

American Intervention in Failing Countries is Necessary

Written by Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy

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Intervention to stabilize and reconstruct failed, failing, fragile, and even re-orient hostile countries may not be avoidable for the U.S. and also for its E.U. partners. But for intervention to be successful it must be undertaken cautiously, preemptively when possible, and swiftly, with coalitions of willing partners and should focus on rebuilding the institutions and economies that sustain civil society. Moreover, successful reconstruction after intervention takes time, resources, and planning in addition to going hand in hand with stabilization. Each endeavor must address the needs and values of the nation undergoing intervention, stabilization, and reconstruction as well, so that citizens become willing partners in the process and valuable resources are not squandered. This article focuses largely on U.S. parameters for intervention and how success may be achievable for all parties involved.

Need for Interventions

To ensure regional wellbeing approximately 2500 years before American, British, Australian, and Polish soldiers entered Iraq in 2003, the Persian leader Cyrus the Great of biblical renown sent his troops to oust its tyrannical leader and prevent a country from disintegrating through civil war. That endeavor proved successful, for Cyrus' forces were able to quickly "reestablish the seat of government," prevent "anyone from terrorizing the people," "restore homes" and "end the troubles there." [1] Given the current tensions with Iran, an ancient Persian intervention may not rank high as a model for western politicians and generals to emulate. But much can be learned from Cyrus' actions especially as he even gained praise from the Israelites set free there as a wise and just leader. As Cyrus seems to have known, destabilizing conditions can lead to the breakdown of entire societies, and so should be prevented, preferably before they get out of control yet must not be undertaken without as prior planning that is full as possible. Mission creep is not a workable and successful strategy for engaging in and escalating U.S. and E.U. roles in foreign interventions. As the West is drawn slowly but surely into greater military confrontation with Mu'ammarr Qadhafi's intransigent and brutal regime in Tripoli, it is both reasonable and necessary to assess the purposes, strategies, and goals of intervention, especially by the U.S. which often but not always takes the lead role in those endeavors. [2]

Many of the world's weakest countries are now in similar plight to that of ancient Babylonia for they "are falling apart." [3] Even more troubling, such failed and failing nations are falling into the hands of militias, despots, religious fanatics, and terrorists. [4] Despite the backlash from incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq initiated by the administration of American President George W. Bush, current governments in the U.S. and E.U. are finding international interventions, and the inevitable stability and reconstruction (S&R) that follows, to be unavoidable. [5] So, intervention is on the upsurge in places like Yemen and Pakistan, as recent WikiLeaks reveal, and now on the urging of France and Britain in Libya. [6]

Writing about the interconnectedness of people during the political, economic, and social chaos brought on by the Mongols and their violent partners in Asia and the Middle East during the 13th century another Persian, the poet Sa'di, commented: "The children of Adam are limbs to each other, having been created of one essence. When calamitous times afflict one limb, the other limbs cannot remain inactive. You who are not responsive to the tribulations of others, it is not fitting for you to be called human." [7] Indeed, destabilizing conditions whether in Somalia from al-Shabaab Islamists, in Yemen due to al-Qaeda terrorism even prior to the Arab Spring protests

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against its incumbent president, in Iraq owing to Baathists and other militias, or in Afghanistan because of its Taliban insurgency undermine lawful governance and hinder economic development while generating health, education, and welfare crises. Equally dangerous is the tendency for problems and violence to be spread first regionally, as from Afghanistan to Pakistan and from Somalia to Uganda, and then globally by ideologues and terrorists.[8] Like it or not, conflicts and calamities that appear to usually occur far away and seemingly only to others in Third World countries do impact everyone and require attention and resolution.[9]

American Policies and Requirements

The parameters of U.S. policy toward international engagements to stabilize and reconstruct failed, failing, and fragile countries were laid out in National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-44 as: "The United States has a significant stake in enhancing the capacity to assist in stabilizing and reconstructing countries or regions, especially those at risk of, in, or in transition from conflict or calamity, and to help them establish a sustainable path toward peaceful societies, democracies, and market economies. The United States should work with other countries and organizations to anticipate state failure, avoid it whenever possible, and respond quickly and effectively when necessary and appropriate to promote peace, security, development, democratic practices, market economies, and the rule of law. Such work should aim to enable governments abroad to exercise sovereignty over their own territories and to prevent those territories from being used as a base of operations or safe haven for extremists, terrorists, organized crime groups, or others who pose a threat to U.S. foreign policy, security, or economic interests." [10] This policy sets the parameters for intervention, including that the U.S. should not feel constrained to wait until problems have reached crisis conditions or have globalized. Yet it also makes clear that intervention should occur in accordance with particular ideals, within specific parameters, and for the purposes of accomplishing very precise goals.

Essentially then, situations that necessitate intervention are ones which pose "a threat to U.S. foreign policy, security, or economic interests," including American citizens and their democratic way of life. Countries with non-state actors, like Pakistan and its indigenous Taliban, whose fragility disrupts the global order through providing safe haven and resources for terrorists to attack its own people and the citizens of neighboring countries like Afghanistan and India, create a major threat to the U.S. Oil is vital to the U.S. and all other nations and therefore ensuring that terrorists in the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa do not disrupt its production and shipment involves pre-empting a major threat. Libya's Qadhafi was a tyrant at home, but he was no longer sponsoring terrorism nor developing weapons of mass destruction. In other words, he was not a threat to the U.S. or its interests including its allies like Britain, France, and Italy, and so if U.S. policy were to be followed his ouster is best left to Libyans themselves rather than involving Western militaries.

Additionally, there are two baselines; clear and present danger, and strategic or other compelling national interest, usually utilized by the U.S. government to determine whether or not a particular issue, organization, or country poses or will become an intervention-warranting threat. The U.S. Army War College approaches the need for intervention similarly: "Security of the homeland" including "protection against attack on territory and people ... in order to ensure survival with fundamental values and political systems intact;" "Economic wellbeing" including "attainment of conditions in the world environment that ensure" national benefit; and "Promotion of the fundamental values of the nation" such as "democracy and human rights." [11] The elimination of Osama bin Laden by U.S. Special Forces within Pakistan falls within the parameters set by those baselines, and had the additional benefit of making America's European partners more secure as well.

Many clear and present dangers are easy to identify, like al-Qaeda attacking the U.S. and its allies directly or Pakistan's western border serving as a staging ground for globalization of terrorism. Others, like Venezuela's role in destabilizing Columbia, are less obvious.[12] Sometimes the long-term strategic or compelling national interest may not be clear for decades, such as the slow collapse of nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, until the draconian outcomes of instability begin to impact America's people and economy.[13] So U.S. administrations could be more pro-active in applying the relevant criteria to determine both the likelihood of a country falling into chaos, failing, or fragmenting, and its impact upon American interests and safety. After all, nation rebuilding or even building anew is not impossible, though but it does involve constant preparation, resource allocation, and careful choices.[14]

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As events in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated, asking these questions prior to U.S. and even E.U. involvement in the Arab uprisings is essential. So, for instance, is Qadhafi's Libya a greater danger to the U.S. and its E.U. partners than Bahrain's leaders creating long-term problems by repressing the Shi'ite majority of its population and thereby generating sectarian unrest that could upturn the entire Persian Gulf through which 25 percent of the world's crude oil flows? How should the tyrannical response by Libya's ruling elite be viewed and responded to differently from the violence unleashed upon citizens in Syria by Bashar al-Assad's forces, especially when events in Syria can impact regional stability even more than those in Libya?

Triumphs and Failures

Deciding to intervene is the initial step. If U.S. interventions, even ones undertaken in coalition Britain and France, are to be successful for all involved, however, recipient countries should be chosen carefully, and each approach to stabilization, reconstruction, and eventual handover has to be appropriate and thorough.[15] Before the U.S. intervened in 1989, Panama was a narcokleptocracy headed by Manuel Noriega. After stabilizing that country politically, however, the U.S. did not engage in socioeconomic reconstruction. So Panama, despite becoming a democracy, continues to be a fragile state.[16] Likewise, the U.S. did not remain committed to stabilizing Pakistan and rebuilding Afghanistan after Russian troops were expelled from the latter country in 1989, so militants and terrorists gained ground there.[17]

The U.S. has considerable experience reconstructing countries, but not always with successful outcomes in recent years. After hostilities had ended in World War II, the U.S. remained in Germany and Japan for six years more to successfully ensure those countries had democratically and economically vibrant foundations for the future.[18] Since that time, the U.S. has not invested similarly adequate personnel and resources into reconstruction of failed, failing, and fragile nations. So, the U.S. has not met with anywhere near the same degree of accomplishment in its intervention efforts since the immediate post-World War II period with the exception of South Korea once the Korean War ended in 1953.[19]

Reconstruction in Germany cost Americans the equivalent of nearly \$33 billion and in Japan more than \$17 billion to ensure both countries were transformed into democratically-representative and law-abiding ones who are responsible partners in domestic and global endeavors in addition to becoming staunch U.S. allies. After the Korean War and the rise of a successful nation in South Korea, the U.S. essentially engaged, sometimes with partners like NATO, in small-scale stabilization efforts with swift hand-off from military to civilian activities. The Dominican Republic witnessed American force presence from 1965-1966, Lebanon in 1982-1983, Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, Somalia from 1992-1993, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia in 1993, and Kosovo in 1998-1999.[20]

But U.S. engagement in ensuring that results of intervention lasts through careful reconstruction has been on the decline as the attention and political will of Americans have turned elsewhere. Americans' are increasingly unwilling to stay the course, which can be costly in lives and funds. Bosnia and Kosovo saw U.S. resource commitment totaling only about \$2.5 and \$1.3 billion, respectively, during American involvement there; although E.U. resources in even larger quantities did ensure positive outcomes there. In 2009, the Government of Somalia operated on a national budget of approximately \$11 million, including \$6 million earned from the port at Mogadishu and \$2.9 million in foreign aid for governance of which the U.S. contribution was a mere \$25,000. At the same time, Somali pirates took in an estimated \$200 million in ransoms payments for maritime vessels, cargo, and crew hijacked in costal and international waters, using some of that loot to pay al-Shabaab terrorists for training and safety. Humanitarian assistance to Somalis from the U.S. government during the first seven months of 2010 amounted to \$31.14 million, with overall aid to that country budgeted at a little over \$103 million.[21] No wonder, Somalia's Transitional Federal Government is unable to maintain law and order or undertake reconstruction, and, tragically, Somali pirates and terrorists threaten the world's seaborne trade and the region's sociopolitical stability.

At the other extreme of current U.S. involvements, much of the approximately \$751 billion and \$336 billion expended as of September 2010 in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively has gone toward stabilization rather than reconstruction (which received only \$49 billion and \$32 billion respectively).[22] So intervention has not produced enduring changes in those two countries. More recently, as American involvement in Yemen has grown so have military and civilian aid

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allocations. Yet again, the main focus is becoming counterinsurgency (COIN) rather than stabilization and reconstruction of Yemen as a whole, as evidenced by USAID expending \$30.33 million in 2009 and \$55.45 million in 2010 while military assistance exceeded \$70 million and \$155 million during those two years.[23] There was little if any planning for the possibility, now a most likely outcome, that the government in Sana'a may prove to be inherently unstable because it failed to adequately represent the citizens' wills and desires as events of the Arab Spring demonstrate. The same has been increasingly the case in Afghanistan too. The price tag, and granted that fiscal considerations must be only one component of considerations about intervention, for U.S. involvement in the Libyans' struggle for freedom has already exceeded \$550 million. Yet what model of governance could be established in a post-Qadhafi Libya and who the new leaders would be remains unclear despite the rebels there establishing a National Transition Council. So, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, ousting the incumbent totalitarian regime may not produce much good in the long-run either for Libyans or for Europeans and Americans even though Qadhafi's departure may very well set the stage for a brighter future if the political transition is managed successfully.[24]

Toward Successful Interventions

As direct intervention expenditures in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to indirect aid expenses on the African continent have demonstrated, however, even very generous fiscal allocations are insufficient by themselves for ensuring that positive transformations will last.[25] In Iraq, even \$24 billion worth of wages, training, and weapons have not generated indigenous law enforcement and defense units that function effectively.[26] So it is becoming clear that the degree of intervention needs to be based on an accurate assessment of each host population's needs and reactions, like it was in Germany, Japan, and South Korea, including the cultural impacts and consequences.[27] Nor can involvement only be self-serving. Going in at the last minute with guns blazing often is counterproductive and costly in lives and funds, for it aggravates fragile conditions and may speed up rather than reverse the disintegration of civil society so vital for peace and prosperity. U.S. and E.U. involvement in the Libya civil war, but the West's hesitancy with regard to even modest pressure on Bahrain and Saudi Arabia plus its absolute fear of Syria falling apart if the Assad clan were to be ousted, unfortunately comes across to many people in the Middle East and elsewhere as completely self-serving.

Residents of Pakistan's militant-plagued Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are clear they back COIN but want it spearheaded by their country's own forces, which hold legitimacy as national institutions, rather than foreign ones. FATA's residents also stress that commercial, educational, and health initiatives need reinforcement if terrorism is to be eradicated. So they seek societal infrastructures that will eliminate the under-privileging conditions that foster militant ideas and actions.[28] Essentially, for intervention, stabilization, and reconstruction to be successful and durable, the host nation's own capacities, not just military ones but, even more important, civilian ones, must become sustainable after foreign assistance ends. A positive French experience in the Sarobi district of Afghanistan, where the focus is on building up local societal capabilities, underscores this point.[29]

Other recent foreign involvements also demonstrate the need for holistic undertakings. Yemenis desperately need small business opportunities, basic education, and primary healthcare. Even subsistence-level nutrition and safe drinking (portable) water are luxuries there. Urgent requests for economic reconstruction from the Yemeni government, which is in a deadly competition with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to rebuild social institutions and thus thwart the establishment of a jihadist state, have not been heeded adequately and when coupled with internal repression and corruption led to the unrest there which is likely to result in the overthrow of an American ally.[30] Likewise, years of American aid to the Mubarak regime in Egypt did little to alleviate the plight of the middle and poor classes, brought almost no political reforms, and never addressed fundamental rights of Egypt's citizens, and so U.S. economic intervention there failed.

Among Somalis, in addition to problems akin to those in Yemeni society, peaceful sustainable livelihoods are rare and so employment by Islamist militias and pirate gangs often is an unavoidable aspect of survival.[31] Yet, like in Pakistan and Afghanistan, direct and indirect expenditures by the U.S. and E.U. on COIN and other military endeavors far outpace resources provided for societal reconstruction in those collapsing nations, because the West's actions are largely geared to the immediate threat of violence rather than to alleviating the issues that fuel militancy, terrorism, and piracy.[32] It also is insufficient merely to acknowledge that stability and reconstruction are not

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mutually exclusive. Both are equally necessary and must be fully-integrated and well-funded for interventions to work.[33]

The root causes of and support for militancy, insurgency, and terrorism lie at local levels of villages, towns, and cities where lack of education, economic opportunities, healthcare, law enforcement, and government agencies facilitate the spread of indoctrination, illicit livelihoods, misery, violence, and separatism. Successful interventions, like ones which have stalled or have failed, demonstrate that focusing resources on at least mitigating and at most eradicating those basic problems make fundamentally positive contributions toward COIN and S&R.[34]

So, in its foreign interventions, the U.S. in conjunction with its E.U. partners must concentrate on catalyzing local conditions for educated, employed, healthy, law-abiding populations will be administered by representative and legitimate governments who are responsive to citizens' needs and are responsible partners in regional and global endeavors. Endeavors should not concentrate on eradicating only a few symptoms, such as terrorism and piracy, of the underlying problems so that American and European interests are protected for the short-term. The U.S. must take a whole of government approach to ensure overall institutional, societal, and national functionality so that everyone's legitimate needs are ensured over the long-term.[35] Indeed, America's constant ally Britain will be refocusing £7 billion (\$11.1 billion) to stabilize and reconstruct "fragile and conflict-ridden countries" which "represent a real and present danger, a danger that cannot be dealt with exclusively by staying at home." [36] Likewise, neither action conducted from afar or hurriedly on the ground is likely to produce benefits for Americans, Europeans, or those communities needing assistance. Rebuilding nations requires patience too, as time is need to carefully create the political, social, and economic conditions under which a society can flourish again.[37] Moreover, as in the case of the recent British decision, U.S. and other Western administrations should realize that even relatively modest sums of money expended early on, before a nation, society, or region has fragmented completely, can bring about exponentially beneficial transformations and even stave off military interventions.[38]

Conclusions

Foreign nation rebuilding and building will continue to be an inescapable reality and a constant challenge to the U.S. and its E.U. partners, just as it has been for other superpowers over the centuries including the Persian or Achaemenid Empire. Those needs are not merely ideological experiments but necessary engagements for global wellbeing.[39] The problems generated by failing nations may not be completely stoppable.[40] Yet outcomes can be shaped favorably without letting new troubles compound old ones, as Cyrus demonstrated so long ago, through timely intercessions utilizing appropriate assessments, approaches, resources, institutions, and partnerships.[41]

As the U.S and other Western nations face change, instability, and possible state failures in multiple countries of the Arab Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, they would do well to exercise both caution and decisiveness while balancing their own needs with those of the nations' in which it chooses to intervene. American intervention in particular would benefit as well, during both planning and implementation, from more integrated partnerships with E.U. nations, especially Britain and France, whose governments have much longer and deeper connections to the regions where stabilization is most necessary.

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