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Failing States and US Strategy

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Policy Recommendations

- Direct US military interventions in failing states should be extremely rare. Even when launched with the best of intentions, a majority of interventions have not succeeded, and they have frequently involved the United States in unexpected problems, serious losses, and grave damage to its international prestige.

  The only cases where US military intervention is appropriate are the following:

  - Where the country concerned has directly attacked the United States *or* provided a base for forces which have recently done so or where a genuine case of genocide is occurring.

  - Where the operation concerned is supported by a regional grouping of states that can be relied on both to legitimize the operation in the eyes of neighboring populations and to undertake the long-term task of reconstruction, development, and policing *or* where the United States itself, because of past actions or commitments, has assumed a direct moral responsibility for the country concerned.

- Unless it has been directly attacked by the state in question, actual genocide is occurring, or the state has already collapsed, the United States should never support ethnic rebellions aimed at breaking up existing states. Functioning states are rare and precious creatures in many parts of the world. It would be both desperately shortsighted and extremely wicked to destroy more of those that we have, even if the geopolitical fashion of the moment has led to them being dubbed "rogues."

- For interventions in smaller countries where violence is the work of poorly armed militias, the United States should support the creation of a small but permanently available UN force, the deployment of which should be the decision of the UN Security Council, and subject to the veto of the permanent members.

- The US armed forces, the State Department, and USAID should jointly draw up contingency plans for a range of countries where the United States may be called upon to intervene in the future.

- The same US institutions should develop a permanent cadre of military officers and civilian officials specially trained and tasked with the administration, policing, and development of occupied territories.

- Any US-led intervention must involve a public commitment to remain in the country involved (subject to the wishes of its own government and people) for as long as is necessary to lay the bases for stability and growth.

- If it intervenes in a given country, the United States must take the lead in drawing up and funding viable development plans for that country with a time frame not of a few years, but of a generation at least.

- Political strategies need to be carefully tailored to the country concerned. It is obvious, for example, that what was appropriate for Afghanistan did not work in Iraq, and neither model applies to Lebanon. In some cases, an outside intervention should lead to the rapid introduction of a democratically elected government. However, almost by definition, failed states are likely to be deeply divided, to lack the bases of modern democratic society, or both. The important priorities therefore are likely to be development and ensuring that the fruits of that development are distributed equitably through society, both to the mass of the population and to the different ethnic and religious groups making up the population. A mixture of guaranteed ethnic power-sharing and mild authoritarianism may be more appropriate in these cases.

- The overwhelming emphasis in American strategy should be on prevention. Once we have extricated ourselves from the Iraqi debacle, this will require a radical shift of spending from the US military to US development and humanitarian aid. At present, the United States is spending some 20 times more on fighting wars than on preventing them.

- Congress and the administration should work together to provide vastly increased funding for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). In order to mobilize the necessary political support, this should be directed especially to countries and projects that are important to the war on terror.

- American leaders and citizens need to conceptualize US aid in the Muslim world today in the same terms that the Truman and Eisenhower administrations thought of aid to Western Europe in the late 1940s, and East and Southeast Asia in the 1950s and 1960s: not as "charity," but as an essential part of America's national security strategy.

- A permanent contingency fund should be created, of not less than $1 billion, to help countries in imminent danger of collapse or undergoing transitions from conflict.

- The United States should enormously increase the development aid that it gives to failing states, so as to try to prevent them from failing in the first place and needing international intervention. This effort should be brought up to the level that the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon administrations invested in helping countries in Europe and East Asia during the Cold War. A new department should be created, under a cabinet-level officer, to administer these programs.

- However, since US resources are not unlimited, these new efforts should be restricted to countries whose collapse is likely to create direct threats to the United States. They should be accompanied by the maximum possible diplomatic effort to mobilize assistance from other wealthy states.

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The issue of failed and failing states is one of the principal challenges facing the United States in the first part of the 21st century. As the US National Security Strategy of 2002 correctly noted, "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones."

One failed state, Afghanistan, incubated the terrorist movement that carried out the attacks of 9/11, and after the US-led international intervention, has become the world's largest producer of heroin. The inability of the Lebanese government and armed forces to control the Hezbollah militia and prevent its attacks on Israel sparked another major conflict in the summer of 2006. Other Muslim countries in a similar condition may become future bases for terrorism, thereby posing a very serious threat to US security and American lives. Moreover, states often fail in circumstances of savage internecine violence and atrocities against civilians that are a reproach to the conscience of mankind, and a blot on America's record as the world's only superpower.

So although given the US record of military intervention, it is strongly desired that the United States never carries out another one. Unfortunately, this may not be possible for several reasons. First, the United States may be attacked again as it was on 9/11, or it may face a genuinely serious threat of this. Just because the Bush administration has invented or exaggerated such threats in recent years does not mean that they may not become real in the future.

Second, there may well be new cases of genocide in small countries like Rwanda where this would be relatively easy to stop. The Rwanda genocide, and its more than 700,000 deaths, could have been prevented by quite small numbers of international troops, either including US forces or backed by US logistical support. In recent years, the word *genocide* has often been greatly overused, and extended from genuine but very rare cases like Rwanda to other conflicts that though ugly, fall far short of the attempted extermination of a people. But cases of true genocide may alas recur, and will bring with them a moral imperative to intervene.

Third, and this is more long-term, relates to the threat of global warming, If majority scientific opinion is correct, then the next decades will see drastic changes to the climate of many parts of the world, including some of the world's poorest and most heavily populated. These will include the flooding of certain areas and the desertification of others, and will place intense pressure on often fragile states—Bangladesh and Pakistan being the most obvious examples. If these states collapse, then the result will be uncontrollable movements of refugees that will first overwhelm great regional states like India, and then possibly even the West. The effectiveness of local states in meeting these challenges is therefore (after action against global warming itself) the world's first line of defense against this potential cataclysm.

Of course, international intervention in a failing state should only be the last option. Vastly preferable in every way is to mobilize effective US and international development assistance to prevent the given state from failing in the first place. Given the threat to vital US interests of Islamist terrorism and revolution, US-led efforts should be focused first and foremost on countries in the Muslim world. They will need to involve not only increased assistance but also greatly increased thought about how to apply such assistance in countries with weak and corrupt state apparatuses. This needs to include a new and more realistic mixture of attitudes and policies toward the question of democracy-building—something that I have called "developmental realism."

The United States needs to treat this issue with the same mixture of urgency and enlightened generosity with which the United States went to the assistance of states menaced by communism during the Cold War. Indeed, given the way in which the US administration, political establishments, and media continually emphasize the dangers to the United States from Islamist extremism, there should be no real question about this.

In fact, however, US assistance remains quite pitiful compared to the sums that it was willing to spend during the Cold War; this is true even in countries like Pakistan, which are universally recognized to be both in serious danger of ultimately failing and to be of absolutely critical importance in the "war on terror." Mobilizing the US public and the political elites behind

new development efforts is therefore an essential part of any US strategy concerning the issue of failing states.

History

In the past, most states that failed did so because they were conquered by their neighbors. In the present age, most do so because they should never have been created in the first place. In most of Africa and certain parts of Asia, the Western colonial empires created and left behind artificial political units that were put together out of radically disparate elements with no precolonial history of belonging to the same country.

The borders of these states, in consequence, often follow no ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical, economic, or even geographical logic. They are simply the result of deals at particular times between various imperial powers. This is true not only of Africa but of several of the leading states of the Middle East, like Iraq. Even some countries that were ostensibly independent of imperial rule, like Afghanistan, can turn out on closer inspection to have been the product less of domestic processes than of imperial deals, and to have been created essentially as the dependency of one or other colonial power.

It may well be therefore that in some cases, if the countries concerned have already collapsed, we should not make excessive attempts to hold them together in the face of really determined local resistance. This is in effect already our policy in Kosovo. In Iraq and the Southern Caucasus, we may have to accept that existing de facto partitions are permanent; and in the future, this may be true of much of sub-Saharan Africa. Such state breakups are highly undesirable, if only because they usually take place amidst massive bloodshed. On the other hand, they have often occurred in the past, and been accepted by the international community (as with the partition of British India), so perhaps we should not take them too tragically.

The situation is much worse when, in addition to this crushing drawback of artificiality, the populations concerned are tribal peoples with no pre-colonial history of statehood, even of the kind that existed in early modern or medieval Europe and East Asia. In a good many cases, societies have had to try to undertake processes in the course of a few decades that in Europe took millennia, quite apart from the sometimes shattering effects of colonial rule itself. It is hardly surprising that so many fail.

It is also very important to recognize that while the idea of state-building through outside intervention has a certain validity, "nation-building" by the action of another nation is virtually a contradiction in terms. State institutions can be created, at least on paper, quite quickly. Creating common national identities, allegiances, and cultures are an immensely long and complex process, which in most cases has taken many hundreds of years. Even in the case of the successful states that have emerged from colonialism, like India or Malaysia, one frequently finds an old basis in local statehoods, religious networks and identities, or both.

Even less promising from the point of view of outside interventions is that the creation of successful countries in the colonial world was a dialectical process, a combination of the creation of colonial institutions and local nationalist mobilization against those institutions. Leaving aside its ancient historical roots, modern Indian democracy is the joint product, during the 50 or so years before independence, of the British introduction of representative institutions and of the Indian National Congress's revolt against British rule, carried out by (mostly) peaceful and democratic means.

If either of these elements had been lacking, or—as in Africa—had appeared only in the few years before independence, then India would not be a democracy today, and might well not even be a united state. Obviously, however, it is impossible to ask an outside interventionist force of today either to remain in a country for decades (or 200 years, in terms of British rule over parts of India) or deliberately to organize a radical opposition to its own presence.

Prevention: Developmental Realism

When it comes to dealing with state failure, prevention is obviously cheaper in every way than cure—in other words, we should do everything possible to prevent states from failing. The US military response to 9/11 has incurred direct and indirect costs that have dwarfed the entire US aid budget of the past decade.

The first task as far as the US government is concerned is better coordination. As the Hart-Rudman Commission on US National Security in the 21st century accurately remarked, “Responsibility for crisis prevention and response is dispersed in multiple USAID and State bureaus, and among State's Under-Secretaries and the AID Administrator. In practice therefore, no one is in charge.” It would be highly desirable, therefore, to create a new department headed by a cabinet-level official to administer all US development and aid activities, with a special mission to combat state failure and the sources of terrorism. This department would also be responsible for coordination with foreign and international aid agencies.

In dealing with failing states that have serious security implications for the United States, the work of this department should be co-coordinated with that of the departments of State and Defense and the CIA through the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC should be specially charged with giving the president early warning about the possible implications of state failure in particular countries.

Serious thought should be given to new forms of international cooperation. Criticizing the United Nations for its record in failed and failing states may seem churlish when the US record is even worse. Both need great improvement. It is also true that conferral of legitimacy by the United Nations can be of immense political help in certain circumstances. However, when it comes to co-coordinating and administering aid, the United Nations has often been extremely inefficient, while the proportion of its funds directed to paying its own staff is nothing short of scandalous (though completely in line with US practice).

So while the United States should continue to work closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and especially its Bureau of Crisis Response and Prevention, there may also be a case for creating a new international co-coordinating agency for development aid in crisis situations under the aegis of a much more limited number of politically and economically powerful states: either the G-8, expanded to take in China and India, or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The United States should also seek to work closely with regional economic organizations.

A central problem about helping failing states not to fail is that Western and international donor organizations are overwhelmingly geared either to providing aid directly to populations, in circumstances where the local state is effectively absent, or to working through local state institutions and officials. But in a failing state, it is precisely these institutions that are failing, and which through their kleptocracy are causing the state to fail. On the other hand, if the United States and donor organizations bypass local institutions, they may not only cause these institutions to decline further but also cause a furious local reaction led by disappointed members of the elites, and actually help to precipitate unrest and state collapse.

There is no universal formula for dealing with this issue: failing and fragile states differ enormously amongst themselves, and so too will the answers to their problems. For areas that are truly important to us, the only general solution is to build up a cadre of experts and practitioners who really understand the nature of each endangered country (and indeed province), and the differences between them.

This rule of the lack of universal rules applies equally to the political sphere. The Bush administration, the bipartisan US establishment, and many NGOs are now touting “democracy” and “civil society” as the universal answer. They associate this with improvement in what they call “governance.” But as the African expert Alex de Waal acutely remarked, “governance” as used in this context implies government without politics—an intellectual absurdity: “To govern is to choose.”

Thus anticorruption campaigns that seem on paper absolutely justified both morally and politically may have severe effects on local patronage networks and produce severe and unpredictable political results. Moreover, if international donors try to insist on standards of governance that are too strict, in failing and endangered states they will never be able to distribute any aid at all. The approach of the British aid ministry Department for International Development (DFID) is to seek “good enough” governance, not to make radical

improvement a condition of increased aid; and this seems very sensible.

In some ways, the war on terror resembles the Cold War, which was also fought as much within states as between them, and in which the battle against a revolutionary ideology was critical. This involved strengthening states, societies, and economies to resist communism. The criteria not only for democracy but also for governance was often very relaxed, if the country concerned was seen as an anti-communist ally.

This led to a number of abominable cases of support for kleptocratic regimes like that of Mobutu in Zaire. However, one should not forget that if ultra-strict standards now being proposed in the United States today had been applied then, the United States would not have been able to give substantial amounts of aid to South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, or Malaysia in the 1960s and 1970s—and thanks in part to that aid, these became spectacular economic success stories and, in the first two cases at least, eventually developed stable democracy.

Too often "democracy," like "governance," is treated as an abstract commodity; as if, in a given case, it did not lead to concrete results regarding power and patronage. Thus in Pakistan today, the concrete result of a return to "democracy" without military control would most probably be the return to power of either the Pakistan People's Party or the Muslim League—both of which were responsible for dreadful levels of corruption and misgovernment in the 1990s. Democracy *can* in certain circumstances bring improved government to weak and failing states, but there is no inevitability about the process. It is not doing so in much of Africa, and did not do so in Russia in the 1990s. One of the most disastrously corrupt and violent societies on earth, Papua New Guinea, has a thoroughly democratic system of government, created by (and for a long time supervised by) neighboring Australia.

In societies threatened by civil strife, the advocates of democracy as a short-term solution tend to ignore that democracy involves winners and losers—and in political systems and political cultures where a mixture of patronage and family prestige are the building blocs of political society, it may be that the last thing you want is clear-cut winners and losers. In such societies, a relatively mild authoritarianism that distributes the fruits of patronage relatively evenly among different competing groups may be vastly preferable.

The Bush administration's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), though very welcome and farsighted in principle, is gravely hampered by the difficulty that countries have in qualifying, given these strict criteria. Moreover, like all too many US aid initiatives, the MCA is miserably underfunded. As of 2006, only $1.5 billion in new aid has been approved under the MCA—not sufficient to make a serious difference to even one large Muslim country.

To continue the Cold War comparison, it is worth recalling the levels of aid that the Truman and Eisenhower administrations were prepared to spend in order to fight communism: The Marshall Plan cost roughly $120 billion in 2006 dollars. Total US aid to Europe in the 1940s (including separate programs for Greece and Turkey) came to almost $267 billion. A similar sum was spent over the next two decades in aid to East and Southeast Asia.

These are figures that are absolutely fabulous by the standards of today. Unfortunately, it seems impossible that any US administration today could mobilize comparable figures. Therefore—sadly but inescapably—we must concentrate our aid on countries like Pakistan and Chad, which combine two features: a real risk that they will sooner or later fail and a real risk that if they do, all or part of them will fall under the control of extremists bitterly hostile to the United States.

Pakistan, with its grossly unequal landowning structures and deeply entrenched, exploitative, and corrupt landowning elites, also illustrates the need for development aid to be linked to radical social reform. The Truman-Eisenhower generation was also rightly convinced that to work in the struggle against communism, development had to be reasonably equitable: that it had to embody real elements of social justice, and visibly spread the benefits of economic growth to the mass of the population. In consequence, the US military government of Japan implemented radical land reforms,

and the United States also insisted on land reform in South Korea and Taiwan as a condition of its aid to those countries.

Given that now, as then, the intention of US aid is largely political, it is also essential that a large proportion of it takes forms that will quickly create visible benefits for large numbers of ordinary people, above all in the form of jobs. This should lead to an emphasis on building infrastructure. In environmentally threatened countries like Pakistan, this could involve above all the creation of new and more efficient systems of water conservation and distribution through labor-intensive construction projects.

Unfortunately, since the end of the Cold War these aspects of development have been eclipsed by the radical free market orthodoxies of the "Washington Consensus," with disastrous results for the establishment of stable democracy in Russia, Latin America, and elsewhere. We urgently need to revive this older and wiser approach as part of our struggle with revolutionary Islamist extremism—for like the Communists, these forces too gain much of their strength from appeals to feelings of economic injustice and deprivation.

It is essential that such strategies be pursued consistently over decades, and not be subject to short-term changes as a result of Western domestic politics. For while stable and successful middle classes are an essential foundation of democracy, a range of disastrous historical experiences shows that middle classes who achieve a certain prosperity and status only to lose it again can be the most dangerous political group of all.

Intervention: Legal and Rare

The US record of military intervention and subsequent state-building is not a happy one. The oft-cited examples of the US occupations of Germany and Japan after the Second World War can be discounted. These countries bore no resemblance to the kind of places where the United States may have to intervene in the future. The United States did not have to build successful capitalism there: Germany and Japan had been the most successful modern economies in Europe and Asia respectively. The United States did not have to build a modern state apparatus: it inherited legions of highly trained, efficient, and honest bureaucrats. It did not have to build constitutional and democratic awareness from scratch: before they fell under the sway of fascism, both Germany and Japan had been constitutional states. And most importantly, the United States did not have to create a united national identity: the process of nation-building had been accomplished long ago by these nations themselves.

One may also discount the examples of Bosnia and Kosovo, for although the US military effort was crucial in both cases to defeating the Serbian forces, thereafter the great bulk of the financial and administrative tasks of reconstruction were assumed by the European Union (EU)—because these are European territories on the EU's doorstep. It is extremely unlikely that the EU will be able or willing to mobilize comparable efforts to help rebuild countries far from Europe's shores. Moreover, many years after the wars ended, Bosnia remains effectively divided and Kosovo remains extremely unsettled, with serious dilemmas hanging over its future.

Elsewhere, the US record has varied from the bad to the disastrous. Haiti is not in a state of civil war, but remains a bitterly divided, utterly impoverished, and extremely violent basket case that would probably collapse again if UN forces were withdrawn. In Lebanon in 1983, US (and French) troops themselves became the target of one of the combatant groups, leading to increased violence and a hasty withdrawal. The same was true in Somalia in 1993.

Somalia remains a nonstate, divided between Islamist forces and various tribal militias. Lebanon subsequently made a good recovery, and eventually—with strong US and French backing—succeeded in 2005 in gaining the removal of Syrian forces from its soil. Before it could make any serious effort at dealing with the issue of disarming and integrating Hezbollah, however, it fell victim to a savage campaign of Israeli reprisal that at the time of writing seems likely to turn it back into a failed state, and which the United States has done nothing to prevent.

After a number of years in which post-Taliban Afghanistan seemed to be proceeding satisfactorily,

2005-2006 has seen a distinct regression, with development faltering and the Taliban making a comeback in many areas. Poppy cultivation and heroin production have soared since 2001, and now account for more than half of Afghanistan's real GDP. The entire administrations of many provinces are controlled by drugs traders, as is much of the central government.

While the president and parliament have been elected, there are no democratic elections at the provincial or local levels, so that ordinary Afghans do not truly experience democracy. Moreover, the president is widely seen as a puppet whose election was the work of the United States, and who has no control over the actions of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. This impression has been worsened by increasing numbers of civilians being inadvertently killed in US bombing raids, and well-publicized cases of the torture and murder of Afghan prisoners by US troops.

As to by far the largest US military intervention, in Iraq, that country was not a failing state when the United States invaded, but has failed as a result of the US attack, resulting in serious US casualties and horrendous Iraqi ones. According to recent reports by senior US and British officials, it may now be too late to prevent that country from disintegrating into full-scale civil war and eventual partition. The colossal drain of the Iraq conflict on US (and to a lesser extent British) manpower and resources has for the moment made it much more difficult even to think of more interventions and wars.

Elsewhere, while atrocious conflicts in failed and failing states have occurred from Southeast Europe through Africa to Southeast Asia, most of these have faced Washington only with a moral claim. They have not posed a direct threat to American security or American vital interests; and so, for better or worse, the great majority of such claims has gone unanswered by the United States, and is likely to go unanswered in the future.

As in recent years, however, the United States may lend logistical and political support to other countries that wish to intervene. This can be the former colonial power, as in the case of Britain in Sierra Leone; a regional organization, like ECOWAS in Liberia; or simply a local state that feels a particular moral or political imperative to take the lead, as with Australia (sanctioned by the United Nations) in East Timor.

It would be highly desirable to create a relatively small (division-strength) permanent international standby force under the United Nations, that could be deployed to small countries like Rwanda in order to prevent conflicts there from spiraling out of control and becoming genocidal. It is sometimes objected that this is impossible, because the permanent members of the UN Security Council (including the United States) would never agree. That is why a strict rule should be established that such a force could only be used with the approval of all five permanent members of the Security Council. Both this and the force's small size would reassure the United States and the other members that the force could never be used against them or their allies, but only in places like Rwanda and Liberia where none had vital interests involved.

When it comes to future imperatives for US intervention rooted in strategic calculations and fears, then outside of Central America and the Caribbean, the overwhelming majority of these are likely to come from parts of the Muslim world; for there, the United States is faced not only with the threat that failed states will be colonized by Islamist terrorist organizations but that they will be penetrated by the influence of neighboring countries that the United States—rightly or wrongly—regards as enemies and has defined as “rogues.”

Tragically, as a result of the Iraq war and the US-sanctioned Israeli attack on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, US prestige in the Muslim world is in rags. According to respected US and international polling organizations, in the eyes of most Muslims, the United States has been made to appear simultaneously racist, hypocritical, cruel, and militarily ineffective. Any new US intervention in this region will stir up new hatred and probably attract a new flood of armed militant volunteers to fight the United States. The Lebanese conflict has also done new damage to America's relationship with the West Europeans, whose financial

assistance in the past has been essential to pay for several US interventions.

Future US military interventions in failing states therefore should be extremely rare. The only occasions for them should be the following: (1) when the United States has been directly attacked by forces based in those states—and not a generation ago (as with Hezbollah in Lebanon) but in the immediate past and (2) when a true genocide is occurring, as in the case of Rwanda or Cambodia—not the brutal but much more limited military campaigns to which this name has been attached, like Chechnya or Darfur. Finally, they should take place when states in the Caribbean or Central America have failed or are likely to fail, since this is an area that borders on and directly affects the United States itself, and for which the United States through repeated (and sometimes disastrous) actions in the past has assumed a heavy moral and historical responsibility.

Even in these cases, however, the United States should whenever possible support actions by regional or local forces rather than intervening itself. This it has done with some success in the cases of the international humanitarian interventions in East Timor and Liberia, where it (belatedly) supported Australia and Nigerian-led African forces respectively.

In the case of Muslim countries that have fallen into civil war, and where one side in that war is clearly aligned with Islamist extremism, the United States may have no choice but to support the other side in that war with arms and money. This could be the case in the future with regard to the militant "Islamic Courts" movement in Somalia and its tribal enemies. On the one hand, there is no doubt from its published propaganda that the Somali Islamists are close to Al Qaeda, spiritually and perhaps militarily. On the other hand, as the example of 1992-1993 shows, it would be disastrous for the United States itself to invade Somalia. Washington may therefore have no choice but to support local proxies, even when—as was also the case with the anti-Taliban warlords in Afghanistan—these are in many ways extremely repulsive.

When possible, it is desirable that all interventions, whether by the United States itself or US-backed, should receive the sanction of the UN Security Council. However, this need comes a long way second to the need for the approval or at least acquiescence of a majority of regional states. The first adds international legitimacy. The second is critical to the success of the intervention itself, and still more importantly to dealing with the prolonged instability and conflict that is likely to follow.

This can be seen from a comparison of the Kosovo and Iraq wars. Much has been made of the fact that neither received in advance the sanction of the United Nations; but this misses the point. The Kosovo war was a war in Europe, and was supported by both the main European organizations, the European Union and NATO; by all the major European states except Russia; and by the great majority of European countries. The practical benefits were obvious. During the war, Serbia was cut off from international help. Because Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria all supported the United States, Russian hard-liners were unable to help the Serbs. In the years of very difficult state-building that have followed, none of the states neighboring Kosovo (except, of course, for Serbia) has had an interest in disturbing the situation there.

The contrast with Iraq could hardly be starker. The US war was opposed by most governments and the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the region. Iran was tacitly supportive (as it had been in the overthrow of the Taliban), but Washington has wantonly thrown away this advantage in the years that followed. As a result, volunteers and supplies have flowed in to help the Iraqi insurgents, while neighboring states have either turned a blind eye or even helped in the process. In this respect, the US intervention in Iraq resembled the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1989: in such regional circumstances, almost any intervention would have been bound to fail.

Where the United States does conduct a military intervention, it is essential that the State Department, USAID (or the new department that this brief has recommended), and the Defense Department jointly work out in advance a detailed plan for state-building and reconstruction. The lack of this in the cases of both Iraq and Afghanistan is now well known. It had

disastrous results in Iraq, and in the long run may well be seen to have crippled our efforts in Afghanistan as well.

However, once the plan is made, it is desirable that the actual work on the ground be conducted chiefly by special cadres from the US military and the intelligence services. This recommendation flies in the face of most contemporary thinking, but is well founded in recent experience. Only an insignificant handful of US diplomats and even of USAID officials has any experience of working on the ground in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, or Muslim Africa. Indeed, across most of the Muslim world, they are pinned in their embassies behind fortress-like antiterrorist defenses, meeting only people from the tiny local English-speaking elites. They also wholly lack intellectual background in the requisite disciplines like social anthropology and the history of religion.

US soldiers and marines also lack this background, but as a result of the past five years in Afghanistan and Iraq, they have something much more important: intensive practical experience on the ground, of everything from building roads and schools to mediating between rival warlords, tribes, and ethno-religious groups. Equally important, they are prepared by training and ethos to face hardship and danger—something that cannot be said of most Western diplomats or even aid officials. The days when a US officer could declare that "we don't do operations in places where dysentery is a way of life" are, we must hope, now over. The United States in this regard needs to take a leaf from the books of the old British and French empires in India and North Africa. The political services of those empires were drawn overwhelmingly from former or serving military officers, and with good reason.

Where the United States is directly involved, even with UN backing, the use of US military cadres in this way is also preferable to the employment of UN personnel. The reason for this is longstanding, but has been harshly revealed again by the experience of East Timor. Under the UN-led program in that country, an annual figure amounting to some $233 for every East Timorese was provided to that country—more than four times the average per capita for post-Taliban Afghanistan. The problem is that according to reliable estimates around half of this sum actually went to the salaries of UN staff, many of whom were doing jobs that should have been left to the Timorese themselves.

The result was not only to squander the aid but to create an artificial boom among the locals serving the United Nations (drivers, servants, translators, mistresses), which collapsed when the UN mission was wound down after 2003. The same phenomenon can be seen to a lesser extent in the post-Taliban city of Kabul, and indeed wherever international agencies are present in a poor country. The United Nations, however, is especially susceptible to this because of the huge number of officials from poor countries that it is forced, by its nature, to employ and reward.

The US operation in Iraq, on the other hand, has proved shockingly vulnerable to corrupt practices on the part of major US corporations like Halliburton. It is essential in the future that a close watch be kept on the whole process of contracting for such operations—something that will be much easier to do if they are planned carefully and in detail well in advance. This requires a restrengthening of congressional oversight of the activities of the executive branch.

Conclusion

Given that failing states come in such different forms, it is impossible to lay down fixed general rules for dealing with them or intervening in them. In fact, as far as intervention is concerned, the only general rules are: (1) if there is any possible alternative, don't and (2) never do so against the will of the region concerned. So the overwhelming emphasis in American strategy should be on prevention. Once we have extricated ourselves from the Iraqi debacle, this will require a radical shift of spending from the US military to US development and humanitarian aid. For it is practically as well as morally grotesque that at present, the United States is spending some 20 times more on fighting wars than on preventing them.

Arguments for US intervention are often couched in the language of morality. It is worth pointing out in conclusion, therefore, that there is often a morally odious disconnect between this kind of rhetoric and real moral commitment on the part of US politicians and others who use it. When you invade and occupy a

country, you take *responsibility* for it and for the promises you made to its people. No US administration that had a real sense of responsibility for Afghanistan could possibly have neglected that country—only a few months after its liberation from the Taliban—in order to pursue war with Iraq. No administration that truly had Afghanistan's interests at heart could possibly today be pursuing a gratuitously hostile course toward Iran, which has ruled or influenced Afghanistan for 2,500 years and will have a critical role to play in its future.

But in truth, this is not just the fault of the Bush administration. All too soon after the Taliban fell, all too many of the Western politicians, commentators, and activists who had pledged their support to that country had hopped on to more newsworthy issues: to the questions of war with Iraq, or Iran, or helping Darfur, or condemning Russia over Chechnya, or supporting the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or whatever. Afghanistan fell from the center of America's attention, and from the news—until it came back into the news again, for reasons that are tragic and that should have been completely predictable. This raises a key issue of ethics: we are not responsible for Darfur. We do not rule Sudan, and we did not create the crisis there. We are responsible for Afghanistan, and any other country in which we intervene.

The United States may well not be able to "stay the course" in Iraq; it should never have invaded in the first place, and the country itself may no longer be worth saving. It must certainly try hard to stay the course in Afghanistan. But above all, a US administration must never again intervene in another country unless it is truly convinced that it and the American people are prepared to stick with that country to the end. ■

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