

Sustainable Partnership: Security, Development and the Future by Johan Bergen



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Cover image: Brazil’s President Dilma Rousseff and United Nations Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon at the closing ceremony of the Rio+20 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 22, 2012 (AP photo by Andre Penner).

SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP: SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT AND THE FUTURE

By Johan Bergen

In 2000, diplomats at the United Nations adopted eight development goals aimed at poverty reduction, education, nutrition, gender equality and safeguarding the environment in the world's poorest countries. An impressive consortium of governments, multilateral organizations, philanthropic foundations, nongovernmental organizations and even celebrities answered the U.N.'s call to implement the so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the past 15 years, partly due to the MDGs agenda, progress was made on a wide range of these development challenges: Extreme poverty was cut in half; deaths from malaria and tuberculosis were drastically reduced; millions of people gained access to anti-retroviral drugs to fight HIV/AIDS; and more boys and girls around the world were enrolled in school than ever before.

This year, the U.N. is developing the next iteration of global development goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [Initiating the process in 2012](#) during a global development summit in Rio de Janeiro, an Open Working Group was charged with devising a suggested set of goals to guide negotiations at the General Assembly prior to the forthcoming adoption of the SDGs in September 2015. The Open Working Group reported back to the U.N. last July, and negotiations are now underway.

There are interesting new dynamics in the SDGs that can be discerned from the current draft. Greater emphasis is placed on the role of security in achieving global development. This provides for an opportunity to engage defense and security actors more robustly and to form interesting and mutually beneficial partnerships across traditional divides.

The goals, as they stand today, will also find a significant implementation deficit. This is most effectively addressed by engaging the

private sector—not by appealing to goodwill, but by making the case that poverty eradication can also be a winning business opportunity.

From the MDGs to the SDGs: A More Ambitious Agenda

The realities the world faces today are different from those faced 15 years ago. Development and security have never been as interconnected as they are today, nor has the role of the private sector been so prominent in achieving development objectives. The post-2015 development goals need to reflect these new realities and leverage resources according to changed dynamics. Much work, however, remains to be done in forging balanced partnerships between the development, defense, security and private sectors, which are critical to achieving the grand aspirations of the SDGs.

For this reason, the SDGs look quite different than what came before. While the MDGs focused exclusively on development initiatives and restricted themselves to eight objectives with 19 targets, the drafted SDGs include 17 goals and 169 targets, and work to incorporate much more than just development.

The more ambitious SDGs have come under criticism for not being specific enough and for failing to set important priorities. For example, Abhijit Banerjee of MIT and Varad Pande of the Harvard Kennedy School [believe the current nature of the goals will lead to governments](#) “simply ignor[ing] the imperatives on the grounds that they are too many, too grandiose and too far out of touch with countries’ limited resources and ability to effect change.”

There is precedent to the criticism that the U.N. is setting unattainable targets across the security-development continuum, [from the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction](#) to the eradication of poverty. Therefore, the fear that, as Banerjee and Pande have written, “the development goals will just be another pious hope in the long list of United Nations sponsored fantasies” is not unfounded. However, it is important to note that many aspects of the SDGs, as was the case with the MDGs, are aspirational and must reflect the will of the entire U.N. membership.

If the SDGs are ambitious, it is not due to lack of forethought. Un-

like the MDGs, the SDGs are working to incorporate an entirely new community into their agenda: the security community. With a broader base of support and more-nuanced goals, the SDGs may actually have a stronger chance for success in spite of their breadth and ambition.

Incorporating Security Objectives Into the Global Development Agenda

Perhaps one of the reasons for the criticism against the SDGs is that, unlike the MDGs, they expand beyond traditional development issues. Their success, therefore, relies upon the active involvement of actors from other sectors, particularly from the defense and security communities. In fact, the SDGs look set to seriously institutionalize security capacity-building as a mechanism to achieve development objectives.

An example of this can be found in the [Open Working Group's Goal 16](#) to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” By 2030, the targets for this goal include to “significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime” and to “strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacities at all levels, in particular in developing countries, for preventing violence and combating terrorism and crime.”

What the Open Working Group is trying to come to grips with in this goal are the undercurrents of globalization and the tremendously negative impact they have on global sustainable development. On average, at no other time in history have people been richer, healthier, better informed and more peaceful. Globalization—the freer and more efficient flow of goods, people, money and services—has led and continues to lead to economic growth and development in almost all corners of the world. Yet the same characteristics of globalization that have brought about its positive effects also threaten to undermine continued progress.

“Transnational criminal organizations have taken advantage of our increasingly interconnected world to expand their illicit enterprise,”

explains the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime. Today, danger increasingly stems from the intersection of highly sophisticated transnational illicit networks trafficking in everything from arms to drugs to people and states that are too weak to combat them. These undercurrents of globalization fuel armed conflict and crime, fund terrorist activities, undermine democratic principles and threaten economic growth in those countries most needing it. All of this represents “development in reverse” and imperils security for all, in the same way that violence and war do, [as pointed out by development economist Paul Collier](#).

In this light, the Open Working Groups’ Goal 16 recognizes this intrinsic link between security and development, and presents an opportunity to embark on a global, multi-decade undertaking to secure key societal functions—such as borders, ports, airports and critical infrastructure—that drive economic growth and development. This also means that militaries and law enforcement agencies in developing countries will require training and equipment in order to implement strategic programs against illicit trade, as well as help in delivering technological solutions to make societies more resilient against terrorist organizations and transnational organized criminals.

Other goals in the Open Working Group’s suggested list of SDGs similarly require the involvement of the defense and security communities, or require security capacity-building. These include Goal 3, which concerns public health, including combating such communicable diseases as Ebola; Goal 9, which calls for building resilient infrastructure; Goal 11, which highlights the need to make cities safe, resilient and sustainable; Goal 14, which focuses on managing the oceans, seas and marine resources; and Goal 15, which addresses the management of natural resources.

The progressive calls for a more inclusive concept of sustainable development reflect lessons learned from 15 years of implementing the MDGs and, even more so, broader global trends to integrate security and development initiatives. At the end of Kofi Annan’s term as the U.N. secretary-general, [he penned a manifesto](#) suggesting that development and security cannot be achieved in silos, but that they are intrinsically linked and must be achieved in parallel. This powerful

rhetoric has been echoed worldwide. From [the World Bank](#) to governmental development organizations in both [North](#) and [South America](#), [Europe](#), [Asia](#) and throughout the developing world, the message is clear: In order to achieve development objectives, a wider perspective and a more inclusive group of partners is necessary.

Similarly, from the security and defense sphere, there is a growing realization that militaries and security forces must expand their partnerships with development agencies and NGOs in order to accomplish their primary mission: to defend the homeland. [As noted by retired Adm. James Stavridis](#), who served both as the NATO supreme allied commander in Europe and for U.S. Southern Command, “we will not deliver security solely from the barrel of a gun.” The integration of defense, security and diplomatic resources—dubbed “smart power”—is also at the very center of former U.S. Secretary of State and likely presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s vision for foreign policy.

Unfortunately, to date, neither the U.N. secretary-general nor the Open Working Group has clearly offered an invitation or enlisted the support of the defense and security communities to assist in both the formulation and the implementation of the SDGs. Whether that is due to inattention or unease between the often highly divergent cultures of the security and development communities, a collaborative approach to bringing the military and security communities onboard with regard to the SDGs could solve a lot of problems for the U.N.—primary among those being the funding of the goals.

At the end of last year, a Western European diplomat who had participated in the negotiations over the SDGs privately admitted that while the agenda was ambitious, the ideas so far on how to resource its implementation were not. Part of the answer to this problem could come through partnerships with military and security departments in governments and multilateral organizations that would draw from the security sector’s incomparably vast resources. In total, governments around the world [spend about \\$135 billion](#) on development aid every year. In contrast, the U.S. defense budget alone [was \\$615 billion in 2014](#). Combining this with resources from other security-related departments—such as State, Energy or Homeland Security, as well as other countries’ security institutions—for application toward the

SDGs, the development community has a force-multiplying opportunity to implement the goals.

This does not mean that governments should “securitize” the SDGs, but that an interwoven development and security agenda requires a new kind of partnership with the defense and security communities. The time is ripe for these new partnerships, as defense and security departments around the world have already begun preparing to participate in a wider range of issues traditionally outside the purview of the defense and security community, [such as climate change](#). Correctly framed and well-formed partnerships will enhance security while simultaneously facilitating sustainable development, with the two elements reinforcing each other. The SDGs are an excellent forum to institutionalize a robust and long-term commitment among development, security and defense actors to work together for mutual gain.

Enlisting the Support of the Private Sector to Close the Financing Gap

The aforementioned lack of resources for implementation of the SDGs is also moving the U.N. and its member nations to try to engage the private sector. [As advocated in the World Investment Report 2014](#) published by the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, “the SDGs will require a step-change in the levels of both public and private investment in all countries. At current levels of investment in SDG-relevant sectors, developing countries alone face an annual gap of \$2.5 trillion. . . . [T]he role of private sector investment will be indispensable.”

In his [end-of-the-year report on the SDGs](#), U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for urgent private sector action to “unlock the transformative power of trillions of dollars of private resources to deliver on sustainable development objectives.” This would be best accomplished by working with companies on engagements that result in major market and profit opportunities while also [leading to the shared value of implementing the SDGs](#). In the words of the recently departed United States Agency for International Development (USAID) administrator, [Rajiv Shah](#): “Corporate social responsibility alone can’t yield the kind of sustainable economic progress that can raise incomes at scale. Only investments that generate real financial returns

for corporations and real income for the poor can do that. We need to help companies find profit opportunities abroad, not photo opportunities.”

In order to create this level of buy-in from the private sector, the international community needs to give them a seat at the table. This is not the case today, as Norine Kennedy, vice president at the U.S. Council for International Business, has pointed out. She has said that while private industry is invited to the U.N. process, it is only for brief interventions or to participate in side events. Of the 26 members who made up a High Panel put together by the U.N. secretary-general in 2012 to advise him on the new global development agenda, only two members were representatives of the private sector. [As Nigerian CEO and entrepreneur Tony Elumelu noted](#): “A global agenda that intends to address the livelihood of people and attack extreme poverty is not set up for success if it does not fully engage the sector of society that controls the most capital, employs the most people, and fosters the most innovation.”

In the past 50 years, the balance of power between nation-states and industry and the subsequent ability of either to have sustainable impacts on the world has shifted in favor of the private sector. For example, at the end of the Cold War, official development assistance (ODA) was twice the size of private sector foreign direct investments (FDI). Now, [the flows of investment](#) to developing countries alone [are over five times higher than aid](#). Trade has tripled worldwide in recent decades, and the biggest benefactors are emerging and developing economies, whose share of world trade [rose from around 10 percent to over 40 percent](#). Over 90 percent of jobs in the world [are now in the private sector](#), a significant change since several decades ago, when public sector employment [constituted almost half of all employment](#) in certain regions.

The bottom line is that private industry has more influence on poverty alleviation than the public sector will ever have. As such, finding a mutually beneficial relationship between government and industry is absolutely critical. A good start to institutionalizing new and innovative approaches can begin right now with the SDGs.

Conclusion

U.N. diplomats have drafted an agenda for the post-2015 sustainable development goals that reflect the world we live in. Far-reaching in scope and aspiration, the SDGs push the development community, the U.N. and governments to engage more and more seriously with implementation partners.

The defense and security community has the mandate, interest, skills, experience and resources to be a valuable partner to the development community. The private sector has the ambition, diversity and risk-taking required to be a force-multiplier in the implementation process.

One suggestion to further the prospects for collaboration between the development and security communities is to have one of the 17 SDGs more clearly identified as a security goal. For example, such a goal could involve eliminating all security challenges that hamper a framework for global sustainable development. This would be no more ostentatious than some of the existing SDGs. It would also have the added benefit of being seen as a more clear invitation to defense and security departments to collaborate with development actors under the framework of the SDGs.

The U.N. and its diplomats have also realized that they do not have the financial resources to implement the SDGs and are turning to the private sector for help. Instead of coming to industry with hat in hand, governments should make a strategic deal with companies. They should not ask for industry's resources and partnership out of charity, but instead strike a multi-decade grand bargain that begins in 2015 with the opportunity to seriously influence the development of the SDGs and goes on thereafter to build a partnership with the potential to transform private-sector investments into major profit opportunities in developing and emerging markets. A proposal should be ready by the summer, as prior to concluding the SDGs in September at the U.N., diplomats will meet in Addis Ababa in July for a conference on development financing.

The Open Working Group [suggests that](#) “Poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today . . . ” Grand chal-

lenges require grand new solutions, and kick-starting the partnership with the defense and security community, as well as reinvigorating the relationship between the public and the private sector, is not a deal with the devil. It may be the SDGs' only chance for success. □

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