

Radical Reconstructions: a Critical Analogy of US Post-conflict State-building

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Resumo

Reconstruções Radicais: Uma Analogia Crítica do State-building Pós-conflito Americano

As questões relacionadas com o *State-building* em situações pós-conflito têm dominado muitos dos debates contemporâneos nas Relações Internacionais. Porém, as experiências de *state-building* não são um fenómeno recente. O presente artigo estabelece uma analogia entre a actual experiência americana com o *state-building* no Iraque e o esforço de reconstrução dos estados do Sul no período a seguir à Guerra Civil americana. O objectivo principal do exercício é tentar identificar semelhanças e diferenças nas dinâmicas envolvidas em ambos os casos. A observação demonstra que ambos os projectos de reconstrução não visavam restaurar a ordem política previamente existente. Pelo contrário, as experiências seculares de *state-building* por parte dos EUA têm culminado na institucionalização de uma agenda de transformação radical das ordens política, social e económicas existentes. Tanto a Reconstrução Radical no Sul como a guerra no Iraque podem ser melhor compreendidas no quadro no projecto contemporâneo de construção da paz, englobado dentro do desígnio do *state-building* liberal.

Abstract

Post-conflict state-building has been at the heart of contemporary debates in IR. However, state-building endeavours by foreign countries are not a novel phenomenon. This article establishes an analogy between the present-day US State-building experience in Iraq and the reconstruction effort of the postbellum South in the 19th century. The aim is to try to identify similarities and differences in the dynamics involved in both instances. The assessment demonstrates that both reconstruction projects did not look to restore the previously existing political order. Quite on the contrary, the secular State-building experiments of the US have culminated in the institutionalization of an agenda of radical transformation of the existing political, social and economic orders. Both Radical Reconstruction and the War in Iraq can be best understood in the framework of the contemporary peacebuilding project, encompassed within the liberal state-building enterprise.

Introduction

The Civil War was America's first experiment in ideological conquest, therefore, and what followed was America's first experiment in "nation-building".

(Robert Kagan, 2006)

The foregoing statement by Robert Kagan (2006) in his revisionist book *Dangerous Nation: America's Foreign Policy from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* is at the heart of our present essay. From having been a shunned topic in most mainstream academic discussions for many years, the reconstruction of the *postbellum* South has become a subject of renewed interest (Foner, 1997). Various scholars have revisited this complex period of American history, reviewing and reanalyzing initial propositions. A short and heuristic appraisal of the recent literature allows for some consideration on the analogous qualities of the *postbellum* reconstruction policies in the South and the recent American undertakings in post-conflict State-building in places so far off as Iraq, for example.

The use of historical analogies in international relations has been widely discussed (Jervis, 1976; Khong, 1992; Vertzberger, 2002). While adverting to the dangers of historical generalizations, Robert Jervis (1976: 217) insists "we cannot make sense out of our environment without assuming that, in some sense, the future will resemble the past". According to Yuen Foong Khong (1992: 7), a historical analogy assumes that if two or more events "separated in time agree in one respect, than they also may agree in another". In this sense, analogies are useful in highlighting patterns of continuity and change in political behaviour. Despite the dangers of historical analogies, we cannot, however, fail to explore the similarities of the two distinct eras referred to above in order to try to understand some of the dynamics and patterns in US post-conflict interventions. What two other examples - i.e., the (possibly) first and the most recent US nation-building endeavours - can assess the eventual existence of patterns of political thought and behaviour throughout the history of US intervention?

In fact, it is difficult not to hear Kagan's prose and relate it to today's international milieu:

To the North, the defeated South was, in the argot of the twentieth century, an underdeveloped nation. Its underdevelopment, its backwardness, exemplified by the archaic institution of slavery, many northerners believed, had been responsible for the horrendous conflict that almost destroyed the entire nation.

Now the North, having subdued the rebellion and punished its leaders, had the task not only of standing the conquered land back on its feet, but of curing it of the evils that had led to war, which in turn meant dragging it forcibly into the modern world. (Kagan, 2006: 270)

Kagan's words parallel Thomas Barnett's present-day plea for the global dissemination of a Western model of political and economic development, particularly in its Iraqi setting:

If America can enable Iraq's reconnection to the world, then we will have won a real victory in the globalization struggle, and the transformation of the Middle East will begin in earnest. Winning the war brought no security to the United States. In fact, by committing ourselves to Iraq's eventual integration into the Core, we temporarily reduced our security. But winning the war was the necessary first step to winning the peace we wage now, and that follow-on victory will increase US security in the long run quite dramatically. By that I do not simply mean regime change in other countries seeking WMD or supporting terrorist networks, I mean really "draining the swamp" of all the hatreds that fuel the violence we suffered on 9/11. I mean destroying disconnectedness across the region as a whole. (Barnett, 2004: 286)

Both statements demonstrate a historical commitment of US political and military involvement aimed at promoting a particular political agenda. In fact, the US has a long track record of foreign interventions and State-building experiences (Dobbins *et al*, 2008; 2007; 2003). Despite some policy adjustments, US officials have demonstrated some difficulty in learning from past experiences. Most of the correlations established with past American State-building experiences tend to focus specifically on the post-war reconstruction of Germany and Japan. These endeavours are usually referred to with great enthusiasm and are considered "the gold standard for postwar reconstruction" (Dobbins *et al*, 2008: xiii). Most studies of US State-building ventures have concentrated essentially on post-Cold War peace-building operations.¹

Our undertaking in the present essay looks to go further back in history to try to comprehend the dynamics of US policy in post-conflict environments. We believe that what has been at stake since the post-Civil War Reconstruction is a project of

1 For some other historical analogies of US Nation-building experiences see Gardner and Young (2005) and Sicherman (2007).

striking political transformation. As David Ignatius (2005) put it “The Civil War, like the invasion of Iraq, was a war of transformation in which the victors hoped to reshape the political culture of the vanquished”.

State-building, Nation-building, and Peace-building

Before we can embark on an evaluation spree between the two periods under examination, it is important that we first consider what State-building means. Like most words that insinuate themselves into conventional speech and communication and become loosely defined, State-building lacks a clear and definite description and explanation. It thus shares a place with similar concepts in the lexical quagmire of the social sciences in general and the field of International Relations in particular. It is nevertheless possible to identify some features that are recurrent in the thematic literature written on the subject of State-building.

At the outset it is opportune to dispel some confusion in relation to the ambiguity of the concepts of State-building and Nation-building. Even though there is some distinction applied to both concepts in many European schools of thought, we use the terms interchangeably. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008: 13) distinguishes between both concepts, underlining the fact that “state building is not nation-building”. For the OECD, Nation-building implies deliberate strategies, usually applied by domestic elites to create a common national identity around the idea of the nation, namely:

Actions undertaken, usually by national actors, to forge a sense of common nationhood, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian or communal differences; usually to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty; and usually to mobilise a population behind a parallel state-building project. May or may not contribute to peacebuilding. Confusingly equated with post-conflict stabilisation and peacebuilding in some recent scholarship and US political discourse. (OECD, 2008: 13)

Despite this conceptual distinction, in the dominant American schools of thought both terms intermingle casually. In fact, Francis Fukuyama (2004b) in his article *Nation-Building 101* clarifies that when applying the expression Nation-building “What we are really talking about is state-building – that is, creating or strengthening such government institutions as armies, police forces, judiciaries, central banks, tax-collection agencies, health and education systems, and the like”.

To add to the confusion, while defining Nation-building,² Dobbins *et al* (2008: 2) argue that “other terms currently in use to describe this process include *stabilization and reconstruction, peace-building, and statebuilding*”. Other sources could be presented to justify our claim, but it appears to suffice to assume that the external factor³ imposing new institutional structures is the common denominator in our essay, thus allowing us to use both terms (State-building and Nation-building) interchangeably.

State-building came into the limelight a few years after the end of the Cold War. With the lack of a credible inter-state dispute between global powers to influence international politics, growing concern mounted with regard to other menaces. The newly designated “weak” or “failed states” captured the political imagination of the International Community, especially in the Western states. The perils facing international society were diverse, but their root-causes were unique. According to Fukuyama (2004a: 17), “Weak or failed states are close to the root of many of the world’s most serious problems, from poverty and AIDS to drug trafficking and terrorism”.

In addition to the grave humanitarian disasters in these weak states, other factors reinforced the urgency of international intervention:

For a while, the United States and other countries could pretend that these problems were just local, but the terrorist attacks of September 11 proved that state weakness constituted a huge strategic challenge as well. Radical Islamist terrorism combined with the availability of weapons of mass destruction added a major security dimension to the burden of problems created by weak governance. (...) Suddenly the ability to shore up or create from whole cloth missing state capabilities and institutions has risen to the top of the global agenda and seems likely to be a major condition for the possibility of security in important parts of the world. Thus state weakness is both a national and an international issue today of the first order. (Fukuyama, 2004a: 18)

Humanitarian issues may have preceded many of the International Community’s (IC) numerous concerns in relation to fragile or failed states in the 1990s. But, as previously alleged, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 brought security matters to the

2 For James Dobbins *et al* (2008: 2) “Nation-building can be defined as the use of armed forces in the aftermath of a conflict to promote an enduring peace and a transition to democracy”.

3 The external dimension inherent in our understanding of State-building is reflected in Mark Berger’s (2006: 6) definition that stresses “an externally driven, or facilitated, attempt to form or consolidate a stable, and sometimes democratic, government”.

forefront in international policy. The succession of international military interventions in the 1990s seemed to have been defined by a humanitarian whim within the IC. Differing from their Cold War counterparts, the more recent operations revealed some novel characteristics, specifically the involvement in the domestic affairs of the states concerned, the centrality of humanitarian concerns, and the use of military force when necessary to complete the ICs goals⁴ (Cottney, 2008: 429).

These interventions diverged significantly from traditional peacekeeping operations. Consequently, many people questioned the International Community's legitimacy to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states. The UN embraced the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty's concept of "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) as response to this problem.⁵ Accordingly, R2P establishes that:

Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect. (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: xi)

But, in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a macro-level shift in the international peacebuilding strategy which began to emphasize the construction and/or strengthening of legitimate governmental institutions in states emerging from internal conflict (Paris and Sisk, 2008). It is in this operational context that State-building has acquired its recently renowned status, for "State-building is a particular approach to peacebuilding" (Paris and Sisk, 2008: 1). While peace-building "refers to efforts to create conditions in which violence will not recur", State-building distinguishes itself by being a "sub-component of peacebuilding", intended to strengthen or construct legitimate governmental institutions in countries emerging from conflicts⁶ (*Idem*: 14).

According to the OECD (2008: 14), State-building can be defined "as *purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal*

4 For a comprehensive typology of the different peace operations since the Cold War see Andrew Cottney (2008).

5 The UN and its Secretary-general, Kofi Annan, adopted many of the premises of R2P in official documents and speeches. See Cottney, 2008: 435.

6 It is possible to envision State-building in a peaceful setting, but accounts of state formation without some form of violence at some stage are infrequent (OECD, 2008: 13).

groups". This particular description emphasises factors of legitimacy, domestic actions, the state-society negotiation process, along with the appreciation of other informal institutions beside the state (*Idem: Ibidem*).

Most definitions of State-building are more condensed. For Fukuyama:

At the core of state-building is the creation of a government that has a monopoly of legitimate power and that is capable of enforcing rules throughout the state's territory. That is why state-building always begins with the creation of military and police forces or the conversion of the former regime's coercive agencies into new ones. (Fukuyama: 2005:87)

This description is distinct from others that tend to emphasize the importance of political and economic factors, because "before you can have democracy or economic development, you have to have a state" (*Idem: 84*).

Another view is that of Dobbins (2008: 72), for which the "prime objective of any nation-building operation is to make violent societies peaceful, not to make poor ones prosperous, or authoritarian ones democratic". Dobbins recognizes that economic development and political reform are essential to this transformation but, however, not sufficient by themselves. Therefore, public security and humanitarian assistance are the first-order priorities for State-building interventions, given that "If the most basic human needs for safety, food and shelter are not being met, any money spent on political or economic development is likely to be wasted" (*Idem: 73*).

In operational terms, Dobbins (2007: 14-15) organizes such interventions around a sequential hierarchy of tasks:

- security: peacekeeping, law enforcement, rule of law, and security sector reform;
- humanitarian relief: return of refugees and response to potential epidemics, hunger, and lack of shelter;
- governance: resuming public services and restoring public administration;
- economic stabilization: establishing a stable currency and providing a legal and regulatory framework in which local and international commerce can resume;
- democratization: building political parties, freedom of the press, civil society, and a legal and constitutional framework for elections;
- development: fostering economic growth, poverty reduction, and infrastructure improvements.

In a broader and more technocratic conception, Lakhdar Brahimi (2007: 4) describes State-building “as the central objective of any peace operation”. According to the former diplomat, State-building is a more appropriate description of what the International Community is trying to accomplish in post-conflict countries through the building of effective systems and institutions of government.⁷ In spite of supporting a “light footprint” solution, Brahimi does present some activities that need to be undertaken, specifically constitution-drafting, electoral processes, reintegration and national reconciliation, and the implementation of the rule of law.

Hence, as acknowledged before, State-building is about transforming states, not restoring them as they were (Brahimi, 2007: 5). Following an appraisal of the preceding definitions, we cannot deny that post-conflict State-building reflects “a vision of social progress – commonly called the liberal peace – where post-war reconstruction is wrapped in a broader concept of development and modernization” (Suhrke, 2007: 1292). More precisely, “the underlying model of reconstruction and modernization is derived from Western experiences of liberal political development and economic growth” (Suhrke, 2007: 1292).

Despite recent criticism of the Liberal Peace model, Fukuyama (2004a: 20) admits “in retrospect, there was nothing wrong with the Washington Consensus *per se*”⁸. Rather, “the problem lay in basic conceptual failures to unpack the

7 The concept of “Institution” is also problematic and most studies on State-building lack any kind of conceptual framework. Our understanding of Institutions is based on Marina Ottaway’s essay “Rebuilding State Institutions in Collapsed States” in which she departs from a dictionary definition of Institution (as “significant practice or organization in a society” or as “an established organization, especially of public character”) emphasizing the *significant* and *established* dimensions. In her view, the International Community understands institution (re)building as organizing government departments and public agencies to fulfil their functions both efficiently and democratically following models of Weberian states – e.g. electoral institutions; executive agencies (particularly dealing with finances); the parliament; the judiciary; the military; and the police. Accordingly, “what external agents do is set up organizations, not institutions” (2003: 248). These organizations will only become *significant* and *established* when the relevant actors believe they provide solutions to real problems, meaning they will only develop into institutions over time and through the resolution of problems affecting the local community.

8 “Washington Consensus” refers to the term initially coined in 1989 by John Williamson to describe a set of ten specific economic policy prescriptions that he considered should constitute the “standard” reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington, DC-based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the US Treasury Department and comprehend: 1) Fiscal discipline; 2) a redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution, such as primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure; 3) tax reform (to lower marginal rates and broaden the tax base); 4) interest rate liberalization; 5) a competitive exchange rate; 6) trade liberalization; 7) liberalization of inflows of foreign direct investment; 8) privatization; 9) deregulation (to abolish barriers to entry and exit); and 10) secure property rights.

different dimensions of stateness, and to understand how they relate to economic development” (*Idem*: 20-21). In order to solve this predicament, Fukayama (*Idem*) recommends distinguishing between the *scope* (the different functions and goals taken on by Governments) and *strength* (the ability of states to plan and execute policies, and to enforce laws cleanly and transparently – what is now commonly referred to as state or institutional capacity) of state activity.

The claim that institutions (the *strength* dimension) are the critical variable in development has become conventional wisdom. The disappointment of many of the peacebuilding operations of the 1990s revealed the inadequacies of quick-fix solutions, such as rapid elections and disengaged schemes of economic privatization. As Paris and Sisk argue:

The International Community’s efforts to promote stability in war-torn states by encouraging democratization and marketization in the 1990s had created not a liberal peace but instead renewed competition and violence in part because peacebuilders had not made sufficient efforts to build basic institutional structures (including, most importantly, rule of law institutions) that both democracy and market economics required to function well. (2008: 10)

Subsequently, the International Community’s answer to the contemporary weak state challenge seems to be strengthening the State-building effort, by working to overcome its intrinsic tensions and contradictions. A departure from this tract “would be tantamount to abandoning tens of millions of people to lawlessness, predation, disease, and fear” (*Idem*: 14).

Reconstructing the *Postbellum* South

Despite the fact that the more recent studies on *postbellum* history and policy are much more sensitive to the complexities involved in the reconstruction process, it is still common to come across opinions similar to those of writer and diplomat Claude Bowers:

Never have American public men in responsible positions, directing the destiny of the Nation, been so brutal, hypocritical, and corrupt. The Constitution was treated as a door-mat on which politicians and army officers wiped their feet after wading in the muck. (...) Brutal men, inspired by personal ambition or party motives, assumed the pose of philanthropists and patriots, and thus deceived and misguided vast numbers of well-meaning people in the North. (1929: v-vi)

Oddly enough, Bowers' words echo many contemporary lamentations of America's latest State-building enterprise. However, it is only fair to glance on Southern reconstruction through the latest academic perspectives in order to try to comprehend how the various challenges encountered were dealt with. Until the 1950s most of the texts on Reconstruction had been about sordid motives and human depravity.⁹ Revisionist literature initiated in the 1960s has tended to expose some commendable achievements of Reconstruction, recognizing some aspects of social and political progress (Foner, 1997). Nevertheless, the legacy of the Civil War was a tragic death toll and a massive devastation of American society. After over four years of belligerence there finally came a time "to bind up the nation's wounds"¹⁰. The South was particularly devastated by the years of belligerence. But despite the misery and destruction, the South's reconstruction "involved more than rebuilding shattered farms and repairing broken bridges", for "an entire social order had been swept away, and on its ruin a new one had to be constructed" (Foner, 1989: 128).

The preparation for Reconstruction was being pondered, at least theoretically, from the onset of the War. For Abraham Lincoln the quintessential purpose of Reconstruction was restoring the old relationship between Southern States and the Union. In fact, President Lincoln did not envision any sweeping social revolution or "believe that Reconstruction entailed social and political changes beyond the abolition of slavery" (Foner, 1989: 36) Naturally he considered this a Presidential, not a Congressional, duty.¹¹ Congress, for its part, believed this to be its responsibility. A dilemma shortly ensued however because both the President and the Congress were both championing conflicting plans for Reconstruction (Stampp, 1970: 28).

Lincoln did not hesitate to act and, as soon as a considerable area of the South was under Federal occupation, he began devising and implementing a program of his own. Abraham Lincoln's Reconstruction program looked to facilitate the reintegration of the Southern states by recognizing state governments composed by a minority of voters who would take an oath of allegiance to the Union (Foner, 1989: 36). In opposition, Congress adopted the Wade-Davis Bill in July 1864, outlining a harsher

9 For an understanding of the traditional version of Reconstruction see Kenneth Stampp (1970: 7-8).

10 Quote from Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25819>.

11 For Abraham Lincoln, as commander in chief of the armed forces, it was the Presidents Constitutional obligation to grant individual pardons or a general amnesty to Southerners. Consequently, it was his responsibility to impose the conditions of amnesty, to decide when loyal governments had been re-established in the South, and fix the temporal horizon of martial law.

program for Southern states, i.e. establishing a military governor to temporarily rule each Confederate state and requiring Southerners to take an “iron-clad oath” in order to be able to partake politically. The President vetoed the bill, clarifying he was reluctant to “be inflexibly committed to any single plan of restoration” (Lincoln *Apud* Stampp, 1970: 40). Lincoln followed his arrangement until his death, recognizing several Southern state governments composed by local minorities.

With regard to slavery and the race problem, Abraham Lincoln approached Reconstruction with three basic assumptions: “1) emancipation from slavery should be gradual; 2) colonization was the ideal solution to the race problem; and 3) colonization failing, the free Negro would have to accept an inferior status in American society” (Stampp, 1970: 35).

President Lincoln’s death in April 1865 set the stage for some Radical Republicans to redirect the Reconstruction¹². These men were, according to Kenneth Stampp (1970: 50) “determined not to lose the fruits of war through a soft peace”, meaning a reconciliation that “would enable the southern rebel leaders to regain the positions of political and economic power they had held before the war”.

The presidential ascent of Andrew Johnson was accompanied by a harsher rhetoric regarding Reconstruction. Straight away he asserted the need to bring key Confederates to trial, break the large southern estates, and abolish slavery completely. The Radical Republicans in Congress¹³ quickly rallied around Johnson and his sweeping agenda. However, as time would confirm, President Johnson and the Radicals had in fact very little in common¹⁴. Above all, Andrew Johnson was not elated in replacing the Southern landed aristocracy with a Northern moneyed aristocracy.¹⁵ Hastily, President Johnson took-up Abraham Lincoln’s plan, attempting to make Reconstruction a presidential endeavour of swift accomplishment¹⁶. After

12 Andrew Johnson referred to the policy as “Restoration”.

13 The Thirty-ninth Congress was initially defines around four political groups - i.e. Democratic minority, conservative Republicans, radical Republicans, and moderate Republicans. While initially holding the balance of power, the moderate Republicans soon allied themselves with the Radicals giving them control of Congress by the summer of 1866.

14 The common issues for both Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans were their mutual desire to preserve the Union by suppressing the Southern revolt, uphold the Thirteenth Amendment, and their desire to destroy southern planter aristocracy. Beyond these basic issues the Radicals had a much more drastic plan for southern reconstruction, entailing much broader changes in the South. See Kenneth Stampp (1970: 53-54).

15 Keeping with his modest roots, Andrew Johnson wanted a reconstruction project which would empower the yeoman class in the South.

16 Andrew Johnson did alter some of the terms of Abraham Lincoln’s plan, namely restricting the benefits of amnesty of Confederate civil and military officers and appointing provisional governments in the southern states until an electoral delegation could be assembled. He also demanded that Confederate states declare the illegality of their ordinance of secession, repudiate

having verified the transition of political power to the newly elected governors and legislatures during the summer, Johnson announced the reconstruction process was completed when Congress finally assembled in December of 1865.¹⁷

Congress rejected the President's policy, rebuffing the new governments in the South and devising a new plan for reconstruction. Contrary to Andrew Johnson who contended the Confederate states had never been out of the Union, the Radical Republicans considered the Southern states had in fact seceded from the Union and should be treated as conquered provinces and be "subject to all the liabilities of a vanquished foe" (Stampp, 1970: 86). Consequently, only Congress had the power to admit and rebuild the Southern states. The implications of such an outlook were that, according to George W. Julian, the secessionist states would be treated "as outside of their constitutional relations to the Union, and as incapable of restoring themselves to it except on conditions to be prescribed by Congress" (Julien *apud* Stampp, 1970: 87).¹⁸

The Republican victory in the 1866 Congressional elections literally put the Radicals in charge of Reconstruction. The question of slavery was of critical importance to Radical Reconstruction. Not only was there the conviction of the moral obligation to end slavery, but also the former slaves political support was vital to the Radical's new program. Aiding the emancipation of former slaves was a central feature of Radical Reconstruction or as Stampp (1970: 122) argues "to give full citizenship to southern Negroes - in effect, to revolutionize the relations of the two races - was the leap in the dark of the reconstruction era". Even so, for Radicals no true liberation could be accomplished without economic assistance.¹⁹ The confiscation of land and its redistribution to former slaves figured prominently on the Radical Agenda.²⁰ It embodied a plan to "to overrun the plantation system

all Confederate debts, as well as ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. Consequently, the process of political reconstruction would then be completed and martial law could be revoked by the President and federal troops removed.

17 No real political change was brought by the newly elected governments since the majority of elected representatives were planters and Confederate leaders and pursued policies very similar to their antebellum counterparts. Especially defeating to Andrew Johnson were the Black Codes promulgated in South, which denied coloured people many of their newly acquired rights by limiting many of their activities.

18 Equally important to the debate was the Negro question, for which Radicals only admitted a truly equal status for whites and blacks alike.

19 The over four million former slaves emerged in a condition of complete destitution, without work, land or legal claim to any belonging. The Radicals believed that this condition of economic helplessness threatened to become a purely nominal freedom.

20 Many of the plans proposed established the distribution of confiscated land to every adult freedman, selling the rest to pay for public debt, provide pension for disabled veterans and compensate loyal men for property damages during the war.

and provide former slaves with homesteads”, ultimately reshaping Southern society (Foner, 1989: 235). However, the land reform programs were defeated in Congress, for the moderate Republicans did not accept such sweeping initiatives. The land confiscation and redistribution proposal was a striking blow for Radicals and “probably made inevitable the ultimate failure of the whole radical program”²¹ (Stampp, 1970: 129).

Federal assistance on a less ambitious scale was accomplished through the creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau).²² The Bureau was intended to last for only one year after the war ended, but following the Congressional Committee on Reconstruction’s proposal, Congress extended the Freedmen’s Bureau indefinitely and increased its powers – e.g. supervision of labour contracts and creation of special courts for black people when they were unable to get justice in other courts – contributing to “the transformation of the Negro from slave to citizen” (Stampp, 1970: 133). However, in 1869 Congress terminated the Freedmen’s Bureau and vanquished its most valuable agency for protecting the civil and political rights of former slaves. In fact, the Civil Rights Act²³ of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment²⁴ were left without any formal Federal safeguards, allowing for the defiance of black people exercising their recently acquired political rights.

In contrast, Reconstruction policy dealing with white Southerners was surprisingly indulgent. It is commonly accepted that Confederates and their supporters were castigated and penalized for their actions. Yet the vast majority of Southerners who took up arms or backed the Confederate cause were usually only required to

21 One of the reasons identified by Kenneth Stampp (1970: 129) for not approving the land reform program was due to the fact that many moderate and radical Republicans did not understand the need of giving the freedman economic emancipation. Most believed that it would be enough to approve a series of constitutional amendments granting freedom, civil rights and voting capacity to former slaves. Also, most Republicans were averse to such Federal meddling in the economic realm, seeing it as an ignoble attack on property rights.

22 The Freedman’s Bureau provided white refugees and freedmen with food, clothing and medical care, allowing them to settle on abandoned or confiscated land for a limited period of time, namely the transition from slavery to freedom.

23 The Civil Rights Act was the first important action by Congress towards protecting the rights of Freedmen during Reconstruction. Passed on March 1866, as a counterattack against the Black Codes in the southern United States, it guaranteed the rights to make contracts, sue, bear witness in court and own private property.

24 The Fourteenth Amendment was adopted on July 9, 1868 as part of the Reconstruction Amendments. The amendment provides a broad definition of citizenship, overruling *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) which had excluded slaves, and their descendants, from possessing Constitutional rights.

take an oath of allegiance in order to be pardoned and regain their basic political rights. Even the Confederate leaders suffered only minor sanctions. The sentences for Confederates were in fact quite lenient:

With few exceptions, even the property of Confederate leaders was untouched, save, of course, for the emancipation of their slaves. Indeed, the only penalty imposed on most Confederate leaders was a temporary political disability provided in the Fourteenth Amendment. But in 1872 Congress pardoned all but a handful of Southerners; and soon former Confederate leaders were serving as state governors, as members of Congress, and even as Cabinet advisers of Presidents. (Stampp, 1970: 10-11)

But there were significant differences in the perspective underlying the Radical's Reconstruction project. As stated previously, Radicals looked upon the Southern states as secessionists who had broken their connection to the Union and forfeited their political privileges. Therefore, from March 1867 onwards, several acts were passed in order to impose Radical Reconstruction. The first act declared "no legal State governments or adequate protection for life or property now exists in rebel States" (Stampp, 1970: 144). As a result, the Andrew Johnson approved governments were rejected and the ten unreconstructed Southern States were divided into five military districts.²⁵

Under the authority of the district commanders qualified voters were enrolled, state constitutional conventions were established, state legislators were elected, new state constitutions were framed, and Constitutional Amendments were ratified.²⁶ By 1868 six of the Southern states had completed this process and were readmitted into the Union, while the other four were readmitted in 1870, completing the political Reconstruction of the Southern states.

The Radical governments established in Southern states did not however impose radical reforms. In effect, the "delegates showed little interest in experimentation" (Stampp, 1970: 170). The newly written constitutions were quite orthodox and there was no penchant for novel executive or judicial systems. Even in the social

25 Of the original 11 secessionist States only Tennessee was considered reconstructed. The five military districts were: 1) South Carolina and North Carolina; 2) Virginia; 3) Georgia, Alabama and Florida; 4) Mississippi and Arkansas; 5) Louisiana and Texas.

26 The district commanders had powers "to protect all persons in their rights of person, to suppress insurrection, disorder and violence, and to punish ... all disturbers of the public peace", having the authority to remove civil officers, make arrests, try civilians in military courts, and use federal troops to preserve order (K. Stampp, 1970: 145).

and economic realms few radical experiments were approved. While proclaiming equality for all men and recognizing freedmen's political rights, few constitutions advanced any considerable innovation on the social relations between races, namely segregation. On the whole, they were conservative documents that simply accomplished some long overdue reforms.

Throughout this process the Radicals were also redefining the relationship of the legislative and executive branches by restricting presidential powers. In 1867 several Acts were passed by Congress allowing for greater leeway in the pursuit of Radical Reconstruction. These Acts served as a prelude to the impeachment process of President Johnson in early 1868. And although the Radicals lost this prosecution, Johnson's political élan was severely wounded.

But the Radicals could not rejoice too enthusiastically for Radical Reconstruction was being undermined in the South. After having control of all eleven states of the former Confederacy in the years between 1867 and 1877, white Democrats gradually returned to power.²⁷ Driving the white redemption of the South were various accusations against Radical Reconstruction, specifically that the governments set up by the Republicans "expelled from power the South's experienced statesmen and natural leaders and replaced them with untrained men who were almost uniformly incompetent and corrupt" (Stampp, 1970: 156). To be precise the main targets of these claims were the carpetbaggers,²⁸ scalawags²⁹ and former slaves, whom were held responsible for the disastrous economic situation and the ruining of the whole class of white property holders in Southern states. Despite broad condemnation, most carpetbaggers seemed to merge the aspiration of personal gain with a commitment in participating in an endeavour "to substitute the civilization of freedom for that of slavery" (Foner, 1989: 296). But The Radical Governments in the South did in fact contribute to this general censure. News of fraudulent bond issues, grafts in land sales and purchases, deception in contracts for public works and squandering of public and federal funds were commonplace. State debts soon swelled, burdening the public with higher tax rates. Stampp (1970: 183) insists that taxes, government

27 The first state to be "redeemed" was Tennessee in 1869. The redemption process was completed by 1877 with the Democrats rise to power in South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana.

28 Carpetbagger was the name southerners gave to northerners who moved to the South during the Reconstruction Era, and formed a coalition with freedmen and scalawags in the Republican Party to control former Confederate states. The main accusation against them was that they came to the South to loot and plunder merely for economic and political greed.

29 The term scallawags was used to characterize poor southern whites who supported Reconstruction and aided carpetbaggers and freedmen in governing Southern states after the war. They were accused of betraying their race and heritage for the spoils and opportunities offered by Reconstruction.

expenditure and public debts were bound to increase regardless of who was governing in the South, due to the pressing requirement of physical reconstruction. Therefore, the need for railroad systems, public services and school systems would have burdened any government in charge. Nevertheless, the downfall of the Radical Governments in the South halted the advancement of any further political reforms and allowed for the return of a more traditional political arrangement. After the controversial Presidential elections of 1876,³⁰ Rutherford Hayes withdrew the last federal troops from the South³¹ in April 1877. The Republicans gradual division and the retrenchment of its forward-looking agenda throughout the Reconstructions years were foretelling. Its Radical branch was overcome by the times, giving way to a new generation of stalwarts who sought “not reform, but the *status quo*” (*Idem*: 190). In conjunction with the weakening of the Republican Party, racial prejudice was consolidating in the South and North. The increasingly intolerant tone of the redeemed South was reinforced by physical violence. The ascension of organized terrorism³² was a form of fighting the Radicals and their policies and gaining control of local governments, namely by intimidating the participation of black voters. Economic coercion was also used effectively to triumph over the Radicals.

In the end, the lack of firm support for Radical Reconstruction was its undoing. In addition to questioning the moral integrity of Radical Reconstruction, many initial advocates and sponsors abandoned the project. Northern businessmen complained that existing conditions in the South discouraged any type of significant investment.³³ Freedmen were also disenchanted with the development of Radical policies, even though they recognized the pivotal role of the Republicans in their emancipation. Furthermore, Northerners in general were also growing weary of Reconstruction. The years of economic depression beginning in 1873 aggravated the situation:

As they became concerned about business stagnation, unemployment, collapsing farm prices, and the decay of public and private morals, Northerners not only

30 The 1867 Presidential elections was the first time a candidate who received the greater number of popular votes (Samuel Tilden) did not receive the majority of the votes in the Electoral College. President Rutherford Hayes was awarded the 20 delegates of Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina after charges of fraud and threats of violence were made against the Democrats, allowing him to win by 185 to 184 votes.

31 The last states to have the federal troops removed were South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana.

32 Some of the most prominent organizations were the Klu Klux Klan, Knights of the White Camelia, White Brotherhood, Pale Faces and the 76 Association.

33 According to Kenneth Stampp (1970: 207), by 1870 the *New York Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, *The New York Tribune*, and the *Nation* were all demanding the end of Radical Reconstruction due to its hampering of Southern business and investment.

lost interest in reconstruction but temporarily lost faith in the Republican party. (Stampp, 1970: 209)

The Republican defeat in the elections for the House of Representatives in 1874 guaranteed the beginning of end of federal protection for the Southern freedmen. The withdrawal of the last federal troops from the South in 1877 implied the end of Radical Reconstruction. Ultimately, the end of the Radicals meant also “that the idealism of the antislavery crusade finally died” (*Idem*: 211).

In this sense, a good deal of the political and social progress black people experienced after the war was less a result of Radical Reconstruction than of self-organization and mobilization. The former slaves organized themselves in the South around existing and newly created institutions:

Blacks withdrew almost entirely from white-controlled churches, establishing independent religious institutions of their own; and a diverse panoply of fraternal, benevolent, and mutual aid societies also sprang into existence. And though aided by northern reform societies and the federal government, the freedmen often took the initiative in establishing schools. Nor was black suffrage thrust upon an indifferent black population, for in 1865 and 1866 black conventions gathered throughout the South to demand civil equality and the right to vote. (Foner, 1997: 99)

A final assessment of the Reconstruction of the *postbellum* South is not straightforward. Progress was made in many segments of political and social life and the Southern States were soundly reintegrated into the Union. However, traditional as well revisionist accounts of Reconstruction have been all but flattering. It has developed into a general consensus that “whether measured by the dreams inspired by emancipation or the more limited goals of securing blacks’ rights as citizens and free laborers, and establishing an enduring Republican presence in the South, Reconstruction can only be judged as a failure” (Foner, 1989: 603).

This unenthusiastic account of the reconstruction of the *postbellum* South resonates closely with contemporary criticism of US involvement in other postwar scenarios. The recent US State-building endeavour in Iraq has also been subject to a wide array of disparagement. We proceed to explore the reconstruction process in Iraq in order to try to discern the existence of similar patterns and dynamics with the *postbellum* experience.

Pottery Barn on the Tigris: Breaking and rebuilding Iraq

The rules of the game were set from the go. Former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, warned that the war on Iraq had to observe the so-called Pottery Barn Rule - i.e. "If you break it, you own it" (Sicherman, 2007: 28).³⁴ Despite Powell's admonition, and contrary to the dominant perceptions in the Administration, the US invasion broke the already fragile Iraqi state. The overwhelming US military force quickly decapitated the regime, but also left a heavy footprint in its path. Rather than being hailed as liberators, the US forces promptly faced a power vacuum and recognized the difficulties ahead, namely the absence of an identifiable state structure capable of providing for the Iraqis. Since then, a great deal of censorship regarding the US-led military involvement in Iraq has been directed at the principle of the intervention itself. It is not our intention here to engage in this debate. We simply accept that the US did intervene militarily in Iraq, toppling its political regime, and subsequently undertaking conventional State-building efforts:

Once the Ba'athists were ousted from power, the vacuum of political authority had somehow to be filled, and order on the streets had to be re-established. The state as an institution had to be restructured and revived. Basic services had to be restored, infrastructure repaired, and jobs created. Fighting between disparate ethnic, regional, and religious groups - many of them with well armed militias - had to be prevented or preempted. The political culture of fear, distrust, brutal dominance, and blind submission had to be transformed. Political parties and civil society organizations working to represent citizen interests, rebuild communities, and educate for democracy had to be assisted, trained, and protected. A plan needed to be developed to produce a broadly representative and legitimate new government, and to write a new constitution for the future political order. And sooner or later, democratic elections would need to be held. (Diamond, 2005: 9-10)

Diamond eloquently summarized the challenges facing the US, but the prescriptions were not so easily achieved. The State-building debate of the 1990s in the US had already reflected on the numerous shortcomings of past interventions and put forth various recommendations for the future (Clarke and Herbst, 1996; Hamre and Sullivan, 2002; Ottaway, 2002; Powell, 1992; von Hippel, 2000). However,

³⁴ According to Naomi Klein (2005), The Pottery Barn chain stores do not actually have such a rule, but the expression has been attributed to Colin Powell by author Bob Woodward.

as events soon confirmed, the lessons of the past had not been incorporated into US pre-war planning.

It has become a cliché to assert that the US and its coalition partners did not prepare for postwar Iraq. However, there were an assortment of plans and planning processes developed in many agencies and organizations within the US Government before the war commenced (Bensahel *et al*, 2008; Rathmell, 2005; Sichertman, 2007). Although we can dispute their aptness and efficacy for dealing with the challenges faced after the military campaign, we cannot deny their existence. In fact, initial military planning commenced in late 2001. US Central Command commanding officer, General Tommy Franks, presented Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld an initial four-phase operation plan (designated OPLAN 1003V) in December of that same year (Bensahel, 2006a; Rathmell, 2005). Through a counselling process between civilian and military leaders the war plan was gradually consolidated in the next several months, comprising “post hostility operations” in its Phase IV section – i.e. operations intended to produce a representative government in postwar Iraq.

While the principal military aspects were well established by mid-2002, civilian planning was still in its preliminary phase. During the summer of 2002 the National Security Council created an interagency Executive Steering Group³⁵ which was responsible for planning and developing policy recommendations, including for humanitarian relief and reconstruction (Bensahel, 2006a: 455). In the following months preparations continued and in February 2003 the general principles of humanitarian relief plans were being discussed.

However, reconstruction planning lagged and was “not nearly as robust as the humanitarian relief plans, despite the fact that they were both developed by the same interagency working group” (Bensahel, 2006a: 456). The reason for the deferred reconstruction plan was twofold: first Americans believed they would be hailed as liberators, not as occupiers; second, and most importantly, US officials assumed that after toppling the regime the governmental institutions would continue to function. To all intents and purposes, officials in Washington assumed that US forces would be acclaimed and “no large-scale reconstruction would therefore be necessary, since the new leadership of Iraq would inherit a functioning and capable governance structure” (Bensahel, 2006a: 458). The planning process mirrored the political buoyancy in Washington. The Bush Administration, especially the Secretary

35 The ESG included representatives from the State Department, Defense Department, CIA and the Office of the Vice President and was supported by a staff-level Iraq Political- Military Cell and several other working groups.

of Defense, promulgated a “light footprint” approach for State-building in Iraq³⁶ (Sicherman, 2007). These illusions quickly dissipated. After reaching Baghdad and deposing Saddam Hussein’s regime, the postwar situation was very different from the anticipated scenarios. The first “surprise” was the absence of a major humanitarian crisis.³⁷ Andrew Rathmell (2005: 1023) attributes this to the fact that the Saddam regime had distributed provisions to the population before his capitulation and the coalition forces had planned robustly for a humanitarian emergency. The second surprise was the collapse of government institutions, particularly law and order establishments. Actually, US military action largely contributed to the destruction of the Iraqi State:

The regime of Saddam Hussein diverted resources from the official institutions of the state to the flexible networks of patronage that kept it in power. Faced with widespread lawlessness that is common after violent regime change, the United States did not have the number of troops to control the situation. After three weeks of looting the state’s administrative capacity was destroyed. (...) Following the destruction of government infrastructure across the country, de-Baathification purged the civil service of its top layer of management, making between 20,000 and 120,000 people unemployed, removing its institutional memory. (Dodge, 2007: 88)

In fact, in Iraq “state structures had the form, but not the substance of a modern state” (Rathmell, 2005: 1018). Even the administrative, social and physical infrastructures were on the verge of imminent collapse. Iraqi “stateness” only received its form due to the continued exercise of authoritarian force (Rathmell, 2005). The collapse of the State led to third big surprise – the emergence of a violent insurgency. The security vacuum allowed for an assortment of groups to wreak havoc and destruction throughout Iraq.

The lack of a comprehensive reconstruction plan became manifest as State-building became the prime concern for US policy-makers. According to George Bush (2003) “Rebuilding Iraq will require a sustained commitment from many nations, including our own”. For the Bush Administration State-building and reconstruction went

36 Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained the concept of “light footprint” in his February 14, 2003, speech, stating that the US could do more with less thanks to the benefits of the Revolution in Military Affairs and a revised notion of State-building acquired with the war in Afghanistan.

37 Initial planning expected a major humanitarian crisis. The US and UN estimated that the war would displace over two million people, in addition to the more than 800 000 already displaced. The plans also anticipated the disruption and possible destruction of key nodes in food distribution, electric and water supply, and health services (Bensahel, 2006).

hand-in-hand as the US strategy (National Security Council, 2005) looked to establish a democratic government while concurrently rebuilding the foundations for a sound economy and functional social order. State-building and reconstruction intermingled causally, becoming the centrepiece of the US postwar policy.

In effect, the postwar planning had initially been attributed to the Department of Defense, which in turn established the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA) to coordinate planning for the administration of postwar Iraq. However, ORHA was deployed to Iraq only two months after its conception and was under-staffed, under-informed, and unprepared for the task at hand. Only a little after a month in Iraq, ORHA was replaced by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) spearheaded by Paul Bremer III. The changeover revealed a drastic change in perspective, for “whereas ORHA had been designed as a temporary organization to assist a new Iraqi government during a short transition period of several months, CPA was an explicit occupying authority that possessed indefinite control of the Iraqi government” (Bensahel, 2006a: 462).

Just like the ORHA, the CPA was also ill equipped to deal with the postwar reality in Iraq. Besides being in constant reformulation of its mission, many of the CPA’s initiatives only helped to exacerbate the difficulties of rebuilding the Iraqi State. The CPA’s first official decree outlawed the Ba’ath Party, crippling any attempt to restore the Iraqi bureaucracy. A week later, the second decree dissolved the Iraqi army and other security organizations. This order stripped the US and its allies of the “forces necessary to stabilize the country and guard its borders in the absence of sufficient Coalition troops” (Sicherman, 2007: 31). More notably, the CPA failed to implement an effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) effort. The disbandment of the Iraqi army left over 400,000 trained military personnel out of work and without any planned alternatives, contributing to the mounting insurgency (Bensahel, 2006b). Furthermore, despite the CPA’s efforts in early 2004 to negotiate a DDR agreement with the various local militias, the outbreak of the insurgencies of the Falluja-based Sunni resistance and the Shiite fighters under Muqtada al-Sadr in April 2004 seriously derailed the initiative (Diamond, 2004; 2006).

On the whole, the Iraqis were never truly brought into the reconstruction effort. From the outset the US had determined the interlocutors they would work with in rebuilding the Iraqi Government. The Bush Administration initially favoured and maintained a privileged relationship with the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and its exiled leader Ahmed Chalabi. However, the obvious lack of local support and personal capabilities soon determined an alteration in the relationship and the need to establish relations with other elites. The CPA proceeded to create the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003, along with numerous other local and

provincial organs of government. Widespread public participation was dispensed with, for according to the CPA “so long as someone from each group is represented, and so long as even select groups of citizens are included in the selection process, the process and the institutions are representative” (Manning, 2006: 729; see also Papagianni, 2007). This imposition of political participants and representatives disenfranchised the majority of Iraqis and furthered suspicion of US intentions and the political system it was implementing.

In the meantime, due to the lack of a credible civilian reconstruction effort, the military commanders began “undertaking a wide range of reconstruction activities out of necessity” (Bensahel, 2006a: 465). While several tasks carried out were ones in which military capabilities revealed themselves to be valuable, many were far beyond their usual responsibilities – e.g. establishing city councils, justice procedures, and local budgets and spending priorities (*Idem*). Furthermore, the CPA contributed to this lack of endogenous participation largely by rebuffing local elections in many communities, denying a variety of initiatives that could have promoted local development and simultaneously mitigated some of the major identity fissures growing in Iraq (Diamond, 2006). This policy led inevitably to disjointed initiatives and rebuilding efforts which complicated even more the reconstruction process.

The same is true for the economic reconstruction of Iraq. Contrary to other sectors of the State, “the design of the future economic order in Iraq was clear early on” (Lacher: 2007: 245). In fact, for US officials, the construction of a free Iraqi society meant first and foremost a free Iraqi economy. As Rajiv Chandrasekran (2007: 130) explains, those decision-makers in Washington “regarded wholesale economic change in Iraq as an integral part of the American mission to remake the country”. In June 2003 the CPA delineated a comprehensive liberalization of the Iraqi economy which comprised the privatization of socially-owned enterprises, the end of State subsidies, and radical trade liberalization. In the CPA’s Order Number 39³⁸ it was stated that “A foreign investor shall be entitled to make foreign investments in Iraq on terms no less favourable than those applicable to an Iraqi investor, unless otherwise provided herein”, allowing virtually unlimited and unrestricted foreign investment, while placing no limitations on the expatriation of profit. But growing resistance halted the privatization spree.

Foreign companies did nonetheless partake in reconstruction and profit considerably. US companies were the main beneficiaries of government contracts, relegating Iraqi companies and obstructing the building of local capacity for

38 http://www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/20031220_CPAORD_39_Foreign_Investment_.pdf

economic recovery and combating insurgency (Le Billon, 2005). Yet, the liberalizing impetus was accompanied by an uncoordinated and weakly monitored process in which “dependence on inexperienced contractors without adequate auditing and controls led to significant corruption involving US and Iraqi officials as well as US contractors” (Ozlu, 2006: 25). Equally significant was the fact that the massive investments in infrastructure were also unable to produce the economic gains and local development initially predicted. As a matter of fact, many investments in infrastructure and diverse reconstruction projects have revealed enormous deficiencies and unsustainable operational costs (Looney, 2008). Consequently, many investments and reconstruction projects have further burdened the local economy and population.

Meanwhile, the deterioration of the political situation in Iraq impelled the Bush Administration to look for a swift exit strategy. Contrary to Bremer’s opposition, officials in Washington advocated a rapid transfer of sovereignty to the Governing Council,³⁹ along with the assignment of security responsibilities to newly created Iraqi forces (Sicherman, 2007). Accordingly, in November of 2003, President Bush determined that in early 2004 the new constitution should be ready, allowing for elections briefly afterwards. Nevertheless, local political squabbling between the Governing Council, as well as the augmentation of violence in early 2004 halted Washington’s quick departure.⁴⁰ The worsening of the situation on the ground, especially the intensification of the insurgency, pressed Washington to find a way out. Over-extended beyond their capabilities US forces could not face all the challenges. To fight-off the uprisings and try to maintain a minimally functioning security apparatus, reconstruction took a backseat. Numerous projects and programs to promote democracy were either put on hold or cancelled, demonstrating that “what was best for Iraq was no longer the standard. What was best for Washington was the new calculus” (Chandrasekran, 2007: 258).

The Administration pushed for a transfer of sovereignty as soon as possible. It took various rounds of negotiations with the various local leaders, especially the mediation of UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi with Ayatolla Sistani, to reach a compromise – i.e. an interim government would be nominated and take office

39 The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was a 25-member council that was appointed by the US in July 2003, resulting from concessions to local elites. It did not exercise any real power, but it did advise the American Viceroy and nominate Iraqi ministers, as well as proposing timetables and drafting and ratification formulas for the new constitution (Diamond, 2005).

40 Two rebellions grew in March 2004. The first occurred in Fallujah after four American security contractors were murdered and their bodies mutilated. The other occurred after Sadr’s Shi’a militia revolted against American troops.

in June 2004, preparing for election of a transitional government no later than 31 January 2005 (Diamond, 2005). Amid the disarray and violence, transition plans carried on and on January 30 the election for the transitional government took place. Subsequently, after drafting and ratifying a new constitution, elections for a new Iraqi National Assembly were held on December 15.⁴¹

In the meantime, the CPA had transferred sovereignty to the interim government on 28 June 2004, putting an end to formal occupation. When the CPA left many of its goals were still unfulfilled. The physical infrastructure remained deficient, the security apparatus dysfunctional, the political system fragile, and the daily violence persistent (Chandrasekran, 2007). The incapacity of the new Iraqi State to deal with the security situation hampered their efforts to assert control. The Coalition troops were still responsible for trying to maintain order, while Iraqi military and police forces were gradually assuming increasing responsibilities. Nonetheless, sabotage, terrorism, rebellion and organized crime have plagued Iraqi society ever since, complicating political and economic reconstruction.

Final Comments and Considerations

When we began this essay, any likelihood of uncovering a parallel between the policies and dynamics underlying the reconstruction of the *postbellum* South and Iraq was a question of serendipity. Nevertheless, while heuristically surveying both interventions we could not help but detect a significant amount of uncanny resemblances. Even as we recognize there is a danger in trying to extrapolate insights from such historical analogies we must speculate whether there are lessons to be garnered from the past and present US State-building operations that may be helpful for the future. This becomes even more significant due to the fact that when we look close at the both periods we come across more similarities than differences.

The first and most significant distinction between reconstruction in the *postbellum* South and Iraq is the fact that the former is the result of an intra-state conflict, while the latter was the outcome of an inter-state conflict initiated by the US. Contrary to the Civil War, the war in Iraq was a war of choice. As realists John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (2003: 59) acknowledged before the war began “even if such a

41 The electoral process led to the elections of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, with Jalal Talabani as president, however the polarization of power between the ethno-sectarian parties delayed the agreement on a Cabinet for five months.

war goes well and has positive long-range consequences, it will still have been unnecessary”.

The geographical complexities underlying both interventions were also unique. Despite many opinions to the contrary the integration of North and South was favoured by a shared identity. Any division caused by the war could not erase the past relationships:

For all of their distinctiveness, the Old South and North were complementary elements in an American society that was everywhere primarily rural, capitalistic, materialistic, and socially stratified, racially, ethnically, and religiously heterogeneous, and stridently chauvinistic and expansionist. (Pessen, 1980:1149)

In Iraq the situation was much more complex, with greater cultural and political diversity complicating reconstruction. Personal loyalties were based on ethnic and clan affiliation. This cultural and political division was artificially bundled together under a century ago by foreign powers. Besides the lack of a democratic legacy and institutions the unity of the State could only be preserved by force. Despite its political discrimination and intolerance towards slaves, the South already had a democratic tradition as well as democratic institutions.

Equally distinguishable was the transition of political power. Although both interventions defeated the dominant political group there is a significant consequential distinction. In the South intervention tried to give power to a minority, whereas in Iraq the reassignment of political power was to the majority group.

But by and large, in our perspective, the two interventions have many more features in common. Both interventions were initiated due to national security concerns. While Lincoln fought to preserve the Union from dismemberment, Bush sought to curtail Saddam Hussein's access to weapons of mass destruction. The progression of both conflicts eventually developed into a program of emancipation, in which the liberation of an oppressed community became the acknowledged end result – i.e. the political liberation of slaves in the South and the oppressed and tyrannized Iraqi population. Despite original intentions, in each case the political discourse evolved into one in which “the US attempted to politically empower a previously disenfranchised people through democratic reform” (Leavey, 2006: 6-7).

In the South and in Iraq strong moral convictions pressed this spirit of liberation. Nevertheless, in both cases this approach backfired, as local populations did not recognize the legitimacy of the occupier. Andrea Talentino (2007: 153) has alerted to the fact that local perceptions may impede State-building initiatives because

“actors resist change, even when they might objectively agree that it is positive, if it seems forced upon them”. Consequently, in the *postbellum* South as well as in Iraq the end of military operations did not signify the end of violence. The insurgency in Iraq is equivalent to the political resistance and terrorist activities identified in the years of Reconstruction.⁴²

History seems to demonstrate that political leaders look for the swiftest route to solving their problems. Lincoln, Johnson and Bush all sought swift political solutions. But while the 19th century Presidents tried to include former adversaries in a compromising solution, Bush, just like the Radical Republicans before him, strived to proscribe opponents – i.e. Ba ath Party members. The quick-fix solution depicts one of the fundamental misgivings of Southern and Iraqi reconstruction projects – the political unwillingness or incapacity to truly commit to the transformational experiment. Neither the Radical Republicans nor the Bush Administration⁴³ were able or prepared to consign the resources required to enforce their political agendas.

At the same time as local governing bodies were imposed in the Southern States and Iraq, endogenous resentment augmented. If the imposition of local governments did not alienate local populations, the ineffectiveness of their actions surely did. The requirements for those responsible for local reconstruction were questionable at best. Deficient planning and lack of coordination amplified these shortcomings (Rathmell, 2007). We can exempt Radical Reconstruction for some of the inadequacies due to the lack of prior experience in reconstruction projects. Nevertheless, in the case of Iraq, the US has a long history of State-building endeavours from which to have learned some valuable lessons⁴⁴ (Dobbins *et al*, 2008; 2003). The key flaw though in the Bush Administration’s planning can almost certainly be attributed to an optimistic outlook preceding the initial military intervention. As Sicherman (2007: 35) points out “Hope was many things, but a policy it was not”.

In the *postbellum* South Congress and the President wrestled for control of the reconstruction process. The Bush Administration’s control of the State-building experiment in Iraq was never in question. Yet on the ground there was no power

42 In Iraq the insurgency can count on foreign assistance, while the violent groups in the South did not share this support.

43 The Obama Administration has already demonstrated that is too also looking to pull out of Iraq, concentrating their State-building efforts in Afghanistan.

44 The US officials responsible for reconstruction in Iraq made things even more difficult as they allowed bureaucratic disputes to prevent it from using the expertise in the State Department and other national and international institutions, such as the UN, to help them in their State-building endeavours (Rathmell, 2005).

overseeing the State-building enterprise. Military commanders and civilian officials reported to different hierarchies and there were few organizational linkages. Some orders countered other organizations orders and created a sometimes tense environment between military officers and civilian officials. In fact, in Iraq “there was no one in the theatre who was responsible for both” military and civilian operations (Bensahel, 2006a: 465).

The promise and hope of economic development was also hampered in both historical cases. State-building and Estate-building went hand in hand in the South and Iraq. Economic reconstruction was plagued by difficulties due to the continued violence and alleged corruption. Moreover, the local communities gained little from the existing economic development. Whereas after the Civil War Radical Reconstruction “shifted the terms of trade against agriculture in favor of industry and centralized control of credit in the hands of leading New York banks” (Foner, 1997: 95), so did Reconstruction contracts in Iraq favour large American corporations. In fact, active indigenous participation in the political and physical reconstruction was residual in both situations. Local representatives were designated by the occupying forces and lacked legitimacy, exacerbating the difficulties of restoring order and providing hope.

Another similarity between both projects of reconstruction was the reservation in relation to the newly liberated people’s ability to appreciate and benefit from their newly acquired political rights. When the difficulties pressed for a way out, US officials and intelligentsia considered whether the gift of freedom and democracy was appropriate. In the South it was questioned whether black people were ready and capable of receiving a formal education and political freedom. Similarly, doubts surged as to whether the Iraqis were prepared for democracy and political independence.

Equally analogous is the Americans continued trust in military solutions to State-building challenges. Many analysts and officials defend that without strong military involvement any State-building effort is destined to be defeated (Leavey, 2006; Ottaway, 2002). However, many times the emphasis on the military dimensions hampers the final political objectives. Rupert Smith (2008) has demonstrated the intertwined nature of contemporary conflicts and suggests we reflect on the utility of force. The historical record of US State-Building initiatives has cautioned us to the over reliance on military solutions to political objectives.

In the same way, popular support for the interventions withered in both instances. In the 19th century the North gradually lost its enthusiasm for the Radical program. In the case of Iraq, international support was absent almost from the start. Eventually, the mounting death toll of American troops and the souring costs on

public expenditure changed US public attitude towards the State-building adventure, mobilizing a large public demand for the return home of US troops.

Amitai Etzioni (2007: 27) states that reconstruction should be understood as a “restoration of the conditions of the assets and infrastructure of an occupied nation or territory” to the *status quo ante*. Nevertheless, the reconstruction projects undertaken by the US did not look to restore the previously existing political order. Quite on the contrary, the secular State-building experiments of the US have culminated in the institutionalization of “a new cartography in the struggle to remake the global map in very particular ways and in support of very specific class and locational interests” (Smith, 2004: 23). Both Radical Reconstruction and the War in Iraq can be best understood in the framework of the contemporary peacebuilding project, “which in itself has been subsumed within a liberal state-building enterprise” (Richmond, 2008: 105). In fact, both sought radical transformations of the existing political, social and economic orders.

Consequently, it seems that Kagan’s (2006) account that the US Civil War was America’s first experiment in State-building should not be dismissed nonchalantly. Given some intellectual leeway, the Civil War can be seen as initiating a “massive, interventionary, process of social, political and economic engineering” which we nowadays designate as “state-building and its association with the liberal peace” (Richmond, 2008: 114). In this sense, as the historical analogy presented reveals, the different US State-building endeavours can only be understood as a top-down initiative. Any attempt to concede the state-building project to the different indigenous actors may lead to an undesired attempt for emancipation from the intended grand liberal scheme.

For many decades *postbellum* Reconstruction in the South “represented the ultimate shame of the American people” (Stampp, 1970: 4). Similar remarks have been asserted in recent times in regard to the American State-building experiment in Iraq. International zeitgeist will not absolve the US intervention in Iraq any time soon. Even some of the more hawkish figures associated with American foreign policy have assailed the George W. Bush Administration’s course of action. Today’s political imperative is a quiet exit strategy out of Iraq. What kind of State is left behind seems to matter little. Disappointment and weariness have calmed the State-building debate for the time being.

But it is possible that the history of US intervention in Iraq will one day be examined in a different light. Will there be a revisionist history of the American State-building experiment in Iraq? Will it vindicate the intervention or further condemn it and those responsible? It should be remembered that the traditional interpretation of *postbellum* Reconstruction was radically altered. As Eric Foner

(1997: 98) reminds us, many a revisionists' verdict is "that if Reconstruction was a tragic era, it was so because change did not go far enough". In this outlook, reconstruction fell short of its potential by not pursuing enthusiastically enough in its transformational agenda.

Recent events have spurred many to re-evaluate the democratizing experiment in Iraq. The 12 June, 2009 Iranian elections and the ensuing uprisings have led many commentators and analysts to rejoice with a renewed sense of hope regarding the liberal peace project. Not all go as far as Daniel Finkelstein (2009) who states that "what we are seeing on the streets of Iran now is a vindication of [the] neoconservative ideas". But democratic enthusiasm has returned, although with some nuances.

Lessons from the past seem to have been learned as *New York Times* columnist David Brooks (2009) recognizes that there are no formulas for undermining frail regimes and "there are no circumstances in which the United States has been able to peacefully play a leading role in another nation's revolution". Nevertheless, the US does have many tools for supporting local democratic movements - e.g. media, technical advice, cultural and economic sanctions, presidential visits for key dissidents, embracing of democratic values, and condemnation of regimes barbarities. These, he insists, should all be used in order to promote the Iranian regimes collapse, for "hastening that day is now the central goal" (*Idem*).

Rathmell (2005: 1037) has concluded that Iraq is not the model for future operations for "the assumption of all government functions by occupying forces in the aftermath of a coercive regime change in such large and conflicted country will be a rare occurrence". This may be so, but the US will certainly pursue the global diffusion of its political project. In fact, if the historical analogy in this essay reveals anything, it is that there is a distinguishable historical pattern and dynamic of actively and forcefully imposing a specific political agenda in US postwar interventions.

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