

## **Nation Building Then and Now**

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[A Report on a Talk Given by Lt. Col. (USAF) Greg Rose, Ph.D. March 27, 2004]

Dr. Rose (speaking as a citizen of the United States not as an official representative of the United States Air Force) based his talk on three aspects of nation building: unity, security, and economy. As a phrase, “nation building” was popular in the 1950s and 1960s, but then fell out of favor. Now, due to terrorist attacks sponsored by failed states and the American military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, the phrase has returned.

He said that the “nation” in “nation building” refers to a social entity, a community with a common bond. “State” on the other hand, refers to a legal and political entity. Nation building can be examined by looking at three processes. First, the social unity of a group of people: do they share an identity and purpose? Second, the creation of an integrated society practically: do the people share economic activity and the means of mass communication? Third, the state apparatus: do the people have some loyalty to the government and is there a tax base and functional revenue service?

Dr. Rose then made some observations about nation building. Nation building always entails a redistribution of power. For example, in Iraq the power of the Sunni minority will decrease and the power of the Shiite majority will increase. Building a nation takes a long time—centuries. There is still nation building going on in Great Britain for example. In the past, nation building involved a lot of violence, including genocide. Nation building is a very long-term process, yet we are impatient for results today.

The U.S. has engaged in seventeen attempts at nation building with military involvement. Out of these attempts at democratization, four were successful (e.g., Japan and Germany after WWII). Most examples of failure are located in Latin America. What were some of the variables affecting success or failure in nation building? A list of variables includes the following three:

- Strong ethnic identity and homogeneity
- Strong state capacity (organized military, judiciary, bureaucracy)
- Economic development and resources

*How do Iraq and Afghanistan rate when it comes to these variables?*

Iraq is a very difficult place to engage in nation building. Why? Because it lacks state capacity and the people have had no previous experience with a constitution or democracy. Also, the U.S. does not have any special advantages regarding Iraq. For example, we do not know the people and their language and customs well.

There are some positive elements in the attempt:

- The Iraqi population is favorable toward development.
- Iraqi leaders have shown patience in staving off a civil war.
- Resistance efforts are unlikely to undermine Iraqi leaders, but the concern is that the U.S. will not put up with the cost and casualties for long enough.
- The resistance has not provided a good alternative vision of the future, so the U.S. vision is the best for now.

- Local self-government is returning to Iraq—there are anywhere between 20 and 100 political parties.
- Freedom of the press has grown significantly—there are now 150 newspapers, compared to 5 under the previous regime.
- Iraq has a valuable natural resource—oil.

Yet there are substantial problems. The biggest one right now is security. In addition to the resistance, there are a lot of criminals loose in Iraq committing “regular” crimes. Also, Saddam Hussein had stockpiled 600,000 tons of small arms throughout the country, and the U.S. has only captured 10% of them. This is a huge job and there are not enough troops for it. Communication is still a big problem, that is, communication between Iraqis, Americans, and coalition forces as well as amongst the different American units. A constitution was recently signed, but many of the difficult questions were not answered in the document.

Afghanistan presents an even harder case of nation building than Iraq. Why? Because the terrain is extremely rugged, there are strong tribes with ethnic and religious differences, and there is no strong central government. Security, poverty, and illiteracy are also major problems in the country. In addition to these hurdles to success, there is the economy. About 40% of it is a black market and opium is the biggest export. About 75% of the world’s opium originates in Afghanistan.

At the moment, Afghanistan lacks attention. There are 150,000 troops in Iraq, but only 11,000 troops in Afghanistan. Iraq will be able to generate revenue from oil, but Afghanistan cannot use opium to do this. Originally it was thought that Afghanistan would need 12 billion dollars over five years, but five billion has been spent already. Experts forecast that 28 billion more will be needed.

Dr. Rose ended his talk by saying that over the long-term, there is some basis for being optimistic, especially when it comes to Iraq. We are in an era of democratization. In 1900 there were 29 democracies in the world. Now there are 120. Democratic forms of government are proving to be popular in many regions of the world.

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