
Nation Building and Crisis Prevention in the Post-Cold War World

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The meaning of nation building has changed considerably since the 1960s. Thirty years ago, nation building was largely a post-colonial phenomenon, an ambitious program to help newly independent countries acquire the institutions, infrastructure, economy, and social cohesion of more advanced nations. Nation building was a strategic and competitive enterprise, part of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this environment, the success or failure of less-developed nations was measured only partly by whether the lives of citizens improved; how individual governments aligned themselves with the superpowers also figured prominently in judgments of "success" and "failure."

The end of the Cold War changed the imperatives of nation building. The cessation of superpower competition has all but eliminated a nation's political alignment as a standard of development. Governments can no longer use the strategic competition between the West and the Communist bloc to extract assistance. Moreover, the spread of the democratic model, free market economics, and open communications, is forcing nations throughout the world into a more competitive environment, both at home and abroad. Both external and internal factors are forcing governments to open up their economic and political systems or face economic stagnation and social unrest.

In this brave new world, some less-developed nations have moved

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toward democratic and market solutions; in most instances, the economic and social benefits are already apparent. Other countries have begun to fail as nations and societies. The economic and social costs of these failures to the affected nation, its neighbors in the region, and to the world at large, are increasingly evident. Both situations concern the United States because both affect our political and economic interests.

When the clouds of the Cold War lifted, a continuum emerged, and aligned along it were the less-developed nations of the world. This continuum runs all the way from full-blown crisis to sustainable development: from natural and man-made disasters and civil war; to social breakdown and its restraint through conflict avoidance and resolution; to emergency food aid and refugee relief; to peacekeeping and peacemaking; to arrangements for recovery from crisis, national rebuilding, and transition to development; to long-term, sustainable development.

Nation building in the post-Cold War world must focus on helping nations move productively along this continuum. The competitive forces that drove traditional nation building are gone. The real question that confronts us is why should we be concerned with the fate of less-developed nations? The reason is simple: the failure of nations resonates. It affects other countries, undermines the notion of international community, and ultimately endangers our own economic and political interests. Ultimately it drives international disorder and chaos. The failure of nations ultimately constitutes a strategic threat to the United States—perhaps not as cataclysmic as the prospect of nuclear conflict during the Cold War, but over time as a threat to the stability of our own national well-being.

The failure of nations is not only a matter of civil collapse, as we have seen in Liberia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. It is also a matter of persistent underdevelopment, poverty, environmental damage, overpopulation, and political repression. These factors resonate across borders, cause nations to sink into social disarray, and they also have spillover effects—pollution, refugees, lost markets—that can undermine our economic well-being, our national security, and our values as a caring people.

This is where American leadership—in the security field, in international economics, in diplomacy, and in the field of development—comes so vitally into play. For just as chaos feeds on itself, so does

sustainable development, respect for the rule of law, the expectation of international order, and most importantly, democratic governance.

The immediate post-Cold War era is not just a time of spreading conflict. It is also a time of democratic experimentation and consolidation. The emphasis the United States attaches to cooperation, development, and democracy-building is consistent both with our national values and our national security interests. Democracies help, reinforce, and support each other. Furthermore, they insist upon respect for the rule of law and thus serve to restrain one another, and they are skilled at pursuing their national interests through peaceful negotiations.

The consolidation of democracy and the success of policies and programs that prevent crises make economic sense: wealthier nations no longer have the resources or the inclination to help nations rebuild from utter ruin. There is a broad recognition that the price of peace and stability is far, far less than the cost of reconstructing entire nations.

Modern nation building is thus a preventive investment. This kind of nation building is not something donor nations do for poor countries. It is something they help them do for themselves. It demands cooperation with developing countries and their citizens, and a diplomacy that uses development as a strategic asset, for in the post-Cold War world, crisis prevention and national development are inextricably linked.

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We now must focus on the aforementioned continuum. Each of the stops along the continuum has characteristic needs. They include:

- The acute needs associated with natural and man-made disasters—notably advance planning, crisis mitigation, refugee assistance, food aid, and general relief.
- The special needs of post-crisis transitions, such as peacekeeping, demining, institution building, economic stabilization, reintegration of combatants, restoration of critical government services, and repatriation of refugees and internally displaced people.
- The long-term needs of sustainable development, including democracy building, population and health, protection of the environment, and support for broad-based economic growth.

People all the world over aspire to the same opportunities—to gain control over their lives. If ordinary citizens have the necessary tools and

the freedom to use them, they will create opportunities to solve their own problems. They will actively work for their own well-being and in so doing, they will ratchet down crises and pursue the peaceful resolution of their conflicts.

Our approach is designed to deal with short-term concerns and to formulate the longer-term investments that will permanently reduce disorder. Our policy is designed to address particularly critical problems along the continuum, and in so doing, to help nations move progressively away from crisis and toward sustainable development.

For instance, civil conflict may be followed by reconciliation, or it may lead to the breakup of the nation. This latter course is dangerous and expensive, and recovery from it requires far more resources and time. Similarly, the long-term impact of an earthquake or drought may be social collapse or nothing more than a detour on the path of development. We have organized an Office of Transition Initiatives to help nations deal with the unique problems that arise when they try to emerge from a natural disaster or civil crisis. OTI addresses turning-point situations that heretofore have not been fully addressed by emergency food aid, peace-keeping, or long-term development programs.

The OTI effort is in its infancy, but it is already at work in Haiti, helping to pull that country back from the brink. In Haiti, we are assisting in the demobilization of soldiers, in the training of a new and accountable civilian police force, and in reforming the judiciary and government ministries. In other nations, OTI is evaluating existing assets and identifying interventions that can help nations emerge from crisis. We are working closely with the UN and its peacekeeping forces. We are forging new relationships with other development agencies and donors to share responsibilities in crisis-torn areas, avoid duplication, and leverage our resources.

We hope that in the future, OTI will help provide care for children orphaned by war, help displaced people return to their homes, and help ex-combatants acquire job skills. We would like to help people who have been victimized rebuild their lives, help reinforce critical government institutions so that they can begin functioning again, and help poor farmers acquire the tools and seed they need to begin feeding themselves and their neighbors.

In a similar vein, we have also embarked on programs designed to help nations anticipate and minimize crisis, not just react. An example is our Greater Horn of Africa Initiative, a regional plan announced earlier this year by President Clinton. It represents the best spirit of humanitarian activism. More than 22 million people today, in ten nations, are now at risk of starvation from famine as a result of drought in the Horn. But

we believe that while drought may be inevitable, famine is a condition created by humans.

We are mindful of the fact that collective actions by nations in the Sahel since the late 1970s have prevented repeated droughts from becoming famines. We remember that when the worst drought in a hundred years struck southern Africa in 1991 and 1992, regional cooperation made death by starvation almost unheard of. This was a remarkable achievement, and it can be emulated.

The situation in the Greater Horn is a classic complex crisis. It is the product of weak governance, ethnic fighting, a structural food deficit, poor infrastructure, the flow of refugees, a plethora of weapons, and weak institutions of conflict resolution. But the starvation of millions in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and elsewhere is not inevitable. Famine can be contained and its effects minimized. That is what our Greater Horn Initiative is about.

We plan to provide assistance with early warning, so that affected nations and donors can identify areas where food shortages are materializing. We are establishing mechanisms to pre-position supplies and facilitate their speedy transport, so that people do not have to leave their homes and become refugees in search of food. We are mobilizing American resources—logistical assistance, food aid, and cash—to ensure quick response. We are also working closely with other donors to ensure that responsibilities are shared.

This is an ambitious plan, made all the more difficult by the fighting throughout the region and governments that find it difficult to cooperate with one another. But we feel that if concerted action in a regional framework is effective, it may encourage some of the accommodation and conflict resolution that is central to helping nations act in their own interests and in so doing, prevent problems from becoming intractable crises that cost lives. We believe that our approach will help nations in duress to survive, and avoid the kind of social collapse whose reversal would demand far greater resources.

Finally, we have embraced sustainable development as the long-term objective of our work in the post-Cold War world. Sustainable development is a process that helps nations permanently improve the ability of societies and their citizens to anticipate problems, establish the institutions to deal with them, acquire and transmit the necessary expertise, find and allocate the needed resources, and in so doing, maintain the cohesion of society, whatever the crises that may confront it. This form of development—sustainable development—is the heart of our work.

Under the Clinton administration, USAID is pursuing a policy of sustainable development that fulfills four imperatives: to help nations

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generate broad-based economic growth; to help nations deal with unsustainable rates of population growth; to help nations protect the environment; and to help nations build democratic systems and societies where law and human rights are respected.

- To generate broad-based economic growth, we are helping to foster enabling environments

comprising institutions and policy changes that facilitate investment, rationalize taxes, privatize state-owned assets, encourage people to start businesses, protect the rights of workers, and build free trade. To help the poorest families join the economic system, we are supporting village banks and microenterprise programs to lend people, particularly women, the modest wherewithal they need to start small businesses, to create incomes for themselves, to acquire savings, and to look beyond their next meal.

- To help deal with issues of population, we are helping families live healthy lives by supporting a wide range of endeavors that improve maternal health, reduce infant mortality, provide childhood immunizations, support family planning systems and services, and help contain the spread of HIV/AIDS.

- To help people conserve their nation's resources for the future, we are assisting with water purification, controlling soil erosion, and helping nations establish economic and regulatory mechanisms that protect the natural environment, particularly biodiverse areas.

- To help build democracy, we are helping families empower themselves at the grassroots level by helping them create and sustain local non-governmental organizations. These NGOs convey peoples' concerns and teach the everyday skills of democracy: our assistance begins with partnerships forged with such local NGOs and the citizens they bring together. To help people form a more equal partnership with their governments, we are providing help in holding elections, supporting political party-building, training municipal employees, and providing technical support for courts and legislatures to enhance their professionalism, reinforce the rule of law, and make them accountable to the people they represent.

We cannot keep states from failing with a top-down approach. No amount of international resources or organizational capacity can serve as a substitute for the efforts of people in the developing world to build

stable, pluralist societies. Nor can we help societies on the edge of crisis transform themselves overnight.

But we can begin. We can render technical assistance, political encouragement, and diplomatic support. We can work nation to nation and people to people. These things we can do in our own political and economic and moral self-interest, as a reflection of how we believe an international community should comport itself, as a function of America's responsibility to provide leadership, as proof of our commitment to being a good neighbor, and as evidence of our willingness to care.

In the post-Cold War world, dramatic victories will be rare and setbacks common. But we have begun. We must extend and sustain our efforts, rooting out the things that cause nations to fail and chaos to spread, addressing the root causes that ultimately determine whether a nation grows or falters. We cannot build nations, but we can help them survive and help their people build a society and state that will serve them well, far into the future. ❧