

Reconstruction and Democratic Development

Daniel N. Nelson*

After conflicts and dictatorships, the debris of such phenomena – destroyed infrastructure, societies torn asunder by death and mass refugee movements, and institutions rendered non-existent, rudimentary or threatened – must be confronted by the “first world” of advanced, stable, democratic states and their NGOs. At stake is not only the survival of directly affected nations, but also global security. If this responsibility is not met, the first world will be imperiled. Ignoring needs for reconstruction and democratic development will lead inexorably to failed states and attendant extremism, economic migration, and resource disruption.

The United States and Western Europe, embodied in NATO and the European Union, remain the strongest elements of the first world’s first responders to post-conflict, post-dictatorship uncertainty. For North America and Western Europe, failure to cooperate in reconstruction and democratic development goals strongly implies that these democratic states no longer see their interests intertwined. Were allies to be ineffectual or disjointed in their responses to the consequences of war and autocracy, the alliance itself will be jeopardized – unraveling, ebbing, and splintering into factions or coalitions.

The terrible consequences of such political immaturity would be to ensure that conflicts never end and that democracy never takes root, therefore preordaining future insecurity.

It is far too easy to cite a litany of successful “Western” – NATO, EU or allied countries – commitments to reconstruct and democratize. Such a self-congratulatory summary of good outcomes is too often what we hear. At international summits and multilateral conferences, vignettes of success are recited, including Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Moldova in Southeastern Europe. In Asia, a case such as Afghanistan is now lauded alongside East Timor to exemplify the power and resolve of the international community to ensure a post-conflict return to democracy.

But, the record is far from clear. Indeed, we *ought* to engage in a critical, questioning assessment of the first world’s response in the aftermath of war and autocracy. Such an exercise is not speculative; rather, a post-Intifada Palestinian State may ensue, and a post-Castro Cuba may soon be upon us. How will the advanced democracies of the world react? What ought NATO, the EU or associated states do to promote both the return of well-being and the advent of democracy?

The softest landing among post-conflict, post-dictatorship scenarios has been where interests of the democratic West had been engaged for fifty years. The former communist states of “Eastern Europe” – from the Baltic to the Balkans – have been transformed into stable democratic capitalist systems in a decade or so. Although the degree of stability, democracy and capitalism vary, and some Balkan states must still be excluded from this grouping, the real success story of first world reconstruction and democratic development is usually *not* included in the list of achievements remembered by governments and their

spokespersons. While communist regimes collapsed through internal non-legitimacy and poor performance, not America's nuclear power or NATO deterrence, the genesis of democratic systems and jump-starting competitive economies from Estonia to Bulgaria was accelerated by EU and NATO counsel, training and funding. Creating markets and democracies – a success of Central and East European peoples – is nevertheless a conspicuous demonstration of how massive corporate investment, NGO engagement, and Western governments' use of carrots and sticks (the benefits of inclusion if criteria were met, and the alternative of ostracism) led to fundamental regional transformation. Early doubts and dangers of failure were overcome, and institutional and cultural changes seem deeply embedded.

But, the success of post-communist transitions relied on a broad consensus among first-world responders – particularly NATO, the EU and their principal members – and a prolonged engagement that transcended transient political winds in any capital. Long-term commitments grounded in consensual interests and values are predictors of the West's likelihood of success in reconstruction and/or democratic development. After conflicts or authoritarianism, market economies and democracies don't "happen" – they are encouraged and nurtured.

Absent consensual aims and open-ended commitments, the record of Western-assisted reconstruction and democratization is poor.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, approaching the tenth anniversary of the Dayton Accord, a sub-war, cold peace prevails. No truly unified governance exists, and endemic corruption (amply considered by such NGOs as Transparency International) undercuts the rule of law. That the EU has now assumed control of the smaller EUFOR (7,000 personnel under British command), reduces to a miniscule number the US presence and effectively ends a transatlantic commitment in BiH.

Kosovo evinces even less success more than half a decade after the NATO intervention. Violent outbreaks in 2004, particularly in Mitrovica, led to almost twenty deaths as Albanians rampaged through Serb neighborhoods and villages. A huge NATO military presence was unable to prevent such violence, while Kosovo's final status – its degree of autonomy or sovereignty – remain to be addressed.

A tenuous non-war is the best one can say about Macedonia's present condition, as the population has become divided as never before. Skopje's Albanian quarter is now essentially off limits to any non-Muslim, as it was never in past years. The Ohrid Agreement halted the slide to full-scale civil war, but has not assured the state's reconstruction or constitutional re-inclusion. And, rather than retaining robust NATO or EU visibility, there is no more than a symbolic presence. Judging from International Crisis Group evaluations, the danger of a return of violence is never far away.

Afghanistan's presidential election was lauded as a sign of democracy and emerging stability. But, Karzai remains dependent on the collaboration of, or acceptance by regional warlords such as Dostum, central control of the countryside is precarious and

the country's return to a poppy-driven economy is conceded. The 9,000 ISAF personnel has had only a Kabul presence, and the very slow and cautious deployment of small NATO units in different locales is negotiated with local authorities. Karzai, himself, remains behind a cordon of heavily armed Dyncorp employees.

The Iraq debacle now epitomizes the absence of a first world, Western, or transatlantic consensus about larger matters of international security. Key allies did not join the United States invasion, and many of those that did participate have or will withdraw (Spain, Poland, and many others). A coalition of the willing, rather than alliance, invaded – and now that coalition is frayed if not entirely fictional. NATO has fractured even on a matter such as training Iraqi forces, as six members (including Germany, France and Belgium) refused to accede to American requests.

Why do first world efforts to reconstruct and democratize after war and dictatorships usually achieve partial results and often fail entirely?

Where sustained commitment is absent, these endeavors will invariably have ephemeral results. The bureaucracy of assistance, in the EU or US, is often a serious impediment for success, slowing otherwise helpful programs and alienating recipients. Lack of American and European coordination – in some cases leading to de facto competition – wastes time and money for reconstruction and democratic development. Where there are no willing partners inside a country, of course, first world interventions can be ineffectual or counterproductive; the termination of a conflict or end of dictatorship do not ensure that new governments will react favorably to Western assistance. That Americans and Europeans err on the side of cautious change and the preservation of stability may yield no institutional or cultural transformation. And, finally, the inconsistency between US and EU actors in their assistance priorities has been destabilizing. The EU's tendency to work through state agencies to promote socioeconomic transformations, versus the American tendency to emphasize the electoral process of democracy, again exhibits a lack of consensus about priorities and forms of commitment.

We ought to see and hear evidence that advanced Western democracies, as they seek to rebuild societies shattered from conflict and to instill democratic norms and processes, may be doing poorly – save for the bright, shining example of Central and Eastern Europe. That these post-communist transitions could be unique, however, may soon be an inescapable conclusion. If Western attention and presence in other post-conflict or post-dictatorial situations is weak, transient, and disjointed, more harm than good may ensue.

***Daniel N. Nelson** (Ph.D., The Johns Hopkins University) is Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, University of New Haven and senior consultant, Global Concepts, Inc. Previously, he served as a senior advisor to US Congressional leaders such as Richard Gephardt, and held posts in the State and Defense Departments from 1998 through July 2002.