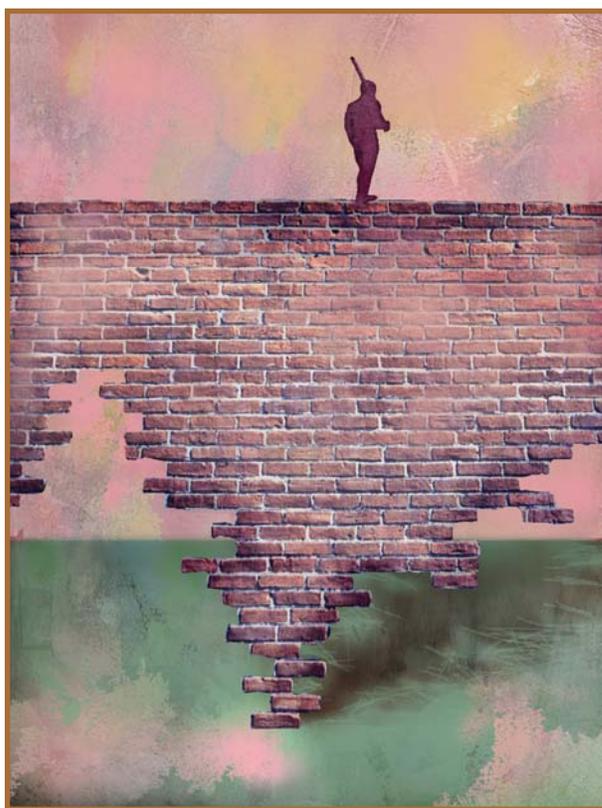


THE CASE AGAINST STATE'S NATIONBUILDING OFFICE



Clemente Boello

THE ARGUMENT THAT INSTABILITY IN ITSELF REPRESENTS A THREAT TO AMERICA AND THAT NATIONBUILDING MUST BE THE CURE IS DEEPLY FLAWED.

BY JUSTIN LOGAN AND CHRISTOPHER PREBLE

In July 2004, the State Department opened the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. The creation of the office, known as S/CRS, was inspired by a congressional resolution spearheaded by Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The resolution sought to “provide for the development, as a core mission of the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development, of an effective expert civilian response capability to carry out stabilization and reconstruc-

tion activities in a country or region that is in, or is in transition from, conflict or strife.”

The reasoning behind the office’s creation was put succinctly by Carlos Pascual, the first coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization, and Steven D. Krasner, director of the State Department’s policy planning staff: “Weak and failed states pose an acute risk to U.S. and global security.”

Although the idea of a nationbuilding office has broad bipartisan support, Congress refused to grant any funding for it in the foreign appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2006. Undeterred, the Bush administration sought creative ways to keep the office open, re-routing funds from other departments and agencies. The administration similarly plowed ahead with two new policy initiatives in support of the S/CRS mandate. In November 2005, the Department of Defense released a directive establishing that nationbuilding missions were a core function of the U.S. military; and in December, National Security Presidential Directive 44 placed the ultimate responsibility for stabilization and reconstruction missions with the State Department, specifically S/CRS.

Although Pascual departed S/CRS in January 2006, his replacement, John Herbst, was not announced until March, and did not take office until late May. Whether the time lapse reflects a lack of bureaucratic support or a search for the best person for the job is unclear. According to Pascual, S/CRS had requested roughly \$100 million for FY 2007. As of this writing, it appears that State’s failure to provide — as directed by Congress — “a comprehensive strategy, detailing how the [office] will utilize these funds to respond to international crises and post-conflict contingencies” may jeopardize the office’s funding in FY 2007, much as the funding was refused for 2006. Congress has historically been reluctant to issue blank checks to executive agencies, seeing such requests as encroachments on its spending power.

Still, S/CRS makes regular appearances in President Bush’s speeches about tools needed to address the foreign

Justin Logan is a foreign policy analyst and Christopher Preble is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.

***This entire approach
to security policy is a
recipe for squandering
American power, American
money and, potentially,
American lives.***

policy challenges facing the country, and fits neatly into Secretary Rice’s call for “transformational diplomacy.” Therefore, while the office may remain on shaky fiscal ground, the logic behind its creation shows no sign of having lost favor. That said, the arguments in favor of the office — namely, that instability in itself represents a threat to America and that nationbuilding must be the cure — are deeply flawed. Most nationbuilding

missions are far removed from U.S. national security interests. Such operations threaten to embroil Americans in an array of conflicts abroad for indefinite periods of time, with vague or ambiguous public mandates, and with little likelihood of success. In short, this entire approach to security policy is a recipe for squandering American power, American money and, potentially, American lives.

Here a Threat, There a Threat ...

The 2000 presidential election took place in the shadow of the nationbuilding adventures of the 1990s. Candidate George W. Bush seemed skeptical about the utility and necessity of nationbuilding. During the second presidential debate, Bush took a shot at the interventionism of the 1990s, stating, “I’m not so sure the role of the United States is to go around the world and say, ‘This is the way it’s got to be.’” Bush pointed to the high costs and dubious outcomes, stating, “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called nationbuilding. ... I mean, we’re going to have some kind of nationbuilding corps from America? Absolutely not.”

After Sept. 11, 2001, however, the Bush administration changed course dramatically. The U.S. National Security Strategy, released in September 2002, made “expand[ing] the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy” a central plank of America’s response to the 9/11 attacks. Part of the administration’s new security policy would be to “help build police forces, court systems and legal codes, local and provincial government institutions, and electoral systems.” The overarching goal was to “make the world not just safer but better.” Clearly, the president had changed his mind about the wisdom of attempting to build nations.

The failed-states-as-security-threat fallacy now perme-

ates all aspects of strategic planning. Indeed, it has become practically an article of faith. Even the administration's October 2005 National Intelligence Strategy claims (without support) that "the lack of freedom in one state endangers the peace and freedom of others, and ... failed states are a refuge and breeding ground of extremism."

Failed States and Failed Reasoning

In fact, the overwhelming majority of failed states have posed no security threat to the United States. The blanket characterization that failed states represent anything monolithic is misleading. The dangers that can arise from failed states are not the product of state failure itself; the threats are the result of other conditions, such as the presence of terrorist cells or other malign actors within a failed state. It is not the "failure" that threatens.

In 2000, the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Intelligence sought to quantify and examine episodes of state failure. Adopting a loose definition of state failure, the authors found 114 cases between 1955 and 1998. A look at the list compiled by the CIA calls into question the methodology used. The report's highly subjective standard for state failure produced a data set that characterized China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Israel, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Turkey as failed states as of December 1998. Surely it discredits any discussion of failed states if Israel and Sierra Leone fall under the same general heading.

Other lists confirm that state failure in itself does not constitute a security threat. A list compiled by the British Department for International Development included such countries as Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. It is difficult to understand how many of the above countries could present security threats to the United States in any foreseeable scenario.

The Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine jointly published a "failed states index" recently that included some obvious cases such as Iraq and Afghanistan, but also prototypical failed states such as Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Chad and Guinea. Simply put, these states do not warrant significant attention from the U.S. national security apparatus.

What would be more helpful, and more prudent, than issuing categorical statements about what failed states

mean for the United States would be to examine countries, failed or otherwise, on the basis of discrete measures of threat assessment: to what extent does a government — or nonstate actors operating within a state — intend and have the means to attack America?

To the extent that any state does represent a threat, a massive nationbuilding mission targeted at the condition of state failure — rather than the threat itself — is not the most appropriate response. Attacking a threat rarely entails paving roads or establishing new judicial standards. Afghanistan serves as a stark reminder that we must not overlook failed states, but it does not justify moving "state failure" in the abstract to the top of the list of security concerns.

An Unbounded Mandate

Supporters of S/CRS believe that the advancement of political and economic reforms — in particular, the spread of democracy — constitutes part of its mandate. However, that way of thinking carries with it serious risks: poorly executed or misguided nationbuilding operations might actually compound the problem of terrorism directed against the United States. During the transition from autocracy to democracy, states are vulnerable to the collapse of civil order, widespread violence and counter-revolutionary coups.

It is not only internal unrest that can follow in the wake of regime transformation. The risk of full-blown war actually tends to increase in countries where political change has recently occurred. Professors Edward D. Mansfield of the University of Pennsylvania and Jack Snyder of Columbia University point out that new democracies typically "go through a rocky transitional period, where democratic control over foreign policy is partial, where mass politics mixes in a volatile way with authoritarian elite politics, and where democratization suffers reversals. In this transitional phase of democratization, countries become more aggressive and war-prone, not less, and they do fight wars with democratic states."

Thus, if U.S. foreign policy seeks to minimize the risk of war, it may wish to eschew ambitious projects of "democratization," or else be willing and able to occupy target countries indefinitely in the hope that a fully-formed democracy will eventually emerge. If nothing else, we should be confident that any intervention will produce outcomes beneficial to U.S. interests at an acceptable cost. Unfortunately, nationbuilding has an

extremely poor track record in this regard, and it is far from clear that S/CRS can reverse the lessons of history.

The scholarly work on nationbuilding illuminates both the costs and the true nature of a broad policy of “fixing” failed states. In 2003, retired diplomats James R. Hooper and Paul R. Williams argued for what they called “earned sovereignty,” the idea being that target states would need to climb back into the good graces of the intervening power to regain their sovereignty. In some cases, that would take the form of “shared sovereignty,” in which domestic governments would perform whatever functions were allowed by the intervener, but other duties would be retained by the outside actor. The duration of shared sovereignty varies. “In some instances,” Hooper and Williams explain, “it may be indefinite and subject to the fulfillment of certain conditions as opposed to specified timelines.” The premise seems to be that countries will be returned to the control of their indigenous populations when the *intervener* decides it is appropriate.

Neocolonial Logic

Stanford political scientists James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin dispense with rhetorical niceties, calling explicitly for “postmodern imperialism.” Under a straightforwardly neocolonial model, “the search for an exit strategy is delusional,” they explain, particularly with respect to returning “control of domestic security to local authorities by a certain date in the near future.” To the contrary, in some cases a complete exit by the interveners may never be possible; rather, the endgame is “to make the national level of government irrelevant for people in comparison to the local and supranational levels.” Thus, in Fearon and Laitin’s model, nationbuilding may not be an appropriate term: a better label would perhaps be *nation-ending*, replacing national governments with a supranational governing order. Evidently the nation-state then withers away and dies.

For his part, Krasner believes that the “rules of conventional sovereignty ... no longer work.” Writing in 2004, he called instead for an approach to failed states that would involve “alternative institutional arrangements supported by external actors, such as de facto trusteeships and shared sovereignty.” The implications of those policies are clear. As Krasner states: “In a trusteeship, international actors would assume control over local functions for an indefinite period of time. They might also eliminate the international legal sovereignty of the entity or

control treaty-making powers. ... There would be no assumption of a withdrawal in the short or medium term.”

This hearkens back to Woodrow Wilson’s advocacy of trusteeships in the wake of World War I in order to “build up in as short a time as possible ... a political unit that can take charge of its own affairs” — without, however, the pretense of “as short a time as possible.”

Although most Americans support sovereignty and reject the logic of neocolonialism, avowed advocates of empire have not hidden their pleasure at the creation of S/CRS. In advancing the case for an American colonial office, Max Boot, author and senior fellow for national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, noted that “of course, [a colonial office] cannot be called that. It needs an anodyne euphemism such as ‘Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance.’” Boot later elaborated: “The United States needs its own version of the British Colonial Office for the post-imperial age,” and the decision to establish S/CRS is “a good start.”

If the costs of successfully administering foreign countries were low and the prospects for success high, it might make sense to try. However, a look at what it takes to “get nationbuilding right” demonstrates that the costs of making it a core object of U.S. foreign policy — as envisioned by the advocates of S/CRS — would greatly outweigh any benefits.

The Costs of Nationbuilding

Security is a paramount concern in every stabilization and reconstruction mission. By definition, the target state will be emerging from conflict or collapse, and administrators will need to be protected from violence and intimidation as they initiate and implement S&R programs. In nearly all instances, the U.S. military would have to perform these security functions. But how many troops does it take to support an S&R mission? What types of troops? And how long will they have to stay?

The answers based on the historical record are not heartening. One of the best estimates regarding the military requirements of post-conflict missions comes from the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board. A DSB study from December 2004 that assessed nationbuilding operations over the past two millennia highlights some sobering facts: “Stabilization operations can be very labor-intensive. ... The United States will sometimes have ambitious goals for transforming a society in a conflicted environ-

F O C U S

ment. Those goals may well demand 20 troops per 1,000 inhabitants ... working for five to eight years.”

Extrapolating from the DSB's numbers to particular countries paints an even darker picture. Achieving “ambitious goals” in Iraq, for example, under the DSB framework would have required roughly 500,000 troops in Iraq for five to eight years. Less populous countries such as Haiti, by this rule of thumb, would call for roughly 162,000 American troops.

And what of the efficacy of nationbuilding operations? The historical record is hardly encouraging. The DSB concluded that “[t]he pattern suggests a less than impressive record — one that has not improved with time and historical experience.”

Other advocates of nationbuilding agree. In 2003 Krasner admitted, “The simple fact is that we do not know how to do democracy-building.” Unless our knowledge has grown dramatically in three years, that is not exactly inspiring language coming from one of the top U.S. officials in charge of democracy-building.

If we intend to seriously embark on a plan to build nations, we must be prepared to bear heavy costs in time, money, and even in American lives — or we must be prepared to fail. As Johns Hopkins University's Francis Fukuyama concedes, nationbuilding “has been most successful ... where U.S. forces have remained for generations. We should not get involved to begin with if we are not willing to pay those high costs.”

The problem, however, is actually twofold: the United States in recent years has been overly prone to intervention, but without a proper appreciation of the costs ahead of time. S/CRS exacerbates the former problem without addressing the latter. Sec. Rice confirmed during a town hall meeting at the State Department in June 2005 that S/CRS is “working, right now, on a plan for Sudan, because it is our hope that at some point, we'll be in a post-conflict stabilization phase [there]. We know that we're going to face this in Liberia. We're doing it in Haiti.” She has never explained how to pay for these interventions.

Washington's Clear Choice in Corporate Accommodations

Today's business traveler does have a choice when it comes to short-term accommodations

CAS

Corporate Apartment Specialists, Inc.

- ◆ Rates within federal government per diem
- ◆ Completely furnished apartments
- ◆ Walking distance to Metro
- ◆ Washer/Dryer in unit
- ◆ Pet Friendly
- ◆ Cable TV/Local telephone service included
- ◆ V/MC/Amex/Diners Club accepted
- ◆ All utilities included
- ◆ Maid service available upon request

Location, Location, Location!

Choice neighborhoods of Washington, DC, Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia

Toll-Free: 800 914-2802
Tel: 703 979-2830 Fax: 703 979-2813
E-mail: sales@corporateapartments.com
Web: www.corporateapartments.com

Flexcar
SHIFT YOUR THINKING.

MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING

Former State Department Employee
Stationed Overseas Understands Unique
Financial Situation of Foreign Service

Services Include:

- Retirement Planning
- Tax Preparation and Strategies
- Analysis: Insurance and Investments
- Lump Sum Retirement Options

MARY CORNELIA GINN

4630 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 220
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
Phone: (301) 951-9160
Fax: (703) 938-2278
E-mail: mcgfin@erols.com

SECURITIES OFFERED THROUGH NATHAN & LEWIS SECURITIES, INC., MEMBER NASD & SIPC. MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING AND NATHAN & LEWIS ARE NOT AFFILIATED ENTITIES.

Aiming for the Capillaries

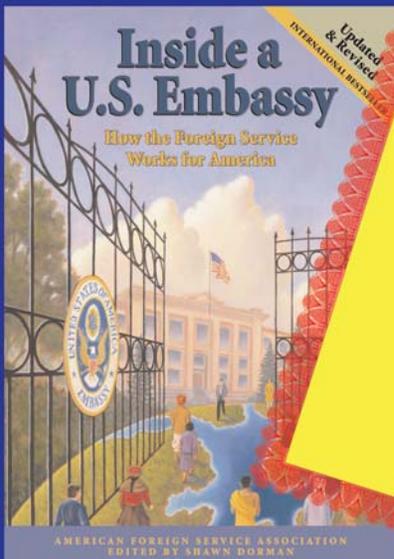
A standing nationbuilding office with dedicated funding and institutional support would likely become a vocal advocate of that approach. Bureaucracies are remarkably inventive in finding ways to justify their own existence. In the case of S/CRS, this would involve agitating for a costly, dangerous course of foreign policy that would generate reconstruction and stabilization missions to work on.

Moreover, S/CRS is simply not needed. President Bush has correctly argued that “over time, free nations grow stronger and dictatorships grow weaker.” But while this is true, direct American intervention has rarely been a factor. Obviously, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc at the end of the Cold War caused a precipitous advance in freedom — both political and economic — without U.S. officials on the ground attempting to direct the change. But apart from the end of the Cold War, between 1994 and 2004 the global freedom prognosis continued to improve. According to Freedom House, 46 percent of the world’s countries are politically “free,” compared with 40 percent

in 1994. The numbers of “partly free” and “not free” countries have declined.

Similarly, economic liberalization continues to advance. According to *Economic Freedom of the World: 2006 Annual Report*, average economic freedom has advanced even during the very recent past. Between 1995 and 2004 the mean economic freedom of countries around the world advanced from 6.1 to 6.5 on a scale of 0 to 10. When trends are moving in a positive direction, the wisest course is usually to stay out of the way.

In an age in which international terrorism could just as plausibly come from Marseille as from Tashkent, America cannot afford to lose its focus and sap its strength by attempting to build nations. Terrorism is a challenging threat that requires intelligence, discrimination and determination. To take on nationbuilding missions that aim for the capillaries of the international system is a dangerous juggling of priorities. It could well create new security challenges where none existed before. ■



SPECIAL HOLIDAY GIFT OFFER
5 for \$45
(That's \$4 off each copy.)

**Help your contacts, friends
and family understand.**

To order, go to

www.afsa.org/inside

or call (847) 364-1222.

Questions? E-mail embassybook@afsa.org.