

Introduction

In October 2007, the Gregg Centre hosted its annual conference on the theme “From Sarajevo to Kandahar: Rescuing Failed States in Historical Perspective.” In keeping with the centre’s ‘tradition’ the conference brought together scholars, students, soldiers, and civilian practitioners with experience in the subject. His Excellency Omar Samad, Ambassador of Afghanistan, opened the conference with an erudite and impassioned address on the challenge of rebuilding his shattered country. He was followed by a variety of speakers whose talks spanned the range of ‘failed state’ crises and conflicts that have dominated the headlines over the last 20 years: the Balkans, Somalia, Darfur, Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Six of the academic papers, revised and edited, are included in this theme section.

Derek Fraser opens the discussion with a definition of a failed state and an explanation of why they matter — because they can pose a threat to international peace. He suggests that since the cost of rescuing such states is considerable, it would be preferable to prevent them from failing. But the problem is not going to go away, and we will have to maintain, if not increase, our efforts to respond to the problems they pose.

David Reilly makes three main arguments. First, the domestic conditions of failing and failed states shape their international behavior, and their international circumstances exacerbate their internal failings. Second, established states and failing/failed states engage in different functions. The former are focused on state expansion activities while the latter are attempting to build a new state. Finally, like Fraser he argues that this problem of failing states is not going away; in fact, a collision course between these two types of states is inevitable.

In his presentation on the Canadian mission in Somalia, Grant Dawson takes a contrarian approach to the conventional wisdom, which — focusing on the torture and murder of a Somali civilian — holds that the Canadian effort was a disaster. Dawson points out that in the Somalia operation one can see the genesis of the “3D” (Defence, Development, Diplomacy) approach which now so clearly defines the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces first worked to establish security, then encouraged Somalis to embrace the peace-making process. The Canadians “led from behind,” working with and encouraging local leaders to define community needs and projects. Finally, they engaged other Canadian government agencies to provide the development and reconstruction resources. However, he cautions readers about the perils of drawing ‘lessons’ from the Somalia case, if only because one lesson that could be drawn easily would be to avoid such operations altogether and leave failed states to fester. He argues that the application of the 3D approach in Afghanistan was simply a case of doing ‘what works.’ The real lesson of Somalia, he says, is that rescu-

ing failed states requires patience — years, even decades, of commitment — and huge amounts of money, talented people, and political will.

Patrice McMahan and Andrea Talentino cast critical eyes on the experience of nation re-building in the Balkans. McMahan notes that the United States has been an active nation-builder, aiming not only to put states back together but ultimately to recreate and transform them. This article argues that the Bush administration's ideological beliefs, specifically what some have called "doctrinal unilateralism," led that administration to ignore important lessons wrought from the Balkans. Specifically, the Bosnia case demonstrated that stabilization and reconstruction were difficult, time consuming tasks; that coercive military force alone was not sufficient for peace-building; that multilateralism was crucial to the success of these missions; and finally, that American or Western liberal values and institutions are sometimes self-defeating, especially when they are forced on a country. Unfortunately, these lessons did not conform to the world view of the president or his view of how the US should execute its foreign policies. Talentino argues that while the international operations in both Bosnia and Kosovo have been profoundly successful to some degree — violence is absent, new governments have taken hold, and elections are considered free and fair — these successes are heavily qualified. Ethnic tensions remain high, local actors remain resistant to consensual modes of governance, and both places are considered relatively unstable. That is not surprising, as research shows that international peace-building is more successful at addressing immediate security needs than at building effective institutions.

Finally, Julian Schofield turns his attention to the complex relationship between nation-building in Afghanistan and that country's relationship with its influential neighbour: Pakistan. The success of NATO's strategy to strengthen the new Kabul regime depends on its intersection with Pakistani policies. Pakistan's strategy in Afghanistan, in turn, is tied to its broader security policy against India. This is complicated by Afghan-Pakistan disputes over territory, Afghan refusal to recognize the Durand Line as the international border, Pakistan's interdiction of third-party trade to and from Afghanistan, and a history of Afghan sponsorship of secessionism in Pakistan. All of these contribute to Pakistan's reluctance to contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan by closing the insurgent sanctuaries in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. NATO has few non-escalatory military options. It has two remaining venues of influence. First, its presence acts as a restraint on Afghan provocation of secessionism, thereby satisfying one of Islamabad's goals. Second, NATO could offer positive trade and aid incentives to Pakistan to gradually withdraw its support to those elements of its society that foment Pakhtun insurgency in Afghanistan (and Pakistan). The long-term effect of such a strategy would be a gradual economic integration and normalization of the Afghan and Pakistan frontier areas.

If there is a single message which emerges from these articles, it is that 'rescuing failed states' is harder than it looks at first; it is not to be undertaken

lightly. It requires a commitment of many kinds of resources; of policies that are sensitive to local politics, cultures, and agendas; and of the patience to see them through. None of these are easy. But, since the problem of failed states is unlikely to disappear any time soon, we had better approach the task with a clear understanding of what will be required of us.