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## Nation-Building in the Middle East: The new Imperialism?

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**Liberales Institut**

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# Nation-Building in the Middle East: The new Imperialism?

Erich Weede

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## Introduction: Nation-building and state failure

The purpose of nation-building is the prevention of state failure. This agenda requires one to define what one regards as the main tasks of the state. Rotberg (2004: 3) provides a convenient starting point: "The state's prime function is to provide that political good of security – to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of political coercion." The state cannot fulfill its functions without capable and reasonably honest administrations, courts, and police. Otherwise, law and order are inconceivable. In essence, state failure refers to the absence of a monopoly of legitimate violence, to warring factions challenging each other and those who claim to constitute the government without, however, being capable to govern. Correlates – and in some instances, possibly, determinants – of state failure are low levels of per capita income and high levels of infant mortality, closure to international trade, and lack of democracy (Rotberg 2004: 21). Nation-building thus requires establishing or restoring political stability, or, better still, the rule of law and providing the requisites of a prospering economy. This is a tall order.

Moreover, the literature and the political debate refer to nation-building rather than merely to state-building. This seems to imply the idea that some degree of identification with all of one's compatriots or fellow citizens, with the nation, is a prerequisite for successful state-building.<sup>1</sup> Wherever the degree of racial, ethnic, or even religious homogeneity within a society is low, people might identify with members of their own subgroup rather than with all of their compatriots. Then voluntary contributions to the provision of public goods, including public order and political stability, become even less likely than they ordinarily are.<sup>2</sup> By contrast to state-building, nation-building is an even taller order: It requires that the primary focus of identification is transferred from local or regional, from ethnic or religious communities to the national level.

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1 Possibly, such national we-feeling, patriotism, or nationalism even contributes to economic growth (Greenfeld 2001). The best contemporary illustrations for this view can be found in East Asia: Japan, South Korea, China, and Vietnam.

2 Based on data collected within the United States, Putnam (2007) found that trust and other measures of social integration are lower in ethnically diverse than in homogeneous neighbourhoods. Based on a review of 20<sup>th</sup> century history with special emphasis on war and civil war, on genocide and mass murder, Ferguson (2007) argues that ethnic heterogeneity is one out of three major determinants of these calamities.

There are two types of actors who are interested in nation-building: first, those who aspire to govern nations or 'should be'-nations, and second, others who fear the spill-over from state-failure. By now, it is fairly well established that state failure and underdevelopment constitute a vicious circle where civil war and state failure contribute to economic stagnation and decline, where worsening poverty makes the establishment of political stability ever more difficult (Collier 2007). Worse still, even neighboring countries are affected by state failure. Neither refugees, nor marauding soldiers, nor contagious diseases respect international borders. As the case of Afghanistan (which has been a failed state at least since the retreat of Soviet troops) illustrates, state failure even may permit terrorist organizations with a global reach, such as al-Qaeda, to establish training camps for terrorists. Pakistan, where the state has failed to establish permanent control in areas such as Baluchistan or Waziristan, illustrates the same point.

Although poverty and terrorist activity seem unrelated at the individual level of analysis, whatever their class, ethnic or educational background may be, terrorists do assemble and train in failed states, as many al-Qaeda warriors did in Afghanistan. Since September 11, 2001, failed states within the Muslim world are therefore perceived as training camps and bases for the global export of terror and violence. The consequences of this postulated relationship between state failure in the Muslim world and the export of terrorism are awe-inspiring: The rich countries of the West in general and the United States as the sole remaining superpower in particular are saddled with responsibility, or at least co-responsibility, for the avoidance of state-failure by nation-building everywhere on the globe, and in the Muslim world in particular. Whether one wants to call this self-imposed policy burden 'imperialism', is a matter of definition.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, global nation-building is not easier than classical colonialism. The Bush presidency has made an enormously demanding job even more difficult by aiming at the democratization rather than merely stabilization of the target states of its recent military interventions, Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Since I am a nominalist (like Popper), I regard all definitions as ultimately arbitrary names. They are mere abbreviations and conventions. As has been argued elsewhere (Lieber 2005; Mandelbaum 2005; Weede 2006b), the United States comes closer to serving as a substitute for world government than the United Nations. Capability is even more important than legitimacy. As Huntington (1968: 5) has observed in a different context: "Authority has to exist before it can be limited." As Tullock (1974) has argued, the establishment of government by consent, contract, and democracy has always been less likely than the establishment of government by force or conquest.

4 The best defence of Bush's policies is Podhoretz' (2007) recent book on World War IV. He perceives four pillars of the Bush doctrine which may be abbreviated as 1. democratization or 'draining the swamp' of Islamist terrorism, 2. holding foreign governments responsible for providing terrorists with bases (Afghanistan), 3. pre-emption against the proliferation of weapons of mass



Not all dictatorships or police states are unstable. Not all of them are exporters of political instability or terrorism. As Etzioni (2007: XIII) has pointed out, their removal might well promote regional instability or state failure: "The sudden removal of the police state in such nations – whether the former U.S.S.R., post-Taliban Afghanistan, or in Post-Saddam Iraq – tends to bring with it an explosive growth of antisocial behavior, in the form of murders, drug abuse, rape, and kidnapping." Irrespective of good intentions, it is always conceivable to make a bad situation even worse.<sup>5</sup>

## Obstacles to Successful Nation-Building: Lessons from Abstract Theories

Nation-building is not a process of social evolution, but it is an exercise in grand-scale *planning*. That is why one should consider whether some of the standard arguments against central planning in economies are applicable against state- or nation-building, whether they contain some warnings for the political planners.

First, there is the problem of knowledge. According to Payne (2006a: 606), "no one knows how to do it." Certainly, the Bush Administration has not proved Payne wrong in Afghanistan or Iraq. According to Hayek (1960), knowledge is scattered across millions of heads. Not all of it is academic or at least explicit and easily verbalized. Some bits of it are tacit. Some bits of it are local and not easily applicable elsewhere or under different circumstances. Some bits are contained in traditions or institutions. It is impossible to centralize the knowledge of a society. If an administration attempts to do so, as Soviet-type planning agencies attempted to do, then a lot of knowledge is lost or wasted. Since nation-building includes overcoming abject poverty and underdevelopment, and has to do so because of the aforementioned vicious circle linking underdevelopment and political instability,<sup>6</sup> Hayek's classical argument about the cognitive limitations for planning fully applies to nation-building which includes economic development, but demands even more: the establishment of trust and social integration, securing the rule of law, political freedom and stability.

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destruction to sympathisers of terrorists (Iraq), 4. insistence on choosing between them (the terrorists and their allies) and us (the US or the West).

- 5 This is the typical outcome of social revolutions (Weede and Muller 1997). Certainly, the Communists succeeded in making bad situations even worse – almost everywhere where they gained power.
- 6 For recent quantitative or econometric evidence on the relationship between low levels of economic development or poverty on the one hand and political instability on the other hand, see, for example, Fearon and Laitin 2003; Fearon 2005; Henderson and Singer 2000; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005.

Second, there is the problem of agency. Whether one regards some poor country government – say in Afghanistan or Iraq – or the US government as the ultimate principal, execution on the ground depends on local agents or officials. This raises the question whether there are sufficient incentives for agents to do what they are told to do. Wherever nation-building is deemed essential – nobody has demanded yet doing it in Britain or Switzerland – the social environment is likely to be characterized by poverty and insecurity, even for officials. Under such circumstances taking bribes as well as shirking wherever the execution of one's duty becomes dangerous should be expected. Can one seriously blame local policemen in the Afghan countryside, if they put survival and feeding their children ahead of Bush's desires or Karzai's orders? Controlling deviant agent behavior should become the more difficult, the longer the chain of command becomes. If there is a cultural or linguistic gap between the principal and his agents, then the task of agent control becomes even more formidable. This applies already to the president of Afghanistan and many of his field agents in valleys, mountains or deserts. It is hard to imagine, how agent control from Washington or NATO headquarters might work out satisfactorily.<sup>7</sup>

Third, given information and agency problems mistakes should frequently happen. Thus, an error correction mechanism is required. How does it look like? How could it look like? Within competitive economies, big errors are corrected almost automatically. If an enterprise produces expensive low-quality products, then nobody will buy them. If the enterprise persists in producing what nobody wants, then bankruptcy becomes unavoidable. Within centrally planned economies, this mechanism never existed. That is why they could engage in comparative-advantage denying strategies for decades (Lin, Cai, and Li 2003).

Since governments and bureaucracies are organized hierarchically rather than competitively, since government offices or departments are almost never disbanded after failure in meeting their objectives, weeding out errors seems to require insights and orders from the top decision-maker. From social psychology (de Rivera 1968) as well as from centrally planned economies (Winiiecki 1988) we know that underlings or agents do not like to tell superiors or principals about failures. So, the ultimate decision-maker is unlikely to be well-informed early. Moreover, being powerful is not necessarily the best learning environment. Power implies that one can resist revising one's view of the world. Deutsch (1968: 124) once suggested that politics might obey the "law of least mental effort".

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7 Moreover, Huntington (1996) has argued that interference in different civilizations is fraught with special risks. Thus, the prophet of 'the clash of civilizations' was more circumspect in his policy recommendations than the Bush Administration was in the execution of its policies.

Fourth, there is a modified economic model of man (Caplan 2007) whose insights might be transferred from voting and political behavior within the United States to the problem at hand. Caplan's basic idea is simple. The traditional economic model of man – according to which human beings are self-seeking utility-maximizers – is applicable only under special circumstances. According to Caplan, this model applies only where people themselves suffer the consequences of their actions.<sup>8</sup> Under such circumstances humans want to learn about the likely consequences of their actions. Such learning is a prerequisite of rational decision-making. Elsewhere humans stick with emotionally satisfying beliefs, like blaming foreigners for all kinds of problems, and do not even care enough to become self-seeking. Instead a combination of irrationality and superficial or rhetorical altruism prevails.

Caplan's argument should be combined with Popper's (1959) who points out that falsification is even more important than verification. This highlights the importance of negative feedback. Caplan's argument about the background conditions of rationality underlines the necessity of feedback and consequences for oneself. Negative feedback might be the most important part of it. Unfortunately, Caplan is right in showing that politics is a sphere of life where the consequences of one's action for oneself are frequently diluted by the consequences of the actions of others, where one's own actions more frequently contribute to damage to a multitude of others than to oneself. One tends to be the victim of similar actions by others. Although this argument is best developed for voting in mass democracies, it can be generalized. That is why rational or maximizing behavior should not be expected in politics or international affairs.

Fifth, if skepticism about political decision-making in general and the feasibility of nation-building in particular is justified, then there should be testable implications. Foreign aid is one tool of nation-building. Since it is a non-lethal one in contrast to military intervention, it enjoys some degree of popularity among ruling elites in rich countries. From the perspective of Caplan's theory about the background conditions of self-seeking rationality on the one hand and cognitively superficial altruism on the other hand, one should not be surprised to find that econometric studies (for references and details see Easterly 2006 or Wolff 2005) by and large do not support the proposition that aid promotes growth. Since ruling elites do not spend their own money, since they do not starve if the inten-

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8 Hayek's (1960) insistence on coupling individual liberty with responsibility is a forerunner of some of Caplan's views. Certainly, these views are consistent with each other in rejecting the neo-classical cult of rational decision-making and the belief in its applicability under all circumstances.

ded beneficiaries do not get it, nobody should expect much political interest in cost-benefit analyses. Nor should one expect that foreign aid is eliminated merely because its effectiveness cannot be demonstrated. For most politicians it seems more important to demonstrate that they care about poverty than to insist on effectiveness in doing good with the taxpayer's money.

Sixth, we can learn something from Western history about stages or phases of nation-building. Of course, Western histories of nation-building differ. Nation-states were established earlier in Britain or France than in Germany or Italy. Democracy evolved slowly in Britain, by revolutionary change in France, after military defeat in Germany or Italy. Stepwise development in Britain was not interrupted by phases of regression, as we can observe in Continental Europe. The sequence of establishing national identity, the rule of law, representative or accountable government, and mass franchise seems to matter. Important political theorists (Dahl 1971; Huntington 1968; Nordlinger 1971; Rustow 1996) agree that establishing national identity first, the rule of law and accountable government second, and the mass franchise last is the best sequence if one is to avoid political instability and civil war or external war involvement. In applying this lesson to poor and unstable developing countries, one observation might be that the process of state-building requires time, that forcing the process is dangerous and unlikely to succeed. There can be no democracy without restraint in using violence for political purposes. Another observation is that democratization is more likely to succeed, if widening the franchise is the final step rather the first step in political development or nation-building. Widening the franchise actually might lead to some reassertion of violence as a tool of political competition and thereby endanger democratization (Payne 2005).

Seventh, there is even some quantitative evidence that stable and mutually recognized borders contribute not only to the avoidance of war, but also to the establishment of democracy (Gibler 2007). Afghanistan never recognized its border with Pakistan which was imposed by the British after one of their Afghan wars when they still ruled India, including what today is Pakistan. Moreover, to this day no government on either side of the border was ever capable of effectively policing it. Concerning the general recognition of Iraq's borders, it suffices to remember that Saddam Hussein waged two wars of aggression against neighboring countries (Iran and Kuwait) in order to acquire territory since 1980, and a bloody counterinsurgency campaign against the Kurds seeking autonomy or, possibly, even secession.

Eighth, there is a close relationship between state-building and military organization (Andreski 1968; Tilly 1990). Many former colonies acquired independence before they developed autonomous military organizations. Since native political power frequently was a gift from former colonizers rather than resulting from conquest or a successful war of independence, monopolies of violence didn't exist there or were easily challenged by non-state actors. Both foreign aid and military intervention in favor of some governments may simultaneously help weak governments to survive, but to remain weak. Is there an alternative to the perpetuation of weak government?

The conceivable alternative to America and the West supporting weak governments is gruesome. It is to "give war a chance". Luttwak (1999: 36) has spelled out the logic of this recommendation: "(...) although war is a great evil, it does have a great virtue: it can resolve political conflicts and lead to peace. This can happen when all belligerents become exhausted or when one wins decisively. Either way the key is that the fighting must continue until a resolution is reached. War brings peace only after a culminating phase of violence. Hopes of military success must fade for accommodation to become more attractive than further combat." Luttwak's 'peace by exhaustion'<sup>9</sup> should apply equally to civil and international wars. Those who recoil from the supposed moral cynicism of this policy recommendation should ask themselves whether Western democracies have the will, the stamina, and the capability to impose their vision of a just political order by military force.<sup>10</sup>

According to Payne's (2006a) study of 51 Anglo-American interventions, only about a quarter of them seem to have succeeded. Even in the American backyard, in Central America and the Caribbean, failure has been the rule and success has been the exception. The US and its allies did not succeed in Indochina during the 1970s when Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam were abandoned to the Communists who established a reign of terror everywhere and exterminated possibly a quarter or third of the population in Cambodia (Rummel 1994). The Reagan administration withdrew from Lebanon in the 1980s, and the Clinton administration

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9 Since Luttwak (1999) wrote his paper before September 11, 2001, and much before the second Iraq War, one may ask whether he really would welcome an American withdrawal from Iraq. His later papers (Luttwak 2005, 2007) clearly say that he recommends a withdrawal.

10 For a similar view, see Fearon (2007: 8): "civil wars typically conclude with a decisive military victory for one side. Of the roughly 55 civil wars fought for control of a central government (as opposed to for secession or regional autonomy) since 1955, fully 75 percent ended with a clear victory for one side." In Iraq, ending the civil war by a power-sharing agreement between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds runs into the obstacle that Sunnis and Shias are insufficiently cohesive to strike binding deals.

from Somalia in the 1990s. It is hard to avoid the prediction that the Americans and their 'coalitions of the willing' will leave Iraq to a tragic fate soon and, possibly, even Afghanistan somewhat later. If the West ultimately let wars burn and terror rule, why not admit our impotence from the beginning?

Seen from a neoconservative perspective, these skeptical observations about American or Western interventionism have an admittedly 'isolationist' or even 'defeatist' flavour.<sup>11</sup> They point to difficulties. They argue that success in nation-building is unlikely. If one adds an insistence on democracy rather 'merely' political stability, then the job gets even tougher. Although the relationship is not deterministic, as India illustrates best, by and large economic development and high average incomes come close to being prerequisites of democracy (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Lipset 1994). Since prosperity usually results from long periods of economic growth, one faces the question how to promote growth in poor countries. As already said above, economic aid does not seem to be the answer (Easterly 2006; Wolff 2005).<sup>12</sup> Econometric studies disagree among themselves about the proper specification of growth equations, and frequently include regional dummy variables (which might be useful in getting more precise estimates of the impact of explicitly included determinants of growth, but) which are not easily interpretable (Bleaney and Nishiyama 2002; Sala-i-Martin, Doppelhofer, and Miller 2004).

Although economic freedom does promote growth (Doucouliagos and Ulubaoglu 2006; Weede 2006a), there seem to be only two very strong determinants of growth: potential advantages of backwardness and human capital endowment. Human capital effects are best operationalized by intelligence quotients (Garrett and Schneider 2006; Weede 2006a). Although this operationalization by no means implies that nothing can be done to raise them, one certainly should not expect short-run miracles.

The potential advantages of backwardness refer to the fact that backward economies can grow more rapidly than highly developed economies. Advantages of backwardness refer to opportunities which can be wasted, and have been wasted in Africa or even in China under Mao or in India at least until the 1980s.

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11 The non-interventionism or 'isolationism' reluctantly accepted here is not the classical American isolationism which advocated a retreat to the Western hemisphere. Instead, 'isolation' or better: 'military non-intervention' here refers to the relationship between the rich countries of the West and those parts of the underdeveloped world which remain mired in stagnation, poverty and political instability, as much of the Muslim world does.

12 Easterly's (2001) earlier book justifies even deeper pessimism. There he discusses the limitations of our knowledge on the sources of growth. In particular, he argues against expecting miracles from more investment in poor countries.

Although there are a number of reasons for this effect, the ability of backward economies to borrow technology from more advanced ones is probably the major reason for this effect. One may even argue (Weede 2006a) that the advantages of backwardness are a kind of spill-over effect from earlier economic freedom and prosperity in the West to still poor countries now. Then, the task of the West vis-à-vis the third world is not to assist in nation-building, nor to provide economic aid, but to provide technologies for poor countries to imitate, to provide open markets for their exports, and to provide an example of economic freedom, prosperity, political stability, and ultimately even democracy.

## The Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq<sup>13</sup>

There is room for debate whether Afghanistan was still a failed state under the Taliban, or whether the regime was on the way towards consolidation. Certainly, the country was no democracy, and the Taliban governed inhumanely. Moreover, they provided a base and training camps for al-Qaeda which is why the Americans felt the necessity to intervene after September 11, 2001.

Strictly speaking, Iraq was not a failed state before the American invasion in 2003. Saddam ruled inhumanely, but effectively. He had murdered enough of his opponents and lots of innocent bystanders, in particular Kurds and Shias, to force the population of Iraq into submission. Under Saddam Hussein repression worked. By defeating him and by the early attempt to replace most of the previously ruling class, the Americans effectively turned Iraq into a failed state. Of course, the American policy goal was something different and better.

But how likely was the establishment of a democracy in Afghanistan or Iraq before the Americans ran into the current predicament? The quantitative evidence most of which was available before the invasion even began should have made one pessimistic. By general agreement, the prospects of democracy are much worse in poor than in rich countries (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Lipset 1994). Afghanistan has been one of the poorest counties of the world for decades. Iraq is also poor. Neither Saddam Hussein's rule nor his wars, including Bush's war deposing him, made the country any richer.<sup>14</sup> The best hope for Iraq to become

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13 This section of the paper builds on previously published papers (Weede 2006b, 2007).

14 It has been claimed (Podhoretz 2006: 26) that per capita income in Iraq is already 30% higher than it was before the war, and that growth prospects look good in spite of the insurgency. This modest prosperity seems to depend on the American taxpayer picking up the security bill. One may doubt whether this type of prosperity – irrespective of its degree – is conducive to democracy.

richer depends on its natural resources, its oil. Unfortunately, such resources can be a curse. The prospects for democracy or even political stability in resource rich countries are worse than elsewhere (Ross 2001, 2004; Weiffen 2004). A plausible reason for this failure is that ruling elites can live comfortably because of resource rents in an otherwise underdeveloped country, if it is well enough endowed with natural resources.

Finally, the cultural characteristics of Afghanistan and Iraq provide few reasons for hope. Both are Muslim countries. Iraq is a mostly Arab country. Although there is some debate whether belonging to Muslim civilization or merely belonging to the Arab family of nations makes a nation less likely to respect human rights or to become democratic (de Soysa and Nordas 2005; Donno and Russett 2004; Weiffen 2004), the details of this debate do not matter much for the purposes at hand. Whether it is because of its largely Arab or its Muslim character, the prospects for democracy look poor in Iraq. Because of its abject poverty and the rough terrain favoring insurgents (Fearon and Laitin 2003), the prospects in Afghanistan are bad, too.

The projects of democratization in Afghanistan and Iraq run into further complications because of the communal tensions across ethnic and sectarian divides:<sup>15</sup> between Pashto-speaking Pathans, Dari-speaking Tajiks, Uzbeks (all of the former being mostly Sunni) and Shia Hazara in Afghanistan; between Arabs and Kurds, between Sunnis in the Middle and the West and Shias in the South of Iraq. Whether majority rule is applicable in Afghanistan is dubious. Straightforward application of the majority principle promises Shia rule for ever in Iraq. In Afghanistan regionalism tends to degenerate into war-lord rule. Some devolution of power to the regional level might pacify the Kurds, but does not look appealing to the Sunnis whose area does not include a significant number of oil wells and who look back to a long period when they ruled Iraq. Since Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Shia Arabs feel threatened by each other, one may argue that democratization presupposes the solution of another difficult problem.

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15 It has been claimed (Podhoretz 2006: 26) that per capita income in Iraq is already 30% higher than it was before the war, and that growth prospects look good in spite of the insurgency. This modest prosperity seems to depend on the American taxpayer picking up the security bill. One may doubt whether this type of prosperity – irrespective of its degree – is conducive to democracy.



In Biddle's (2006: 13) words: "Resolving the country's communal security problems must take priority over bringing self-determination to the Iraqi people - or the democracy that many hope for will never emerge." Similarly, Etzioni (2007: 1) has advocated a change of American priorities from democracy to security and pointed out "that all people have an interest in and right to security, understood to include freedom from deadly violence, maiming, and torture. (...) this right is more fundamental than all the others, including legal-political and socioeconomic rights." As argued above, however, even an 'imperial' policy of exporting 'merely' political stability and security might be overambitious and prove to be beyond the capabilities of the US or even the West.

National identity in Afghanistan and Iraq is precarious: Uzbeks or Tajiks are not even Pashto-speakers. Kurds are not Arabs. Saddam Hussein was not the only Sunni Arab who dreamed of unifying Arabs far beyond Iraq's borders. The rule of law has never existed in Afghanistan or Iraq. Its institutionalization takes time, almost certainly longer than a single decade. Thus, the institutional back-up of any Afghan or Iraqi democracy must remain weak for some time to come. Semi-democratic regimes or emerging democracies, however, are at risk of domestic conflict or interstate war involvement (Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, and Gleditsch 2001; Mansfield and Snyder 2005). There is some evidence that the beneficial effects of democratization are largely confined to mature and liberal democracies, i.e., to a type of democracy which needs decades to be established (Zakaria 2003). Fukuyama (2005: 29-30) even suggested "that more democracy and more modernization will not solve our near-term terrorism problem, but may well exacerbate it." Mansfield and Snyder (2005: 230) provided another warning: "Trying and failing to democratize in adverse circumstances can have fateful, long-term consequences." Unfortunately, less than complete democratic transitions happen to be more frequent than fully successful ones (Mansfield and Snyder 2005: 80-81, 175). Afghanistan's or Iraq's characteristics have never destined these countries to be among the rare and immediately successful cases of democratization.

In the late 1940s, most Western observers would have been pessimistic about the democratic prospects of Germany or Japan. With the benefit of hindsight we know that pessimism was misplaced. Why? Both countries still had the human capital and much of the infrastructure of a developed country. They had the potential to become rich countries. Soon, they succeeded. They did not suffer from the distortions of resource-rich countries. They were neither Arab nor Muslim countries which seem to provide the least fertile soil for efforts at democratization. Moreover, people in both countries found a persuasive reason to collaborate with the United States. Especially in Germany, most people regarded Communism

and the Soviet Union as much worse than the United States and democracy.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Soviet threat provided a basis for collaboration between the US and should-be democrats in Germany and Japan (Edelstein 2004). Since the demise of Communism and the Soviet Union, no common enemy exists against whom American democrats, Afghan or Arab nationalists and fervent believers in a radical interpretation of Islam can cooperate. This is another reason why repeating the democratic reeducation success is unlikely in Afghanistan or Iraq. By contrast to Afghanistan or Iraq, Germany also enjoyed an indigenous tradition of the rule of law which was interrupted only by Hitler. Nevertheless, it provided something to which one could return.

An implicit assumption of American advocates of democratization seems to be that democratically elected governments are likely to be friends of the United States. The Muslim world is the region where this hope looks least plausible. Muslim fundamentalists can win elections because of their devotion and vitality, their honesty and relative immunity to corruption, or even their readiness to intimidate rivals (Pipes 2005–2006). It is hard, however, to imagine a fundamentalist Muslim who prefers American influence over al-Qaeda. At best, a fundamentalist dislikes both of them equally.

We also have to consider the dynamics of the ongoing insurgencies and ask the question whether the US and its allies stand a chance to prevail over the al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters in Afghanistan or al-Qaeda, Baathist and other Islamist insurgents in Iraq. On this question, a theory proposed by an American economist some 30 years ago supports an extremely bleak prospect. In Tullock's (1974) view, insurgency and counterinsurgency depend less on justice, voluntary support, or 'winning hearts and minds' than on the balance of threats and terror.<sup>17</sup> According to this theory, most people are individually powerless to significantly affect the outcome of an insurgency, but collectively they might nevertheless be decisive. Since the actions of resource-poor individuals hardly affect political outcomes, most individuals focus on private goals, like survival for themselves and their families.

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16 A closer look at what the US did in Germany after 1945 is not as reassuring as a superficial approach. Payne (2006b: 212ff.) refers to the 'harsh treatment of Germans', 'deliberately wrecking the German economy', and 'first punishing, then helping Nazis'. He even asserts that "no positive measures were needed to keep Nazism from coming back." If Hitler and his collaborators themselves had discredited Nazism, then the nation-building burden on the US would have been more bearable. Then democracy could have evolved in Germany rather than having to be imposed.

17 Although Tullock (1974) could not take sides or even be aware of the current debate about the primacy of either winning 'hearts and minds' or applying as much coercion as possible, his thinking is obviously close to the coercion school of thought. On the current debate and contemporary US campaigns in the Middle East, see Kahl (2007).

Imagine that the two sides in a civil war – the government and its supporters on the one hand and the insurgents on the other hand – differ somewhat in their readiness to commit atrocities, to maim, torture and kill on the basis of a mere suspicion that one might support the other side. If one's primary goal is survival, or the avoidance of torture, then it is relatively safer to generate the impression of sympathizing with the more cruel side. If most ordinary people act as if they sympathized with the more cruel side – by providing food, information, or shelter for its fighters – then cruelty raises the chances of winning. One might reject this argument by pointing to American firepower and readiness to use it with deadly effect not only on enemy combatants, but also on bystanders. Even if the Americans had killed more innocent bystanders than the insurgents, this would not change the decision calculus of those Afghans or Iraqis who are mainly concerned with survival. Americans do not target bystanders who nevertheless might be killed. That is why it does not make sense to dissuade them from targeting you in the first place.

Unfortunately, this theory has not been rigorously tested. But there is no better way to explain the Communist victories in Russia, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia. During the civil wars between Communists and their opponents and thereafter, the historical record testifies to Communist readiness to kill their suspected enemies by the millions. In my reading of the historical record, cruelty and disregarding human rights were communist tools of acquiring power (see Rummel 1994 and Weede 2000, chapter 4 on China and chapter 10 on Russia). Once in power they did not give up what had served them so well in getting there.

If a contest in cruelty will affect the result of the civil war in Afghanistan or Iraq, then the US and any government aligned with it is at a severe disadvantage. Nothing in the ideology or history of the Taliban or Saddam Hussein's Baath Party or of Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda prevents them from the application of murderous strategies and techniques, if these are believed to be effective. By contrast, no American government can ever order its troops to maim, torture and kill tens of thousands of victims – including women and children – on the basis of mere suspicion that they might be on the other side without paying a significant price. Given a free press at home, no American government could get away with it. Nor could an American government afford an ally who makes cruelty and human rights violations business-as-usual. If an American government ever were complicit to an effort to match or exceed the cruelty of the insurgents against innocent targets, it would merely lose the war on the home front rather than in the theater of war.

Admittedly, Tullock's theory addresses only one out of many determinants of success or failure in Afghanistan or Iraq. American readiness to suffer casualties and to stay in Iraq seems to run out before the insurgent's readiness to kill themselves and their victims does. If so, then Iraq has become a trap for America. Even acknowledging the positive effects of Saddam Hussein's defeat on Libya's abandonment of its WMD program does not fundamentally change this evaluation. Whatever can be done now looks bad. Continuing the war might mean maintaining a school of terrorism, just as Afghanistan was during the Soviet occupation and the insurgency against it. Simultaneously, however, American forces in Iraq and their local allies might serve as a kind of lightning rod. If American forces should be withdrawn, the newly trained terrorists might feel emboldened by the belief that Muslim insurgents defeated the US in Iraq after defeating the USSR in Afghanistan, and again look for soft targets within the Free World in general and America in particular. Moreover, it is dubious whether the West will stay in Afghanistan long enough to pacify the country.<sup>18</sup> In Afghanistan coalition fatalities may have stabilized below two hundred per year and in Iraq just above eight hundred per year (Economist 2007a: 34), but this is not 'winning'. A double defeat or retreat in Iraq and Afghanistan might provide Muslim fundamentalism with renewed vigor and self-confidence.

## What can be done?

Western efforts at nation-building are attempts to forestall state-failure and the export of refugees and political instability to neighboring countries. Although not all terrorists are Islamists – think of the Irish Republican Army, or the Basque Eta, or the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka – only Islamist terrorism is global in scope. It alone killed victims in America and Asia, in Europe and Africa. That is why the Bush doctrine and nation-building are focused on the Muslim world rather than elsewhere. The geopolitical centrality of the realm of Islam and Western dependence on Middle Eastern oil add to the importance of Muslim countries.

In the second section of this paper the difficulties of state- and nation-building have been outlined, in the third section the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq have been analyzed. Both sections have a somewhat 'defeatist' flavor. This analysis seems to contradict the 'neoconservative' view (Podhoretz 2007; Muravchik 2007) diametrically. Actually, however, the neoconservative views that enemies

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18 Scepticism about the chances of pacifying Afghanistan, of state- and nation-building there, does not imply the recommendation that Germany or other US allies should admit defeat before the US does. Maintaining Western unity is more important than most details of policy in Afghanistan.

exist – whether Communists during the Cold War or Muslim fanatics today – that they are evil, that they should be fought, that the UN, diplomacy, and foreign aid are inefficient tools in the war against them are compatible with the arguments made here. Moreover, Germans should be grateful for the neoconservative contribution to the West winning the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> The disagreement with the neoconservatives is not on the nature of the menace, but on what can be done against it. I do not know it. Worse still, my impression is that no one else (neoconservatives included) does.

There is no guarantee of the existence of easy or politically feasible solutions to all problems in international affairs. Conceivably, state- and nation-building in Afghanistan and Iraq might succeed if the West were ready to commit ten times as many troops as it currently does for more than two decades. If one works from the assumption that current troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq are close to the political feasibility frontier, that time or patience in the West is running out, then goals should be scaled down. It is obvious that imposing democracy is an even more ambitious project than 'merely' imposing political stability and providing basic security (Etzioni 2007). How difficult even 'draining the swamp' of Islamist terrorism is, has been clarified by Gordon's (2007: 54) definition of victory which comes "when the ideology the terrorists espouse is discredited, when their tactics are seen to have failed, and when they come to find more promising paths to the dignity, respect, and opportunities they crave." Who knows how to affect the terrorist's minds in this way?<sup>20</sup> As infidels (non-Muslims) Westerners should be at some disadvantage to influence the Islamists.

But we should debate even radical solutions. Huntington (1996: 316) once advocated an 'abstention rule', i.e., he recommended that the US and the West should not interfere outside of its own civilization. One may label this 'non-interventionism' or, if one disagrees: 'isolationism'. But it is not isolationism at the level of the nation-state, whether one thinks of the US, the UK, France or Germany. It is isolationism at the level of Western civilization and focused on the least tractable parts of the underdeveloped world. Thus, the 'abstention rule' is compatible with Western unity.<sup>21</sup> The 'abstention rule' permits a compromise between otherwise

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19 Some Germans claim that détente contributed to the mellowing of the Soviet Union and its decline. I always found another argument more persuasive according to which the reinforcement of the arms race by Reagan and the threat of the strategic defence initiative undermined Soviet self-confidence. In this interpretation of events, Jewish intellectuals in the neoconservative movement contributed to the establishment of the prerequisites of German reunification.

20 Whether Islamist terrorism is single-headed or hydra-like does not necessarily affect the dif-

incompatible positions. Whereas neoconservatives (like Podhoretz 2007) helped to overcome the 'evil empire' of the Soviet Union, but also cheered the US misadventures into Afghanistan and Iraq, the non-interventionist tradition within the US has always been aware of the cost of interventionism in civil liberty at home (Higgs and Close 2007). Global interventionism and the democratization of the Muslim Near and Middle East in particular might necessitate too much subordination of free individuals under the state. If individual freedom and limited government are the main achievements of Western civilization, then we should not risk too much of them at home in order to bring their blessings elsewhere.

Applying the 'abstention rule' and transferring a qualified 'isolationism' toward the level of Western civilization might be an attractive compromise between overextension and global interventionism on the one hand and closing one's eyes to security dilemmas and the necessity of defense on the other hand. As a bloc, the West remains viable, defensible, and even dominant for the foreseeable time. Huntington (1996: 321) is right in claiming: "Europe and America will hang together, or hang separately."

Although the abstention rule would be a decent first rule, we might need some exceptions. Etzioni (2007) has advocated a moral foreign policy by arguing in favor of military interventions to prevent genocide, but not to export democracy. The massacre of the Tutsi in Rwanda is a case where intervention would have been justified according to Etzioni's criteria, but did not happen. Similarly, Collier (2007) puts forward the cheap and efficient British intervention in Sierra Leone as a model for the future. Preventing mass murder and genocide might constitute exceptions from the general abstention rule. But even the exception might need

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faculty of overcoming it. According to Ajami (2007: 22), "the distinction between the Islamism of al-Qaeda and the 'secularism' of the Iraqi regime (under Saddam Hussein, E.W.) is a distinction without a difference." Podhoretz (2007) seems to agree. Ajami (2007: 22) also provides a provocative, but less than fully persuasive answer to the question of how to change Islamist minds: "What happens on the battlefield will settle the great contest. Hearts and minds will follow, and mirror, the military outcome." Even if one accepts this analysis of the menace, it does not follow that democratization of the Middle East is the cure. According to Mead (2007: 164), the Israeli defence establishment does not share the hopes which neoconservatives attach to democratization in the Middle East.

- 21 Like any rule it may be misapplied. Schröder and Chirac used it to undermine Western unity in 2003. This policy has been incompatible with German national interest which requires sticking close to the United States. In the end, Chirac and Schröder overestimated the power potential of a United Europe (should European unity ever be achieved). Whenever we feel that we cannot meet American expectations of support, modesty is required instead of grandstanding (Baring 2003; Weede 2005b, 2007).

the qualification 'intervention on the cheap'. Otherwise, the US or the West might intervene and merely interrupt mass murder and genocide.

Since political instability or state failure is contagious, since refugees might pour across international borders, another qualification of the abstention rule might be required. If unstable countries or regions are at the doorsteps of the West, as Bosnia or Kosovo are, then intervention might be required. Again, however, intervention makes sense only if done with sufficient forces to stabilize the target area. Otherwise intervention could easily degenerate into a prelude of building a fence, as the Israelis have done in an effort to limit the risk spilling over from the Palestinian West bank or Gaza.

Another and more important challenge to the 'abstention rule' concerns the rise of threats to the survival of the West. As long as it existed, the Soviet Union – Reagan's 'evil empire' – qualified as such a threat. Although the Western strategy was limited to containment rather than roll-back, forceful military responses from the rearmament of Germany to threats with 'star wars' were required to defeat the threat. Currently, the question is whether Muslim fundamentalism, al-Qaeda or 'Islamofascism' constitute a comparable threat.<sup>22</sup> Podhoretz (2007) argues that it does and justifies the American interventions in Afghanistan or Iraq on these grounds. The threat may be serious indeed, although we cannot know yet that it proves to be as persistent as the Communist threat was. Possibly, however, military misadventures in the Muslim world add to the risks of a clash of civilizations rather than reduce it. Certainly, Podhoretz is right in raising the issue. Serious challenges to the West exist and might become worse. Probably, the demographically vital, but economically stagnant Muslim world is a more plausible threat than fast growing, but simultaneously graying China. Because of its developmental success China can be co-opted in a free world, just as Japan and South Korea were co-opted before.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of vain attempts at nation-building in other civilizations the West should lead by example, instead of sending troops we should send entrepreneurs, investors, and traders. Of course, they should go at their own risk – preferably driven by the profit motive rather than by missionary zeal and ill-informed idealism. If Westerners in the Third World are driven by the profit motive, then they

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22 If Osama bin Laden has really linked Muslim collaboration with the West to apostasy (The Economist 2007b: 10), then one ought to remember that death is frequently considered to be the only just penalty for it. Such views might indeed make a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) or 'World War IV' (Podhoretz 2007) inevitable..

23 Ultimately, the idea of co-optation builds on the capitalist peace. My view of it has been published elsewhere (Weede 2005a).

have no choice but to adapt to local circumstances and sensibilities in order to satisfy the wants of local consumers. Non-interventionism does not imply leaving the Third World to an ugly fate. The Third World stands a chance. It enjoys potential 'advantages of backwardness' and opportunities for 'catch-up growth'. By their mere existence prosperous Western societies enjoying the rule of law and economic freedom provide a model for latecomers in terms of modernization to follow, technologies to borrow, and rich markets to which to export. Most Asian countries where most of mankind lives have got the message. That is why poverty and even inequality are receding globally (Bhalla 2002; Sala-i-Martin 2007; World Bank 2005). Against Muslim terrorism, Huntington's (1996) abstention rule and building fences might be the alternative to an endless and frustrating 'imperial' campaign of nation-building.

If one expects the Islamist, or even Islamofascist, challenge of terrorism to persist for many decades (Podhoretz 2007), if one doubts the feasibility of further preemptive wars after the victors in Iraq found so little evidence of weapons of mass destruction there, and if one doubts that the Islamist swamp can be drained within less than a generation, then the question still is: What can be done? We may look at Israel, to a Western democracy located almost in the middle of the realm of Islam. Since the end of the Cold War Israel has been the most endangered part of Western civilization. If one relates the number of victims to population size, then it has suffered more from Islamist terrorism than anyone else. Winning a couple of wars against the Arabs did not suffice to make the country safe. Now, the country has built a fence to physically separate the Israelis from their Arab challengers in general, and from terrorists in particular.

If bad comes to worst, then all of the West may some day face similar threats as Israel has done for a long time. Instead of nation-building out there, we might start thinking about disengagement or 'fences' – not necessarily physical fences because most of the West enjoys some distance from the realm of Islam. But the 'abstention rule' might be a kind of cognitive fence against underestimating the cost of exporting democracy there. Obviously, disengagement or 'building fences' implies a more cautious attitude towards Muslim immigration than towards Buddhist or Hindu immigration. As these standards of comparison illustrate, this argument is neither motivated by racial preferences nor by bigotry. But the topic of immigration is beyond the scope of this paper. A less interventionist strategy toward the Muslim world might also necessitate some rethinking of energy policies. Possibly, this might lead to a renewed advocacy of nuclear power. But this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, too.



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