

NATION-BUILDING AND COUNTERINSURGENCY
AFTER IRAQ

JAMES F. DOBBINS

A CENTURY FOUNDATION REPORT

THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

HEADQUARTERS: 41 East 70th Street, New York, New York 10021 ♦ 212-535-4441

D.C.: 1333 H Street, N.W., 10th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005 ♦ 202-387-0400

www.tcf.org

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author. Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Century Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Copyright © 2008 by The Century Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Century Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone observing the American occupation of Iraq could be forgiven for thinking that it was the first time that the United States had attempted an operation of this nature. From the moment Saddam's statue was toppled, the intervention faced one unanticipated challenge after another, resulting in a succession of hastily improvised responses.

In fact, this was not the first, but the seventh time in little more than a decade that the United States had helped to liberate a society and then tried to rebuild it. In 1991, an American-led coalition freed Kuwait. In 1992, U.S. troops went into Somalia; in 1994, into Haiti; in 1995, into Bosnia; in 1999, into Kosovo; and in 2001, into Afghanistan. All of these societies except Haiti are Muslim. Thus, when American troops entered Iraq in 2003, no military in the world had more nation-building experience. No Western military in the world possessed more recent experience operating within a Muslim society.

How, one might well ask, could the United States engage in postwar reconstruction so often, and yet, in this instance, do the job so poorly? The answer has a lot to do with the rapid growth in nation-building activity following the end of the cold war, the controversy that came to surround this activity in the 1990s, and the consequent failure, until very recently, to regard nation-building as an important national competence to be maintained and fostered from one mission to the next.

FROM GERMANY TO THE BALKANS

The term "nation-building" has come to connote the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to promote enduring peace and establish a representative government.¹ In the decades following World War II, the U.S. military took justifiable pride in the reconstruction efforts it had overseen in Germany and Japan. These two occupations have since become the gold standard for nation-building, as they achieved levels of enduring political and economic

reform that have not been equaled since. Germany, of course, was a Western country with substantial democratic experience, surrounded by other Western, democratic countries, and rapidly integrated in democratically based regional arrangements such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Community. Japan enjoyed few of those advantages, yet its transformation went more quickly and smoothly than that of Germany, if perhaps a bit less deeply. Both societies were quite homogenous, and both had already developed advanced economies.

The expertise developed by American officials in these early postwar years was largely dissipated over succeeding decades, during which there was little full-scale nation-building. Throughout the cold war, American military interventions were either undertaken in the midst of ongoing, full-scale wars, as in Korea and Vietnam,² or rather short-lived, as in the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, Grenada, and Panama. The overarching imperative of American policy throughout these years was to *maintain a global equilibrium with the Soviet Union* without allowing any local dispute to escalate to the level of East-West confrontation. Local conflicts were thus either frozen, or allowed to simmer as proxy wars, but were seldom definitively resolved, particularly when such a resolution might advantage one superpower or the other. Berlin, Germany, Europe, Palestine, Cyprus, Korea, and China all remained divided. American or United Nations troops were used to maintain all of these divisions, that is, to prevent the underlying disputes from being resolved. Peacekeeping, throughout this period, consisted largely of separating combatants, patrolling ceasefire lines, and freezing conflicts, not resolving them. And even as the more serious flash points were frozen in this manner, many lower-level conflicts were conducted through East-West proxy wars in places such as Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan,³ which burned on for decades.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, it became possible to secure international mandates, assemble broad coalitions, and employ armed force to do more than simply freeze conflicts and police ceasefires. International military interventions became more frequent and more ambitious in scope. The United Nations, which since its creation in 1945 had been launching an average of one new peacekeeping operation every four years, began to organize several new military interventions every year. The United States, which had intervened

perhaps once per decade throughout the cold war, sent its troops into Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo within a single decade.

These troop commitments were cumulative, many missions lasting half a decade or more. Thus by 2003, the United States was manning four nation-building efforts, in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, while the United Nations has had to sustain up to nearly two dozen peacekeeping operations simultaneously.

The scope of these post-cold war operations also expanded. No longer were peacekeepers simply monitoring truces and policing ceasefire lines. Now they were disarming combatants; demobilizing armies; building new military, police, and judicial establishments; holding elections; and helping to rebuild economies.

As the frequency, scope, and cost of these operations grew exponentially, so did the controversy surrounding them. American taxpayers found themselves footing all the bills for U.S. operations and 25 percent of those by the United Nations. Many of the early post-cold war missions succeeded, but the failures, notably in Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, attracted far greater attention. The result was a mounting congressional and public reaction. “Nation-building” became a term of opprobrium. The U.S. military sought to redefine its responsibilities for the conduct of such operations as narrowly as possible, eschewing all tasks that were not strictly military in character.

Perhaps because of such criticism, American performance in the conduct of such missions gradually improved. Starting from the low base of Somalia, each of the Clinton administration’s successive interventions was better organized than the one that preceded it. The 1994 intervention in Haiti met all its immediate objectives but was sustained too briefly to be of lasting value. In 1995, NATO stopped the civil war in Bosnia, and four years later it halted ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. By then the same officials had organized four successive operations. Not surprisingly, they were gradually becoming more proficient.

AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

Unfortunately, this improved competence did not carry over to the new administration. The Clinton administration had failed to embed the new capabilities needed for these missions into the permanent bureaucracy, and its successors showed little inclination to pick up where the Clinton team had left

off. Nation-building had become quite controversial, and many in the incoming administration had bought into the general criticism. George W. Bush entered office openly disdainful of nation-building: “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nation-building,” candidate Bush said in his October 11, 2000, debate with Vice President Al Gore. “The American military is not a civilian police force. It is not a political referee. It is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society,” wrote Condoleezza Rice in the January 2000 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

Ironically, the pace of American intervention actually picked up during Bush’s first term, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the reentry of American troops into Haiti in 2004. The latter mission was quickly turned over to the United Nations. In Afghanistan and Iraq, however, the Bush administration found itself saddled with two of the largest and most difficult efforts at postwar reconstruction since the end of the German and Japanese occupations. If the new administration came to nation-building reluctantly, it was also determined to conduct these missions very differently from the approach favored by its predecessor.

Following its humiliating retreat from Somalia, the Clinton administration had embraced the doctrine of overwhelming force favored by the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell. In Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the United States and its allies had initially dispatched very powerful forces, the numbers of which were quickly scaled back once security had been established, potential sources of resistance neutralized, and reconstruction begun. The approach for economic assistance was similarly front-loaded. In Afghanistan and then Iraq, the Bush administration tried the reverse approach, starting small and reinforcing only when these initially inadequate efforts faltered.

In Afghanistan, international peacekeepers were deployed to the capital, Kabul, but nowhere else. American troops would continue to hunt down al Qaeda and Taliban remnants, but assume no responsibility for public safety. Security for the Afghan population was to be the exclusive responsibility of Afghan warlords and tribal militia, given that the country had no national army or police force. Economic assistance was equally stunted. Bosnia had received \$800 per inhabitant per year in foreign aid during the initial stages of its reconstruction. Afghanistan, in contrast, received only \$50 per person, of which perhaps \$20 came from the United States.

In defending what came to be called the low-profile, small-footprint approach to nation-building, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued that generous levels of foreign military manpower and economic aid had turned Bosnia and Kosovo into long-term wards of the international community, a fate the Bush administration was determined to avoid for Afghanistan and Iraq. The result, unfortunately, was quite the contrary. In Afghanistan, the refusal to deploy peacekeepers outside Kabul left both international aid workers and Afghan government officials largely confined to the capital, retarding reconstruction and leaving the newly installed president, Hamid Karzai, to be caricatured as no more than the mayor of Kabul. Meanwhile, the Taliban and other insurgent groups were reorganizing, resupplying, and recruiting, largely undisturbed in sanctuaries across the border in Pakistan. By 2004, when these groups began once again to operate more actively in southern and eastern Afghanistan, little had been done to secure or rebuild these border regions. As a result, their populations were uncommitted to the government and easy prey to insurgent appeals.

Initial plans for Iraq represented an even sharper departure from the best practices that had evolved over the previous decade. This was to be a full-fledged occupation, not an internationally mandated peace operation. Further, all civil as well as military reconstruction tasks were to be overseen by the Pentagon, not the Department of State or the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In effect, the administration was seeking to return to the practices of the 1940s, while ignoring the more recent, and perhaps more relevant, experience of the 1990s.

The decision to base America's initial postcombat presence in Iraq on the Laws of Armed Conflict rather than upon the U.N. Charter made an already controversial operation even more offensive in the eyes of the local population. For Americans, the concept of occupation may not sound too terrible. After all, Germany and Japan emerged rather well from the process. For Iraqis, and their neighbors, however, the term had a very different connotation. The only occupation they had ever heard of was the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and of that they had heard nothing good.

The administration also parted from modern practice by turning oversight for all civilian activities in Iraq to the Department of Defense, rather than the Department of State. The last time this had been done was in 1945, in Germany and Japan. Since then, civilian activities had generally been conducted by

agencies, under Department of State leadership. Thus, in Korea, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon (both in 1968 and 1983), Panama, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, an American diplomatic mission had supported American military interventions from their earliest days. President Bush's decision not to establish a diplomatic mission in Iraq, but instead to vest all political and economic aspects of reconstruction in the Department of Defense, was made only a few months before the invasion. This innovation imposed huge start-up costs upon an already daunting enterprise. The Department of Defense had no modern experience in the fields of political or economic development to draw upon, and little capacity to organize and staff a large civilian mission thousands of miles from home, something the Department of State does routinely, albeit seldom on the scale seen in Iraq. In the event, thousands of dedicated and courageous Americans flooded into Baghdad to assume responsibilities for which, in many cases, they had few qualifications. Half the positions within the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) were typically vacant at any one time, and the average stay was three months. Perhaps one position in six was filled by someone who had been there long enough to know what he or she was doing, and was not just about to leave. Given these obstacles, it is remarkable that the CPA achieved as much as it did.

The Bush administration eventually reversed these early minimalist approaches in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Two years after the fall of the Taliban, international peacekeepers began to be deployed beyond Kabul. NATO was invited in to take charge of this effort. American troop and aid levels were doubled, and then redoubled. In 2004, the United Nations was invited in to help form an interim government in Iraq. Subsequently oversight of political and economic reconstruction was returned to the Department of State.

By 2008, American performance had improved markedly, in both Afghanistan and Iraq. More sophisticated counterinsurgency tactics had been introduced, aid and troop levels had been increased, the roles of NATO and the United Nations had been expanded. These changes and reinforcements came too late in either case to forestall the renewal of civil war. In both cases, the rate of decline has been reduced, but it is too early to declare either effort as being on the road to success.

THE UNITED NATIONS EXPERIENCE

If Germany and Japan were America's introduction to modern nation-building, the 1961 intervention in the former Belgian Congo, a newly independent state that failed within days of its independence, was the United Nations's first experience with it. Over the next two years, U.N. peacekeepers mounted repeated offensives, fought pitched battles, suppressed several insurgencies, and left behind a united, if very poorly governed, country. Although comparatively successful, this mission had pitted the Security Council's permanent members against each other, proved costly and controversial, and nearly wrecked the United Nations. Thereafter, until the end of the cold war, the United Nations stuck to monitoring ceasefires and observing truces while avoiding any further missions that required the use of force in anything other than self-defense.

Throughout the 1990s, the United Nations, like the United States, engaged in a trial-and-error process of learning how to conduct the new, more demanding types of missions the international community was now requiring of it. Its first few forays into nation-building were surprisingly successful, as it helped broker and then oversee the end to long-running conflicts in Namibia, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Cambodia. These early successes created excessive optimism about what such sparsely resourced interventions could achieve. Soon the United States and other Security Council members were sending U.N.-hatted troops into situations where there was no peace to keep. Lightly armed blue-helmeted soldiers proved unable to halt clan warfare in Somalia, genocide in Rwanda, or civil war in the former Yugoslavia. By mid-decade, U.N. peacekeeping was in retreat, the number of missions down, the organization chastened, and public opinion highly critical. Yet the demand for such interventions persisted, and no other organization proved ready or willing to take on more than one or two of them. By decade's end, U.N. peacekeeping had been reinvented in a more robust form, with mandates and capabilities that went well beyond mere self-defense, although still short of the full-fledged peace enforcement practiced by NATO. In the early years of the current decade, U.N. administrators were governing Kosovo and East Timor, and U.N. troops were maintaining the peace in Haiti, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, and were back again in the Congo. As of this writing, the United

Nations had over 90,000 soldiers and police deployed in twenty-two countries, more than any other organization or combination of organizations, and second only to the United States in total numbers.

OTHER EMERGING CAPABILITIES

America's unwillingness, throughout the first half of the 1990s, to commit troops to peacekeeping in the Balkans led European governments to begin the development of a purely European capability for military intervention, organized through the European Union. The intent was not to compete with NATO, which would hardly be in Europe's interest, but to provide an alternative to that organization in those circumstances where the United States chose to opt out of collective action. The Clinton administration's eventual willingness to lead NATO peace-enforcement missions in Bosnia and later Kosovo was warmly welcomed but also underscored for European leaders how dependent they were upon the United States in the military sphere. When, in 2000, sectarian conflict broke out in Macedonia, Washington encouraged the European Union to take the lead in brokering the peace and helping to enforce it. In 2004 and 2006, the European Union conducted two relatively short-lived military interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in support of a larger U.N. peacekeeping mission. In 2005, the European Union took over peacekeeping duties in Bosnia from NATO, and in 2008 it deployed a peacekeeping force to Chad to contain the spill-over of conflict from neighboring Sudan. Each of these European-led missions has been competently run and, within their sometimes rather narrow frames of reference, successful.

Australia has become a regional leader in nation-building, heading two interventions in East Timor and one in the Solomon Islands. China and Japan, two countries that have in modern times generally avoided committing their troops abroad, have also begun contributing soldiers and police to U.N.-led operations (Japan in small numbers). China currently has over 1,700 soldiers deployed as U.N. peacekeepers, as compared to 11 for the United States.

The African Union and small sub-regional African organizations also have sought to conduct peacekeeping missions, with mixed results. African governments do not have the capacity or the resources needed to sustain such operations, and their efforts therefore must be almost entirely funded by Western donors. This

makes the United Nations both a cheaper and more capable alternative, since its missions enjoy a broader and more reliable funding base and its supervisory personnel are much more experienced in peacekeeping operations.⁴

Despite some spectacular failures, this growth in nation-building over the past two decades has contributed to a substantial decline in the number of conflicts worldwide and an even greater reduction in the casualties that result from them.⁵ Tens of millions of people are living at peace today, and mostly under freely chosen governments, in places such as Namibia, Mozambique, Cambodia, El Salvador, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, because U.N., NATO, European, or American-led peacekeepers were dispatched to separate combatants, disarm the contending factions, help restart the economy, hold elections, install the resultant governments, and stay around long enough to ensure the resultant regimes take hold.

Unfortunately, for every American who knows about these successes, there are a thousand who have watched *Blackhawk Down*, remember the Rwandan genocide, and see similar events in Darfur on their evening news.

PEACEKEEPING, PEACE ENFORCEMENT, AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

U.N.-led peacekeeping has proved the most cost-effective way to prevent the renewal of conflict in most societies emerging from civil war. Peacekeeping will not stop ongoing genocide, aggression, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, however. The United Nations does not do invasions. In circumstances where one or more parties are not ready to lay down their arms and permit the insertion of foreign troops, a forced entry, or threat thereof, may be needed. Where such is necessary, either a nationally led coalition or a standing alliance will need to execute this mission. This is what the United States did in Haiti, in 1994 and again in 2004, in both cases quickly turning the resultant peacekeeping operation over to the United Nations. This is what NATO did in Bosnia and Kosovo, employing air power and in the latter case the threat of invasion to bring the parties to the table. Similarly, in 1999 and again in 2005, Australia led U.N.-mandated interventions into East Timor, then immediately turned responsibility over to U.N. peacekeepers.

As these cases demonstrate, peace-enforcement missions can transition to peacekeeping, provided the intervening power acts quickly to suppress, deter, or co-opt all sources of violent resistance. Spoiler elements exist in opposition to any nation-building effort, determined to frustrate reforms being promoted by the intervening power. Successful peacekeeping requires that these elements be either deterred from taking up arms or co-opted into the newly emerging political and economic arrangements. When this does not occur, the peace-enforcement action morphs not into peacekeeping, but rather into counterinsurgency.

This is what happened in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, the American-led coalitions failed to establish a secure environment in which economic and political reform could go forward. There are several reasons for this failure. First of all, the Bush administration initially resisted the degree of international oversight and participation that earlier post-cold war nation-building missions had enjoyed and thus forwent the greater legitimacy that would have resulted from such an effort. Second, American leaders grossly underestimated the military manpower and economic-assistance levels required to establish a secure environment and launch a process of reconstruction. Third, and most fundamentally, the United States, having toppled the existing regimes, was loath to accept responsibility for maintaining public security. This failure gave spoiler elements time and space to organize, arm, and begin intimidating the local populace.

Counterinsurgency and peacekeeping missions are alike in requiring a high degree of integration between the civil and military components of an intervention directed toward promoting political and economic changes in the affected society. But counterinsurgency requires a quite different mix of external and indigenous capability. Peacekeeping is by definition a task accomplished by foreign forces in a society that has lost the capacity to secure itself. Foreign troops have often succeeded in securing an acquiescent and in many cases grateful population even in the complete absence of a functioning local government. Outside forces have a much harder time suppressing a well-entrenched local insurgency, however, and can seldom succeed unless they are acting in support of an increasingly capable and legitimate indigenous ally. Building local capacity is thus the ultimate objective for a peacekeeping mission, but an absolute prerequisite for success in counterinsurgency.

Throughout more than forty years of cold war, the United States engaged itself directly and substantially in only one counterinsurgency campaign, in Vietnam. The experience did not encourage repetition. Both before and after Vietnam, the United States confined itself to supporting indigenous actors. In some cases, such as Nicaragua, Angola, and Afghanistan, these were the insurgents. In others, such as the Philippines and El Salvador, these proxies were the counterinsurgents. It seems likely that the current experience in Iraq and Afghanistan will again impel the United States toward less direct and massive engagement in other people's civil wars.

NATION-BUILDING BEYOND IRAQ

The Bush administration has responded to early setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq by redoubling its efforts, and by taking nation-building more seriously. Indeed, the administration has embraced the mission with all the fervor of a new convert. The Pentagon has issued a directive making stability operations a core mission of the U.S. military, on a par with preparation for major combat operations. The Department of State has established an office for reconstruction and stabilization, the function of which is to create a doctrine for the civilian aspects of these missions, and build a cadre of experts to staff them. And President Bush has issued a directive establishing an interagency structure for managing future such operations.⁶ The presidential directive is similar to that which President Bill Clinton promulgated in 1998, but the Pentagon and Department of State actions represent serious new steps toward creating a professional capability in this field.

Other governments have taken similar actions. Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom have created units to help manage postconflict reconstruction along the lines of the new Department of State office. In New York, the United Nations has established the Peacebuilding Commission to help manage the transition from peacekeeping to sustainable development in postconflict societies. The European Union has concentrated heavily on building the capacity to deploy both military and civilian personnel in postconflict environments.

Congress has continued to regard nation-building with some skepticism, however. While the Bush administration's response to its initial failures in Afghanistan and Iraq may be a determination to do better next time, many

Americans' preference may be to avoid a next time altogether. As was the case after Vietnam, a "never again" reaction could well result in the United States turning away from such missions.

This would be unfortunate. If Iraq was a war of choice, and the choice a poor one, Afghanistan was neither. And both interventions left the United States with a heavy burden of postwar reconstruction. The still-increasing demands put on the United Nations to organize such missions are evidence that nation-building is far from unique to the United States.

One must hope that the American people learn two lessons from their engagement in Iraq. First, by all means, let us not again invade any large, hostile Middle Eastern state on the basis of unreliable intelligence with the support of a small, unrepresentative coalition. Let us by all means exercise more discretion regarding future interventions. But the pace of nation-building since 1989 suggests that the mission itself is often unavoidable. So, second, if we must become involved in nation-building, given its difficulty and expense, it is important that we learn to do it better. In particular, we need to learn, or relearn, how to transition peace-enforcement mission to peacekeeping, rather than counterinsurgency, by moving quickly in concert with the rest of the international community to deter or co-opt potential sources of violent resistance.

LEARNING THE BASICS OF NATION-BUILDING

The cold war ended almost twenty years ago. Over the intervening two decades, several dozen internationally mandated, multinationally manned military interventions have taken place with the object of halting conflicts and ensuring that they do not resume. Most of these have been successful. A growing body of literature has emerged identifying the best practices in such operations.

In evaluating the results of these missions, it is important to understand their true purpose. The international community does not employ armed force to make poor societies rich or authoritarian ones democratic. The overarching purpose of such interventions is to make violent societies peaceful. Development and democratization are important tools in this process, but they are not the most important metric of achievement. If the intervening authorities can depart, leaving behind a society at peace with itself and its neighbors, their mission must be regarded as a success.

Reconstruction is thus something of a misnomer in describing this process. Economic and political reforms are essential tools, but potential change of this sort needs to be evaluated against one basic criterion: Are they likely to decrease or increase the propensity for conflict within the society in question? In more-settled environments, social justice and economic growth may be pursued on their own merit. In a postconflict setting, the main objective of political and economic reforms is to redirect the competition for wealth and power that occurs in any society from violent into peaceful channels.

In any multinational military or civil/military operation, there is always some tension between the desire to maintain unity of command and the search for broad participation. Burden-sharing is important on several scores. First, broad participation increases the perceived legitimacy of the operation and reduces, if it cannot eliminate, resistance to the presence of foreign forces. Second, burden-sharing distributes both the manpower and monetary costs of any operation among the largest possible circle of contributors. Finally, broad participation provides the best prospect for constructively engaging regional actors who, if ignored, are likely to use their often powerful influence to undermine the operation.

If there is one lesson that the experience of the past two decades should have taught, it is the near impossibility of pulling together a failed state as long as its neighbors are determined to pull it apart. Adjoining states often have too much influence to be safely ignored, and too much at stake not to interfere. It is they, not we, who will get the refugees, the terrorists, the criminals, the endemic disease, and the economic disruption that are byproducts of state failure. So they will become involved, pick favorites, back one or another contending faction, and often exacerbate the disintegration they would like to stem. Only when their influence can be put at the service of broader international goals can it become constructive. This requires that they be engaged, that their legitimate interests be recognized, and that they be allowed to become part of the solution. One of the major flaws in the Bush administration's original project for Iraq was to believe that the United States could succeed in imposing reforms opposed by nearly all Iraq's neighbors, including not just Iran and Syria, but also our closest allies in the region, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

In any postwar mission, there is a hierarchy of military and civilian tasks that need to be performed. Those leading the intervention will need to:

- Establish a secure environment.
- Begin building down the army and building up the police force.⁷
- Begin addressing basic human needs for food, medical care, and shelter.
- Restore basic public services to include power, water, hospitals, schools, and sanitation.
- Reopen markets, resume domestic and international trade, stabilize the currency, and create an indigenous capacity to gather and spend revenue.
- Promote political reforms leading eventually to elections and the formation of a representative government.
- Initiate longer-term economic development, including the improvement of physical infrastructure.

These tasks are listed in priority order, but they are not necessarily sequential. Indeed, given adequate manpower and money, they may all take place simultaneously. It is essential to provide adequate resources to higher-level tasks before turning to the lower, however, since money spent on the latter will ultimately be wasted if the former are not adequately funded and manned.

There are agencies of the U.S. government, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and for-profit companies who know how to do all these things. Successful planning requires that the right mix of capabilities be assembled, funded, and fielded in the right order. Given the many nations, organizations, and interests normally involved, this task requires a high order of managerial competence and political leadership.

AGENDA FOR THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION

The Department of State has recently begun to organize a civilian reserve corps, members of which may be dispatched to staff future postwar operations. This is a worthwhile endeavor, but the more urgent need is for more active duty personnel with the right experience and willingness to serve in these missions. Everyone who has examined the requirements for postconflict reconstruction agrees that the largest deficiency is in civilian personnel and expertise. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has himself spoken about the need for larger budgets for the Department of

State and USAID. The latter agency is currently one-tenth of the size it was thirty years ago. Our military will continue to be called upon to undertake functions for which it is not equipped or trained in these postconflict environments until we rebuild the capacity of civilian agencies to assume these responsibilities.

For every stability operation the United States takes on, the United Nations leads a half dozen. These U.N.-led operations tend to be smaller, and usually operate in more permissive environments. On the other hand, these U.N. operations are also less well funded, often operating on a shoestring. Yet many of these missions are nevertheless quite successful, often leaving behind peaceful societies under representative governments. U.S. military and civilian personnel could learn a great deal from a deeper American participation in these operations. And anywhere the United Nations succeeds is one less place the United States might need to go on its own, or at the head of a multinational coalition, which is always a much more expensive option.

Nevertheless, the United Nations does not do invasions, and peacekeeping alone will not stop genocide, aggression, or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. U.N.-led operations can forestall the repetition of such events, but only much more robust and expensive peace-enforcement efforts can halt them in their tracks. U.N. peacekeeping should be the default option for the international community in dealing with threats to international security, but occasions will arise when only nationally led coalitions or full-fledged alliances such as NATO will be equal to the task.

A forthcoming RAND study of American presidential leadership going back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt reveals that some administrations have done better at such operations than others, but that all have gotten better over time.⁸ Unfortunately, this improvement is often not sustained from one presidency to the next, particularly when a change of party is also involved. These abrupt and sometimes disastrous declines in capacity occur not just because many presidents prove resistant to learning from their predecessors, but also because the United States, alone among developed nations, depends so heavily upon political patronage to staff the upper levels of its national security bureaucracy. In most modern governments, changes in administration lead to a few hundred officials exiting and entering. In the United States, tens of thousands of such shifts are involved.

The Bush administration offers a prime example both of the disinclination to learn from its predecessor, and the improved competence that comes over time. It

may never be possible to make up the ground lost in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early years of those missions, but the performance of American military and civilian personnel there has certainly improved of late, and the better results are evident, particularly in Iraq. The next administration should of course feel free to reevaluate and perhaps alter these commitments. It should not feel equally free to cast aside hard-won competencies achieved by American military and civilian agencies in the field of nation-building.

The next president should, accordingly, either retain the interagency structure for the management of such operations laid out in President Bush's Directive 44, or quickly replace it with new guidelines. The secretary of defense should reaffirm the current directive, making stability operations a core mission for the U.S. military. The Department of State should retain and seek adequate funding for its Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization. There are also reforms that will require both executive and legislative branch action.

First, the next administration should work with Congress to put in place a more enduring division of labor between the Department of Defense, Department of State, USAID, and the other civilian agencies in the conduct of nation-building missions. Over the past decade, many key activities have shifted wildly from one agency to another, leaving each department uncertain of its long-term responsibilities, and none inclined to make the investments needed to achieve fully professional performance. During the Clinton administration, for instance, the U.S. military did peacekeeping, narrowly defined, but left all other missions to the Department of State. The current administration reversed this arrangement in Afghanistan, where the U.S. military was precluded from doing any peacekeeping, but took many of the heretofore civilian nation-building tasks. Thus in the late 1990s, the American military did nothing but peacekeeping in such environments, and at the opening of the current decade it did everything but. In Iraq, the traditional division of labor was revised even further, when responsibility for overseeing political and economic development was taken from the Department of State and assigned to the Department of Defense.

No agency will invest in developing capabilities it may not need to deploy. As long as each successive president can make such sweeping changes in the missions of his or her cabinet agencies, none of them will become truly proficient in any of the affected functions. Only legislation can provide the degree of

assurance needed to encourage agencies, and their relevant congressional committees, to make the long-term investments needed to achieve professional levels of competence.

Second, the next administration and Congress should put in place a requirement for promotion into the senior executive and senior foreign service of any national security agency that all applicants must have served at least one tour in another agency, or on a multi-agency staff such as the National Security Council. Like the similar requirement for senior military officers to serve at least one tour outside their branch of service, such a rule would help foster a greater sense of “jointness” on an interagency level.

Third, Congress should pass legislation providing that some minimum proportion of sub-cabinet and White House staff positions be filled by career personnel. This would help reduce the abrupt drop in competence that often accompanies presidential transitions.

America’s military, national police, and intelligence services are already largely fenced off from politicization on the grounds that national security is too important to entrust to amateurs. The nation should seek the same standard of professionalism for the senior civilians who staff the Department of Defense and other national security agencies, including the National Security Council staff. It may have been neoconservative excesses that contributed to the current quagmire in Iraq, but well-meaning liberals are capable of the same sort of folly, as the late David Halberstam documented in *The Best and the Brightest*, his classic study of Vietnam War–era policymaking. Presidents should be surrounded by advisers of their own choice, but they should also be exposed to and able to lean upon professional staff, not insulated from them by layer upon layer of individuals appointed principally for their loyalty and service to a political party.

NOTES

1. The United Nations uses the term “peace-building” for this mission. The Bush administration labels it “stabilization and reconstruction.” Many scholars prefer to call it “state-building,” although that phrase is equally applied to assistance efforts that have no military component, whereas “nation-building,” in American parlance at least, normally involves the use of both military and civil instruments.

2. Korea was a conventional war followed by long-term American troop presence. Vietnam was an extended counterinsurgency campaign ending in a very short conventional war. In Korea, the development of a representative government was not a preeminent American objective and took several decades to achieve. In Vietnam, there never was an opportunity for postconflict reconstruction. Thus neither case entirely fits the post-cold war paradigm of nation-building as it emerged in the 1990s.

3. Afghanistan in the 1980s was a proxy war for the United States, but a direct engagement for the Soviet Union, whereas Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s was something of the reverse.

4. The forgoing discussion of U.S., U.N., and European approaches to nation-building draws on three RAND studies on the subject. James Dobbins et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to the Congo* (Santa Clara, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2003), looked at the U.S. record. James Dobbins et al., *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Clara, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005), compared the U.S. efforts to the U.N. way of nation-building. *Europe's Role in Nation-Building: From the Balkans to the Congo*, to be published by the RAND Corporation later in 2008, looks at the European record.

5. For a discussion of trends in conflict and resultant casualties, see *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* and *Human Security Brief 2006*, Human Security Centre, The University of British Columbia.

6. The Department of State created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization in July 2004. The Department of Defense issued the directive entitled “Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations” in November 2005. President Bush released National Security Directive 44, entitled “Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization,” a successor to the Clinton era Presidential Directive 56, which had been allowed to lapse in January 2001, in December 2005.

7. Most societies emerging from conflict will have too many soldiers and too few policemen. Disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating the former into civilian life, while recruiting and training the latter, are two of the most urgent priorities in any reconstruction effort.

8. James Dobbins et al., *After the War: Nation Building from FDR to George W. Bush* (RAND Corporation, forthcoming 2008).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES DOBBINS is the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation. He has held numerous Department of State and White House posts, including assistant secretary of state for Europe, special assistant to the president for the Western Hemisphere, special adviser to the president and secretary of state for the Balkans, and ambassador to the European Community. He has handled a variety of crisis management assignments as the Clinton administration's special envoy for Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and the Bush administration's first special envoy for Afghanistan. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he was designated as the Bush administration's representative to the Afghan opposition. He helped organize and then represented the United States at the Bonn Conference where a new Afghan government was formed. On December 16, 2001, he raised the flag over the newly reopened U.S. Embassy in Kabul. He is lead author of the three-volume *RAND History of Nation-Building* and *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*.

ABOUT THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

The Century Foundation sponsors and supervises timely analyses of economic policy, foreign affairs, and domestic political issues. Not-for-profit and nonpartisan, it was founded in 1919 and endowed by Edward A. Filene.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

H. Brandt Ayers	Richard C. Leone
Alan Brinkley, Chairman	Jessica Tuchman Mathews
Joseph A. Califano, Jr.	Alicia H. Munnell
Alexander Morgan Capron	P. Michael Pitfield
Hodding Carter III	John Podesta
Edward E. David, Jr.	Richard Ravitch
Brewster C. Denny	Alan Sagner
Christopher Edley, Jr.	Harvey I. Sloane, M.D.
Charles V. Hamilton	Theodore C. Sorensen
Matina S. Horner	Kathleen M. Sullivan
Lewis B. Kaden	Shirley Williams
James A. Leach	William Julius Wilson

Richard C. Leone, President