection of topics explored NGO accountability, ethics, volunteerism, faith, and funding. Video webcast coverage of these panels is available on the Colloquium website at www.wws.princeton.edu/pcpia/webcasts.html and video highlights can be viewed on the DVD accompanying this executive summary.

Representing diverse perspectives, the panels were sponsored by a collaboration of programs, departments and centers at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution, including the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy, the Center for Study of Democratic Politics, the Pace Center for Community Service, the Woodrow Wilson School Office of Graduate Career Services and Alumni Relations, the Program in Law and Public Affairs, and the Center for Health and Wellbeing.

Among the NGO panelists were representatives from the Ford, MacArthur, Hewlett and United Nations Foundations, the International Red Cross and the American Red Cross, the Hudson Institute and the Brookings Institute, CARE, LIFEbeat, Ashoka, Human Rights Watch, The Bakhtar Agriculture and Livestock Cooperative, Roadside Theater, Doctors Without Borders, Africare, the Iraq Foundation, Human Rights First, the Social Science Research Council, the Al-Khoei Foundation, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, Common Ground, Lokayan, the International Center for Transitional Justice, the International Rescue Committee, the United Way, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, Mercy Corps, and Hands On Helpers.

Keynote addresses by some extraordinary world citizens highlighted the Colloquium. Speakers included Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of Brazil from 1995-1998 and Chair of the Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society and UN Relationships, and Sarah Chayes, currently the Director of the Dakhtar Agriculture and Livestock Cooperative in Kandahar, Afghanistan and previously Field Director of Afghans for a Civil Society and an international reporter for National Public Radio.

The opening keynote, "The U.S. and Iraq: The Road Ahead," was shared by Rend Rahim Francke, chosen by the Iraqi Governing Council to be Iraq's Ambassador to the United States and formerly founder and executive director of the Iraq Foundation, and Brigadier General Jeffrey Schloesser, currently serving as assistant division commander of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, Air Assault, and previously deputy director of G-5, Chief of Strategic Planning, War on Terrorism, and Joint Staff from 2001-2003.

Government and Non-Government

Woodrow Wilson School Dean Anne-Marie Slaughter introduced the opening keynotes with an insight into how the composition of Colloquium presenters reflects a fundamental reality of NGO existence in the world: “You might have wondered why a colloquium on non-governmental organizations has as its first keynote speakers members of two governments. The answer is because much of these two days are exploring the movement between and across, and the cooperation among the government sector and the non-profit sector. If we had another day, we would include the private sector. We can’t have non-governmental organizations without governments at the same time.”

The term “non-governmental organizations” creates a potential perceptual trap, as it defines NGOs in contraposition to the very government being negated in the label. The Colloquium left many participants commenting that perhaps the time had come to move away from the label “non-governmental organization” or the acronym “NGO,” as these tend to obscure more than identify by attempting to describe this set of organizations in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is. The concern was underscored by the emergence throughout the Colloquium of a plethora of alternative acronyms and descriptives: PVOs (private volunteer organizations), CSOs (civil society organizations), FBOs (faith-based organizations), GONGOs (government organized NGOs), INGOs (international or transnational NGOs), local civil society organizations, ethnically-based organizations, the unincorporated sector, humanitarian space, public interest groups, advocacy groups, and charitable organizations.

Thus the label “non-governmental organizations” became a colloquium topic unto itself. During the panel “NGOs and States: Partners or Rivals,” John Clarke, Project Director of the UN Secretary General’s ‘Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations’ cautioned, “the term NGO is one that commentators on civil society tend to use more than civil society actors themselves.”

During the same panel, the NGO label was challenged most vigorously by panelist Jeremy Rabkin, professor of government at Cornell University: “Non-governmental organization has a really odd name because it calls attention to the thing it’s trying to disclaim. The name non-governmental organization is saying government, government, government!”

On the other hand, perhaps one of the reasons that the “non-governmental” label has stuck is that NGOs see themselves as something more than private voluntary organizations. After all, in many weak or collapsing states NGOs perform functions that the governments would if they could. And in many states with strong oppressive governments, NGOs provide space for speech and activity that is explicitly against the government. These different types of relationships in different countries help explain why the relationships between NGOs and governments are complex and often troubled.

Uneasy Partnerships: NGOs and Governments

Colloquium presentations examining such diverse areas as NGO roles in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, the arts, democratic governance, and nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan yielded a rich harvest of insights on many different issues. However, as the presentations and conversations progressed over two days, the potential and real tensions between governments and NGOs became a common colloquium theme, leading to an observation that the event might more appropriately have been titled *NGOs and Governments: An Uneasy Partnership*. Some of the uneasiness seemed to accompany globalization and the rise of the international civil sector, while governments of developed countries are doing less and less, both domestically and internationally, leaving NGOs to take up the slack.

Within the context of this uneasy dynamic between governments and NGOs, this summary seeks to look across the spectrum of the Colloquium to explore the following questions: Just how uneasy is the emerging relationship between NGOs and governments? Is an NGO an agent, a partner, an adversary, or an intermediary of government? Is the role of civil society to challenge and react to government? How are NGOs to differentiate themselves from military, private contractors, and others crowding into humanitarian space to win hearts and minds? What are the legitimate roles of non-governmental organizations where there is no formal government, as at the transnational level?

In his keynote address, President Cardoso provided first-hand observations on the relationship between governments and civil society organizations, addressing how these relationships have been reshaped in an era of multilateralism and complexity: “One of the most important lessons from the Brazilian experience is that an energetic civil society, working together with government, far from weakening national sovereignty, strengthens a country’s global position.”

Cardoso expanded, “The role of civil society and public opinion in creating a global public space for debate and deliberation is at the heart of contemporary democratic governments.... The source of civil society legitimacy is a very specific one. It does not come from an electoral mandate or a membership base. The legitimacy of civil society organization is derived from what they do.... They do not have the authority to decide or to enforce. Their power is their capacity to argue, to denounce, to propose, to experiment, to innovate.”

Addressing the impact of transnational complexity, President Cardoso concluded: “Global trends, such as financial volatility, environmental disasters, terrorists, drugs and contagious disease affect people’s lives everywhere. They are of such a complexity that no country and no government can address them on their own. Global governance is no longer the sole domain of governments. It now includes a broad variety of non-state actors, NGOs, social movements, tribunals, the private sector, basic organizations, etc. As a consequence, the patterns of relationship between states and civil society have been drastically reshaped. Until very recently, in many parts of the world, this relationship was

of conflict and rivalry. In others, collaboration was seen as the natural order of things. In the United States, the notion of private action for the public good is as old as the nation.”

Introducing the panel “NGOs and States: Partners or Rivals?” Dean Slaughter, reflecting on President Cardoso’s preceding keynote, observed, “During the end of the Soviet Union and during all the upheaval in Eastern and Central Europe, there was a great deal of writing about civil society as a force against governments. It was the principal source of opposition in the former Soviet Union, and a vibrant civil society was one of the engines that helped overthrow totalitarian governments. ...When the government does not represent the people, then civil society can become the force that does represent the people.”

In contrast, Slaughter asked, “What happens when the government does represent the people, when the government has changed and is more democratic, if not fully democratic? I’m not sure any of us have a lock on full democracy, but when the government represents the people, then what is the role of civil society? Of course, there’s the de Toquevillian ideal view that says you have a vibrant set of civic organizations, renamed ‘social capital’ by Harvard Professor Robert Putnam, that works with the government in various ways, or at least parallel to the government. What happens when you have governments that are more or less representative and you have non-governmental organizations that represent different groups of citizens that are often not on the same track with the government, who oppose the government in various ways and who are able to pursue their own agendas? That’s an issue in all countries. In many developing countries the situation is sharpened because often NGOs have as much capacity, or more capacity, than the developing governments that are often quite weak. And at that point you get to the panel question we framed deliberately and provocatively: partners or rivals?”

Panelist Clarke took up Slaughter’s query: “Is it rivalry? No, it’s not rivalry. It’s challenge, though. And challenge is really important, because challenge is at the heart of what democratic processes are all about. If we don’t have challenge, then we don’t have democracy.”

Agreeing with Clarke that NGOs are neither rivals nor partners, but challengers, panelist Chayes refocused the debate by turning the conversation to the question of sovereignty, specifically in the Afghan context: “This panel refers to NGOs and states. There is a question as to wherein does sovereignty lie in so far as NGOs think about that issue when they’re acting in a foreign country? One of the things that happened in Afghanistan was a degree of conscious examination of what the role of non-governmental, and in particular international non-governmental actors would be in a country that was simultaneously seeking to establish governmental institutions. I was quite surprised and impressed to see that the Afghan government in Kabul had set up an Afghan aide coordination agency in the very beginning, almost as soon as Taliban fell and a transitional government came into power. The notion being to at least exercise some guidance from the nascent government’s perspective over what kinds of projects were going to be done and what the priorities would be.”

Chayes proceeded to connect the question of state sovereignty to NGO legitimacy: “Now, I think there is actually a very serious reason to look at why there is this growing challenge from a number of governments and other sources as to the legitimacy of civil society organizations. I think that it does come back to...a sort of evolving debate about what we mean by sovereignty in the world at large. What is the legitimate power of governments? That is being challenged in many ways. Within those challenges, you often find civil society actors as critically important agents. I think that the challenges are not to do with civil societies themselves, but to do with three really powerful forces that impinge on governments today throughout much of the world. One is globalization, the second is decentralization, and the third is the power of public opinion, communications, information technology and the growing spread of democracy as a norm of government. These do not relate to the rise of civil society. The rise of civil society is a symptom of these rather than the cause of these.”

In response to Slaughter’s opening question to the panel, Chayes concluded, “NGOs are not rivals of states, but they are challengers of states. And indeed governments who do not allow and relish that challenge are not themselves successful democratic governments. This challenge is successful in changing public policies and changing public attitudes, but it’s also about reshaping and transforming the nature of democracy in the 21st Century. These are important shifts that I believe put civil society (and I agree that it has to be responsible civil society) at the cusp of great opportunities. It should be not a case of civil society working as partners of states, certainly not as rivals of states, but working alongside states to play a role in modulating the power that states and central governments have.”

Panelist Rabkin countered that NGOs are potentially rivals and most definitely not partners of government or substitutes for government: “In the international realm we say non-governmental organization because the implication is they’re a sort of stand-in for an international government that we don’t have. I think the dangerous part of this is it suggests...[that, though] we don’t have world government, we do have world law or something like world law. And the people who articulate that law and operate it for us are, well, they’re not a government, but they’re non-governmental – they’re a kind of governmentally non-governmental, governmentally quasi-governmental, non-governmental thing -- an NGO.”

Rabkin urged participants to pull back, to see NGOs as charities, not challengers, not substitutes: “If you are not pretending to be a quasi-state, an alternative to a state, a super state, I think it’s great if you go out there and provide assistance to people in need of assistance. We call these charitable organizations. They’re great. We have a lot of them in America. We give them tax-exempt status, and they deserve to be tax-exempt, and people donate to them, and it’s great. That’s called a charity...but not a partner of states, especially not a partner of the core function of making and enforcing the law, otherwise you will end up as a dangerous rival to states....So my advice is: let’s all pull back. Let’s say NGOs have a lot to contribute as long as they are private voluntary

organizations distributing a service, but not if they are a substitute for a government. Governments don't need substitutes.”

During this panel's Q&A, a member of the audience suggested reframing the partner/rival debate: “Framing this in terms of partners or rivals is not the way to go. To me, a much more useful framework is to think in terms of checks and balances. I view the role of civil society as being a part of check and balance in a system in which the overwhelming preponderance of powers is held by states and an increasingly powerful national and transnational private sector. So our role [as NGOs] is to challenge and to provide a balance. We're not anti-government organizations, we accept the role of states as rule makers, but we are not there to simply bow and scrape if the government so decrees.”

Slaughter closed the partner/rival panel with an example of the rivalry relationship between NGOs and government that had surfaced several times during the Colloquium. “One place that we've heard a suggestion of NGOs as rivals to governments is in the international sector. Not rivals to governments, but rivals to *a* government, specifically the U.S. government. We've heard a great deal...that many international NGOs are very angry with the U.S. government. If you look at the axes of disagreement, they are the International Criminal Court, the Landmines Treaty, and Kyoto. Those are three treaties in which international NGOs played a critical role. So, one way of thinking about that disagreement is to see one very powerful government, the U.S., and a lot of non-governmental organizations pushing something that the U.S. has tried to block. The ICC is going to be a powerful force regardless of what the U.S. does, but they're on a collision course.”

Sector Confusion: Blurring Humanitarian Space

Observations made during the plenary session, “Out of Chaos: NGO Challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq,” added to the sense of a growing antagonism between NGOs and governments. Dr. Andrew Wilder, Director of the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, arrived directly from Kabul to observe that NGOs are increasingly finding themselves under attack, both literally, from a security perspective, but also in terms of their role in tasks like nation-building, in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. Wilder stunned his audience when he added that he had recently heard the Afghan Minister of Planning, under whom NGOs have to register, equate NGOs with warlords, basically telling NGOs “it's time to pack your bags and leave.”

In the plenary session with Wilder, Dennis Dragovic, the International Rescue Committee's chief and Country Director in Iraq, brought into clear focus the dangerous blurring of distinctions between NGOs, the government, the military, and government-sponsored private contractors. “I want to discuss a very pertinent issue for NGOs at the moment in Iraq, and that is humanitarian space. Let me begin by reading a quote from a newspaper article that appeared recently: ‘The U.S. military has set aside land on its bases in Iraq for non-governmental organizations, which will help rebuild essential services, such as sewage, water, power, health and education in the war-torn nation.’ One

person quoted in this article said, 'It is not only safer, but I feel that the reconstruction must be a joint effort. I want to have a merger of NGOs and civil and military affairs.' Just, let me repeat that: 'I want to have a merger of NGOs and civil and military affairs.' It seems to me that...people don't have a clear understanding of the role and the unique nature of NGOs, and not surprisingly so, considering what's going on in Iraq at the moment."

Dragovic went on to describe the blurring of humanitarian space: "On one side, we have U.S. military personnel, parading, at certain times, in civilian clothes, driving white 4x4's and even driving civilian vehicles. We have Civilian Aid workers, wearing Department of Defense ID's, surrounded by armed security guards. The media, meanwhile, refer to soldiers and armed security personnel killed in action as 'humanitarians.' NGOs themselves, in some cases, request and accept military escorts or contracts from the Department of Defense. It's very confusing to me, to be able to distinguish between NGOs, and it's understandably even more confusing for Iraqis, who haven't had an experience with the international humanitarian community and the unique independence of NGOs.... Without a clear distinction between civilian actors and belligerents, the security blanket provided to NGOs throughout the world will disappear, undermining over a century and a half of progress in the work that international organizations have done, in hotspots throughout the world, fending for people who, during times of war, are least able to fend for themselves."

Dragovic's recommendations for undoing this confusion of sectors and roles included three sets of actors: the military, the contractors and the NGOs themselves. The first set of actors, the military, "is obliged by international law to ensure that immediate, basic health standards are met, especially during and immediately after the conflict. That is according to the fourth Geneva Convention. Beyond this, history has proven that civilian bodies, such as NGOs, under the auspices of the United Nations, are best placed to carry out further humanitarian aid and development.... The second group of actors, the civilian contractors, should not appropriate certain common terms, such as 'humanitarian', or 'aid worker', or 'non-governmental organization.'"

Pointing the finger inward, Dragovic added that NGOs themselves are the third group of actors responsible for the blurring of the boundaries of humanitarian space. "We are not without blame, ourselves. To widen the humanitarian space, all sides need to pull back. NGOs use the military of the occupying towns to protect them; they house their operations in military bases, and contract or accept grants through the Department of Defense. To review their stance vis à vis the loss of independence, it is generally understood the government's military arm is not an acceptable source of funding for NGOs. Many organizations in Iraq have accepted funding directly from the Department of Defense or the CPA. Many NGOs have been forced into this situation by a U.S. government policy in Iraq, which saw USAID funding directly through...the CPA, which...reported to the Secretary of Defense. Don't be fooled into thinking that these distinctions are only in the realm of academics or bureaucrats. In a meeting, recently, that I had with a staunch anti-U.S. IRC worker in Najif, who described Paul Bremmer as 'the devil', I somewhat hesitantly explained to him where our sources of funding were

coming from, namely, in part, U.S. citizens and the U.S. government through the State Department. After some discussion with the Ayatollah, he understood our situation, and he understood that we, nevertheless, maintained independence, and he has since become a strong supporter of the International Rescue Committee, a New York-based NGO. [My] recommendations for NGOs are: NGOs should not report to or through Department of Defense of any belligerent power. NGOs should remain a clear, independent, and distinctive from the occupying power in all operational aspects.”

Barbara Stapleton, the Advocacy and Policy Coordinator for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBR) and participant in the opening plenary “Out of Chaos: NGO Challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq,” described how the military could not understand why NGOs rejected Colin Powell’s assumption that NGOs are “force multipliers.” She reiterated the concern that due to the “confusion of the sectors in the minds of Afghans and fears within the assistance community...the guiding principles of independence, neutrality, and impartiality have been eroded....In Iraq and Afghanistan, NGOs have seen a ‘we’re all in this together’ approach, which has been publicly and repeatedly stated by the Coalition, anxious to co-opt humanitarian action and relief into their ‘Hearts and Minds’ policies.”

NGO Impartiality and Independence

During the panel “Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges: Stories from the Field,” Kevin Henry, Advocacy Director at CARE, reinforced the concerns about loss of humanitarian independence and erosion of humanitarian space, answering his own rhetorical questions: “So, the question is, what is the state today of independent humanitarian action? What is the state of humanitarian space? The simple answer is that it’s very bad. That it is under assault...I would just highlight three categories of actors who I think are assaulting the integrity of humanitarian action. First of all, you have non-state actors...Non-state actors are attacking humanitarian action. They do not perceive, apparently, humanitarian actors as independent and impartial, but rather representing something that is inimical to their interests. I want to say, very clearly, those people are assaulting humanitarian integrity. What they are doing amounts to war crimes....Second, host governments are assaulting humanitarian principles in many parts of the world. And for those of you who follow the situation in Sudan, all you have to do is look today at the situation in Dafur to know that the government of Sudan is denying unimpeded humanitarian access to its population.”

Henry added, “What is most controversial and most disturbing to me, as an American citizen, is that our government is assaulting the integrity of humanitarian action. In Afghanistan and in Iraq our government has sought, as we say, to ‘instrumentalize’ humanitarian assistance. From the beginning, they have made it an integral part of their military strategy. ...Statements and actions by senior officials in our government totally blur the distinction between civilians and soldiers and humanitarian action and military action. And it goes on today in Afghanistan, despite U.S. protestations to the contrary for nearly two years. Disturbing statements are made by even otherwise responsible public officials like Colin Powell, who, in Afghanistan, referred to NGOs as a

‘force multiplier’ for coalition forces....Before the war in Iraq, senior U.S. government officials said that there would be ‘an army of NGOs’ on the borders waiting to go in behind U.S. forces. You’ve had soldiers in civilian clothing carrying weapons and pretending to be humanitarian workers. You have soldiers driving around in civilian vehicles. You have 20,000 private security guards in Afghanistan. Is it any wonder why the people of Afghanistan and Iraq might be confused, and might not see the difference between an aid worker and a soldier? I think not.”

On the topic of NGO neutrality, Henry’s observations were equally powerful, providing both context and insight: “There are two principles around which we base our action in trying to fulfill our humanitarian imperative, the first is the concept of impartiality...that means that assistance should be provided to all who are in need without regard to distinctions of race, religion, political affiliation, etc., and that aid should not be in any way tied to adherence to any political or religious group....Then there’s the concept of independence, and it is defined in the code of conduct for the Humanitarian Charter in this way: We shall not seek to implement the policy of any government except so far as it coincides with our own.”

Henry then probed the feasibility of such independence today. “The question is: to what extent is independent humanitarian action possible in today’s world? We’ve already had several discussions about the concept of neutrality. CARE and our own policies, including civil-military guidelines that we developed four years ago, does not claim to stand on the principle of neutrality. And there is in fact a raging debate within the humanitarian community about what neutrality means and can we legitimately claim the mantle of neutrality. But I think there are two camps. One tends to be those organizations with the narrower mandate of providing life-saving medical assistance in conflict areas, and it stems from the International Red Cross movement, the whole Geneva Conventions and everything that flows from that. And I don’t say this to be disparaging, because I think they play a vital role. But that camp accepts war as inevitable. They view their role as being there and being able to operate on both sides and being able to provide life-saving assistance. There’s another camp variously described as the new humanitarians. I would put CARE in that camp. We definitely believe in the part of neutrality that says we cannot and should not take active part in any conflict and side with any party in a conflict. On the other hand, the concept of neutrality can be taken to an extreme of saying that you can’t engage in anything that might be considered politically controversial or take a position on any political question. I think, frankly, the concept of apolitical aid is an oxymoron. Humanitarian assistance by its very nature is political in one way or another.”

Responding in the Ethics panel Q&A, panelist Julius Cole, President of Africare, addressed a question on the operational challenge of political neutrality: “It’s a very interesting question. Africare as an organization strives very willingly to be non-partisan. How do we do that? We choose some board members who are obviously Republican. We choose other board members who obviously Democratic. And we choose an ethnic diversity also on the board to give a balance. So no one can accuse us of being a Democratic or a Republican NGO. Why? Because we are African-American led, the

assumption is that we are Democratic. And you hear this over and over again. 'You are obviously a Democratic organization.' In this...world that we live in today, things are very much politicized. Sometimes decisions are made on the basis of politics. So one has to be very, very careful to prove and to show that you're non-partisan."

Another comment during the Ethics panel Q&A added some levity and hope to the situation: "Every cloud has a silver lining, and, in NGO terms, ...in Iraq and Afghanistan the silver lining has been the sudden rediscovery by Western NGOs of their virginity. It's a little bit like that moment in 'Casablanca' where Louis comes in and says 'I'm shocked, shocked to find gambling going on. Here are your winnings'....Iraq and Afghanistan have produced a situation where Western NGOs have become effectively subcontractors of U.S. and Western foreign policy. Of course that was already very much underway and many major NGOs had allowed that to happen in terms of their major source of funding, particularly on humanitarian endeavors."

Sue Lautze, the Director of the Livelihoods Initiative program at Tufts University and a panelist for "Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges," observed that a long-term decline in independence is actually more of a crisis within particularly large U.S. NGOs. With the well documented example of the murdered and desecrated U.S. government contractors in Fallujah being referred to in the U.S. press as 'humanitarians', Lautze underscored concerns about the lack of independence and distrust of U.S. NGOs in the post September 11th worldview. "In the face of threat, humanitarians have been reinvented by the U.S. government as the front line defenders of American national security. In so doing, the images of others engaged in militarized activities have been conflated with that of the humanitarian. The insidiousness of this way of thinking was exemplified most profoundly this week by Halliburton's press release and the identification of its workers killed in Iraq. These workers, who were relatively unskilled laborers earning up to \$140,000 per year, were moving fuel to fighting military troops. The company hailed them as 'brave hearts without medals, humanitarians without parades and heroes without statues.' With due respect to these men and to their families, they were not humanitarians....It's time for U.S. NGOs to begin the long road back to independence from U.S. political, military and economic strategies of global dominance."

Soccer Ball Diplomacy: Hearts, Minds and the Military

Keynote speaker Brigadier General Jeffrey Schloesser's presentation brought the Colloquium a very different perspective on the 'Hearts and Minds' policy in Iraq. To the background beat of American rock music, General Schloesser's slides and video celebrated U.S. soldiers in the northern region of Iraq rebuilding the infrastructure and foundations of a civil society -- opening banks and newspapers, holding regional elections, distributing wheat, rebuilding hospitals and opening clinics, and distributing \$57 million in funding to 5,000 projects in 12 months. General Schloesser's graphs showed that of the nearly 1000 schools that were reopened in those 12 months in the northern region, 507 were done by Coalition forces, 400 by NGOs and others. Praising coalition soldiers for the creation of 160 soccer teams in the northern region, General Schloesser explained, "Yes, we were playing soccer. Somebody once said that soccer ball

diplomacy works. I'm here to tell you it does. We may not all speak Arabic, but there are a lot of folks and fellows and women soldiers now that have grown up playing soccer in America. And you would not believe how many soccer balls we went through, and how much good will it helped create. It may sound ludicrous to you, but it does help. We also did it for very real reasons of stability. A 15-year-old male, Iraqi male, playing soccer in a field that we helped rehabilitate, who goes home tired at night, is a much better Iraq citizen, or young citizen, in our minds, than one that sits around in corners, and gets tired of watching a Humvee go by over and over and over again and wondering where his next paycheck is coming from for his family.”

The audience asked General Schloesser if he thought the military was the appropriate organization to conduct these ‘nation building’ activities, and if NGOs might help bridge the gap between the military and the local civilian population. Schloesser responded, touching again on issues of independence and security: “Is the military the right organization to do these things? In a case like this, it was the only organization to do it, initially. Over a period of essentially 12 months, we actually went from a period when we had a large amount of NGO assistance, initially, and then, as I said, I call it the guerrilla war. And in the guerrilla war, NGOs are targeted. That is a really very difficult question, because it gets to the heart of the matter, about how close can an NGO get to a military organization without losing its independence, and therefore becoming, in some cases, a target. I do know, if you are in an NGO and you think that you are not a target, to a guerrilla who wants to demonstrate that a Coalition cannot maintain security or that an Iraqi security organization cannot maintain security, you’re kidding yourself.”

On this question of “partnering” or engaging with the military, Sarah Chayes remained ever pragmatic. “The question of whether the Pentagon ought to be running U.S. foreign policy is a very important debate for Americans to be having and this is a debate that ought to be engaged explicitly in America. On the ground in Kandahar the fact is that the Pentagon is running U.S. foreign policy. That's how it is. There are 5,000 soldiers there and there's one guy from the State Department. So that means that if I as an American citizen as well as somebody who wants things to go better for Afghanistan would like to see U.S. policy in Afghanistan improve or be more productive and useful to Afghan citizens, I've got to engage with the military.”

NGOs: Undermining Governments?

Though most discussion focused on the irrefutable value of NGOs in building and sustaining democracy, there were conversations from the opposite perspective. An example was brought up from India where NGOs have sometimes been perceived as making it harder for governments to do their job. Because the larger NGOs often pay higher salaries and offer better health care benefits than the local government, they can attract the best and the brightest away from government. They thus perform a hollowing out function, draining brains away from the government. Often both international and local NGO workers have a higher standard of living than the locals they are serving. In addition to attracting talent away, NGOs can actually – though presumably unintentionally -- weaken governments by siphoning aid dollars away from governments

trying to rebuild their own health and development ministries. An example was given of Afghanistan, where money appeared to be flowing more to MSF and other medical NGOs than to the new Afghan government – possibly to circumvent corruption. Even in the U.S., for the young job seeker wanting to change the world, the vision of joining an NGO often has more cache, more draw, than the idea of joining government bureaucracy.

While most participants concurred with Cardoso's keynote admonition a vigorous civil society is essential to the sustainability of democracy, Graeme Robertson, a visiting fellow this year at Princeton's Center for the Study of Democratic Politics, brought forth an extreme counter example, noting the experience of Weimar, Germany where non-government, civil society organizations were conspicuously anti-democratic. According to Robertson, "a number of scholars have demonstrated that Weimar, Germany collapsed not because of a lack of mobilization, but, in contrast, at least in part, due to a very high level of civil society mobilization. Weimar, Germany had a very high level of mobilization and very well educated people, but they mobilized into non-government groups inimical to democracy.... So depending on the context, mobilization and participation could be a good thing, but it could also...have devastating affects for democracy."

Nation Building and Civil Society: Errors in the Making?

Ambassador Rend Rahim Francke, sharing the keynote podium for "The U.S. and Iraq – The Road Ahead" with Brigadier General Jeffrey Schloesser, provided a counterpoint perception of the situation in Iraq, specifically pointing out some of the mistakes she felt had been made as regards civil society: "I regard civil society and civil society institutions as a full fifty-percent of the equation of democracy, the other fifty percent being government. If you don't have the civil society institutions and a strong, vocal civil society, then you really don't have a democracy. When the CPA came to Iraq, they completely neglected this fifty percent of the equation. In my view, they focused, to such a great extent, on infrastructure development, infrastructure repair, setting up industries, and all of these top-down systems. They really lost sight of the need to also create institutions from the bottom up."

The Ambassador continued, "Also, in my view, very little work has really gone into building or putting in the building blocks of democracy. We have not put enough effort into developing government institutions. We have not put in enough effort to ensure transparency and accountability in government and in contracting methods, and so on. There has been very little investment in the institutions of civil society, in civic education, and democracy education."

Francke concluded, "Perhaps, the worst problem...is the gap between expectation and delivery. Iraqis had gone through almost thirteen years of devastating sanctions regime. The country was impoverished. The infrastructure was collapsed. People had no incomes. Liberation, to them, meant not Byzantine political arrangements, but that goods and services could come to them, and that they could benefit from directly: clean water,

electricity, food, health care, so on and so forth. This is what they wanted, above all. Unfortunately, the delivery of these services was delayed.”

Keynote speaker Sarah Chayes witnessed similar errors of Afghanistan – exaggerated expectation setting, a lack of local knowledge, and the bypassing of *shura*, councils of local elders, in deference to warlords and powers-that-be. Chayes underscored that NGOs must have local knowledge and language: “You've got to work close to the ground to actually deliver resources to the people who need them; local knowledge is just critical to effectively delivering international aid. That means, in a place like Kandahar, you have to know the tribes....That's where the security issue becomes a real problem...it becomes harder and harder to do that kind of close tracking of assistance when the security situation is difficult.”

She explained: “I think [the U.S.] notion of democracy has to do with democratic institutions and offices as we know them and I'm afraid that we ignored a little bit the indigenous democratic structures that existed in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, at least in southern Afghanistan, every village has what's called a *shura* that is a local council of elders...that will discuss everything from water disputes, everything that concerns the public life of the village. There are district councils and some times provincial councils. I think that by [the U.S.] working almost exclusively with the governors and their officials, the equivalent of ministers, the local democracy got short-circuited. Those *shuras* are the real representatives of the people. It was also unfortunate that was how aid was channeled.” “[Afghanistan] is a society in post traumatic stress, basically, and some of the symptoms of post traumatic stress are a trust of no one, an inability to work collectively, and an inability to think into the future and delay return in order to get more return over time.”

Paralleling Ambassador Francke's observations in Iraq, Chayes witnessed how “even Kandaharis welcome the U.S. presence in Afghanistan but they wanted three things. One was reconstruction, the other was security, and the third was good governance. What I'm experiencing now is a disappointment and rising frustration among Afghans that the U.S. hasn't delivered on those three things. But that's a very practical negative feeling. It's not ideological. It's not ideological anti-Americanism.”

However: “There is an ideological thing going on. This is not going to make me popular with a lot of my colleagues, what I'm about to say, but, for a number of reasons, very many international humanitarian workers are irritated at the United States and I think it's perfectly reasonable that they be irritated with the United States and it doesn't all have to do with Afghanistan or Iraq. It has to do with things like the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocols and the chemical weapons treaty and the land mine treaty and all of these other things. The fact is that most internationals, as we call them on the ground, are not American and most of them have opinions about all this stuff and the fact is that most Americans on the ground are soldiers, so, therefore, there is a kind of animosity or hostility that doesn't necessarily have to do specifically with conditions on the ground in Kandahar.”

Conclusion

To return full circle to the question flagged early on by Jeremy Rabkin, what is the relationship between NGOs and governments? In the course of the Colloquium, we heard about independent, interdependent and even co-dependent NGOs; embedded NGOs and insurgent NGOs; NGOs working for a cause and NGOs working against a cause; NGOs as a reaction to government or as partners with government. We heard examples of NGOs that function transparently and those that remain opaque, of those that do and others that don't have an ethos. We heard of NGOs deeply committed to ending disease, of others deeply committed to faith, of others committed to art. We heard of some NGOs taking up the slack left by governments, of others substituting for governments, and of still others, distancing themselves fully from governments. We heard of NGOs as charities and as competitors, challengers and checks of government. We were given images of NGOs as "rich people who drive white SUVs and don't do much," as "warlords," as "the bedrock of democracy," and as "humanitarian saviors."

The clear conclusion: This is a sector of enormous diversity. William Maley, Professor and Foundation Director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the Australian National University, provided insight into this diversity in his remarks as a member of the opening plenary session: "NGOs inhabit a realm which could broadly be defined as civil society, but that, itself, insofar as it encompasses agencies with some autonomy from the command structures of the state, is a complex realm with many different actors within it. And in a way, I think the expression 'private voluntary organization' more accurately identifies what it is that is distinctive about what we call NGOs, because, in a literal sense, the phrase non-governmental organization could easily take into its realm corporations and bodies that are important actors in civil society without necessarily engaging directly with the state. When one looks at private voluntary organizations, however, one is immediately struck by the diversity within that category, as well. The non-governmental organizations of this type can be indigenous to a particular state. They can be foreign agencies operating within the state's boundaries with someone's permission. Or they can be transnational organizations that carry out humanitarian activities in a range of different states."

He continued: "Non-governmental organizations of this sort also engage in very diverse activities. They can be involved in the provision of emergency relief. They can be concerned with development issues and conceive their responsibilities as being much longer-term than simply emergency relief activities would imply. Or, they can be involved in advocacy, as well. They also differ very greatly in their structure, in their funding, in their constituency and their ethos. They range from problems that could almost be seen as quasi-governmental, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (which, like its brethren in the Red Cross movement, sees states as parties to the Geneva Convention of 1949 participating in the governments of the organization), down to tiny local organizations with no budget, no constituency that can be identified, what some people would call 'briefcase NGOs' -- one man with a briefcase seeking funding for particular proposals. If we're talking about a realm as mixed as this, then it's likely

that the kinds of challenges non-governmental organizations will have to meet will also be diverse.”

Andrew Wilder even included the diversity of NGO constituencies in his observations. “There are a number of plausible candidates, which may put forward radically different kinds of demands upon non-governmental organizations in the field. One particular constituency is the donors. Many non-governmental organizations have vigorous donor bases, whose components have clear ideas of what NGOs should and should not be doing, and in a sense these donors control the purse strings. In the Afghan context, many non-governmental organizations find increasingly few donors on which they’re drawing for support, so they turn to governments, with political agendas, which can then percolate down into the activities of non-governmental organizations in a way that other donors may not like. So, the community of donors, itself, is not a united realm, but contains within it a diversity of influence. A second kind of constituency to which NGOs might be held accountable would be the host states, the states in which they’re actually working, which brings us back to the issue of relationship between NGOs and emerging states. But, a third constituency, that is sometimes overlooked, is the constituency of beneficiaries. And many NGOs, appropriately, see a key element of their activity as being to work cooperatively with the community of beneficiaries on the ground, so that capacity-building can be a key element of the activities in which they engage, even if the prime stated objective is a more concrete delivery of a particular service to a particular people.”

With specific reference to Afghanistan, Wilder concluded, “I want to end with just a few challenges which I do think are confronting NGOs in Afghanistan, and I think first and foremost, the issue of the independence of NGOs...a critical one. Especially as they are increasingly being asked to support large state programs, increasingly, as the U.S. is, by far and above, the largest single donor funding programs, and has some very explicit political agendas, with which you can agree or disagree. I think it’s important for the U.S., in particular, to recognize that NGOs shouldn’t just be perceived as another arm of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan, but that in many ways, their greatest strength will be to be an independent voice, a voice that strength will be to be an independent voice, a voice that can actually challenge government, at times, and not just being asked to only support it.”

In sum, “non-government” can mean “with government,” “against government,” “funded by government,” or “instead of government” both nationally and internationally. The ideal type, at least for many traditional humanitarian NGOs, would be “independent of government” and even more ideally, independent of politics. Yet many new NGOs are born as instruments of political advocacy. Perhaps the only clear meaning of non-governmental organization that applies to all NGOs is that their staff and donors have chosen to pursue a particular conception of the public interest through means other than government itself. It is worth asking why, but that is a subject for a future colloquium.