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## Human Rights and Post-War Reconstruction: Introduction

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# Human Rights and Post-War Reconstruction

## Introduction by Roberto Belloni

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The expression “post-war reconstruction,” commonly adopted by both practitioners and academics, is somewhat misleading. Reconstruction does not entail rebuilding or return to the pre-war state of affairs as the expression seems to suggest. Rather, reconstruction involves difficult multiple transitions: from war to peace, from a state to a market economy, and from authoritarianism to democracy. Each transition taken by itself would be daunting. Taken together, they can be almost overwhelming.

The task is complicated by the continuing influence of wartime elites, donors' short attention span, and changing global priorities. Notoriously, support for post-war reconstruction is not driven by the needs on the ground, but from the interests of international organizations and bilateral donors engaged in the process. For example, the average Bosnian citizen received much more aid than the average Afghan, despite Afghanistan's much lower pre-war levels of economic and social development.

As the cases included in this Review Digest confirm, the process of reconstruction has a contradictory impact on human rights. Often for the first time citizens of war-torn societies are given the possibility to enjoy political and civil rights. Simultaneously, however, important limitations on individual rights are imposed. International officials working to further democratization and state-building see the rule of law and the respect of human rights as a barrier rather than bedrock for their actions. A form of benevolent autocracy—most evident in the Balkans—is seen as indispensable to prepare the local population for democratic self-governance and the rule of law. Sometimes decisions by international officials unaccountable to the local population undermine the legitimacy of new democratic institutions, and may even retard the emergence of a human rights culture.

The challenges involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Iraq testify to the difficulties and dilemmas facing post-war societies worldwide. Here, each case is usefully divided in three sections addressing issues of democratization, state-building and neotrusteeship. The bibliography gathered here is an indispensable resource for students of human rights and transitional politics, and I wholeheartedly welcome the initiative of *Human Rights & Human Welfare* to gather and disseminate this material.

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