

Christopher J. Coyne: *After war: the political economy of exporting democracy*

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After War was published five years too late. Had the book been in print in 2003—and had George W. Bush read it—he might have realized that invading Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein and light the fires of democracy in the Middle East would be a fool’s errand. Four thousand American lives and untold billions in national treasure later, the process of Iraqi nation-building is still ongoing (as it is in Afghanistan, for that matter), with no end in sight.

Even before Woodrow Wilson pledged to “make the world safe for democracy” by dispatching an armed expeditionary force to the fields of Flanders, the United States had been attempting to export its liberal values at the point of a gun. Christopher Coyne, an assistant professor of economics at West Virginia University, begins *After War* by summarizing the record of American military interventionism in the 20th and 21st centuries. Beginning with Cuba and the Philippines in 1898, both of which were occupied by US forces during and after the Spanish-American War, Coyne reckons that the United States has intervened militarily on foreign soil 27 times since, a count that includes two more invasions of Cuba, three of Nicaragua, and two each of Panama, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He then rates the US occupations as successes or failures according to whether the occupied country achieved a score of +4 or better on the Polity IV scale at intervals of five, ten, 15 and 20 years on. Although a score of +4 is not a very high hurdle (Iran rated a +3 in 2003), Coyne finds that military occupation and reconstruction has failed more often than not. The handful of success stories includes the Philippines, which was occupied from the turn of the century until the end of the Second World War; the principal members of the first Axis of Evil (Austria, Italy, Japan and West Germany); Grenada; and, possibly, Panama after the second US invasion in 1989.

Why so few American interventionist triumphs? The burden of *After War* not only is to explain why US military occupation of foreign lands, whether undertaken for security or humanitarian reasons, frequently has failed to plant the seeds of sustainable liberal democracy, but also why occupation is unlikely to attain that goal. As a matter of fact, in the ab-

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sence of proper incentives for solving internal prisoners' dilemma and coordination games, nation-building is more likely to do harm than to do good. In laying out the case that liberal policies of nonintervention and unilateral free trade offer the best means of accomplishing liberal ends, Coyne combines insights from public choice theory and Austrian economics to identify and discuss the political and social dynamics of reconstruction that often impede permanent regime change.

Somalia is an exception that proves the rule. Nursemaided by the United Nations, the Republic of Somalia was created in 1960 by joining two former British and Italian colonies under a central government modeled on Western democratic lines, with a prime minister, a National Assembly and a professional bureaucracy. But the UN's gift of democracy intruded on Somalia's customary social institutions. Somali clans, membership in which is determined by patrilineal descent, are bound by a network of informal contractual alliances (*heer*) formed for the purposes of providing social insurance in a largely agricultural-pastoral economy vulnerable to the vagaries of rainfall, of resolving inter-clan disputes over common-pool resources and of determining compensation for injuries (*diya*), all overseen and enforced by an inter-clan council of clan leaders (pp. 138–139).

As could have been foreseen (evidently not by the UN, though) political cleavages under the new central government “quickly developed along clan-based lines” (p. 140). With a unicameral parliament governing the whole of the Republic of Somalia (prior to independence there had been two legislative bodies, one in the North and the other in the South), the representatives of various clans struggled to piece together a stable majority in a contentious landscape of fragile, ever-shifting political coalitions. Beforehand, all politics truly was local. With power refocused at the center, the institutions of government in the capital at Mogadishu became a resource to be looted for largesse benefitting one's own clan and enriching oneself personally.

The sequel likewise was predictable: After President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke was assassinated in October of 1969, Major General Muhammad Siad Barre grabbed power in a bloodless coup and imposed order on a fractious populous, ruling heavy-handedly through a revolutionary council dominated by the members of his own extended family and selectively supplying arms to other clans so as to fan the flames of ethnic conflict that would weaken potential rivals (*ibid.*).

Force, coercion and repression kept things from falling apart for two decades, but by the late 1980s a handful of dissident groups had grown large enough and strong enough to seize control of certain regions of the country. When civil unrest eventually spread to Mogadishu in 1991, the Barre regime collapsed, launching a violent clan-based civil war for control of the central government (p. 141). The following year, after news reports of widespread drought, famine and continued bloodshed brought humanitarian concerns to the fore, the UN intervened to mediate a cease-fire in the capital city and to organize a relief effort. That effort failed, as contending factions refused to compromise and began interfering with the delivery of supplies to prevent them from falling into the hands of rival groups. Frustrated with events on the ground, in December 1992 the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of a US-led military taskforce to provide security and later, in May 1993, expanded the taskforce's mission to include “democratization and reconstruction” (p. 137).

What followed was the ignominy vividly memorialized in the book (Bowden 1999) and motion picture *Black Hawk Down*, culminating in President Clinton's craven decision to withdraw US forces from Somalia in 1995. (In the interest of full disclosure, my third cousin, Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for giving his life to protect that of the downed helicopter's pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Mark Durant. To his everlasting credit, Randall's father refused to

shake Mr. Clinton's hand during the White House ceremony at which he accepted the medal on his son's behalf.)

The irony—and the lesson—is that while many observers “expected Somalia to collapse into a violent state of chaos” after the UN taskforce withdrew, “in fact, the opposite occurred” (p. 142). Beginning with the creation in May 1991 of the independent Republic of Somaliland, located in the northern part of the country, at least two other autonomous states have emerged spontaneously within the borders of the former Republic of Somalia (pp. 141–142). Perhaps “statelets” is a better term, because none is recognized as legitimate by any foreign government. Nevertheless, Somaliland, which has its own constitution, Puntland and Southwestern Somalia are pockets of order and stability in an otherwise still faction-riven society with no central government. But that supports Coyne's point. It arguably was the attempt by outsiders to impose a Western-style democracy on a country created by the shotgun marriage of two former colonies, overriding in the process customary social institutions, which led to armed conflict as rival clans engaged in a murderous zero-sum game whose payoff was control of the levers of central government power (p. 142).

Iraq and Afghanistan have followed similar trajectories: “Once the governments in these countries were overthrown, formal institutions quickly unraveled, leaving both . . . without effective police, courts, and [public] utilities” (p. 65). Into the vacuums stepped the peacekeepers and nation-builders, overconfident in their ability, given enough money and boots on the ground, to transform societies having no prior experience with liberal democratic forms of government into carbon-copies of themselves. Because liberal values cannot be inculcated at the drop of a hat, especially when military intervention has destroyed infrastructure and left many people worried more about finding food and shelter than exercising their new freedoms, the occupiers' first instinct after regime change is to hold elections. But, “democracy in itself is not enough to obtain the desired outcome of liberal democracy . . . [H]olding elections is relatively easy” (p. 33). Voting is just window-dressing and, in fact, elections in polities fractionalized along ethnic, religious or clan lines usually are nothing more than head counts: “the election is a census, and the census is an election” (Horowitz 2000: 196).

Besides suffering from the nirvana fallacy (p. 24), establishing order frequently forces the occupiers to take sides, eliciting resistance from groups not in such favor. They find it difficult to convince “indigenous parties . . . that agreements reached during the occupation will be binding and enforceable after the occupation ends” (p. 66). And their policy choices are constrained both by interest-group influence and the whims of public opinion at home. As Hardin (1995) has argued, coordination on a set of core principles is essential for constitution-making. Coordination also is a necessary, if not sufficient condition, for successful reconstruction (p. 42). Indeed, Coyne credits the successes achieved in post-World War II (West) Germany and Japan, not to the Marshall Plan, on the one hand, nor to the broad discretion exercised by proconsul Douglas MacArthur, on the other, but to the shared national identities and institutions of self-governance already in place prior to Allied occupation.

After War supplies valuable historical context and offers new and vital perspectives on what is perhaps the major foreign policy and security challenge facing the United States and Europe at the start of the 21st century. It explains why the United States should never have intervened militarily in Afghanistan or Iraq and why it has no viable exit strategy other than unilateral withdrawal, leaving, as the Soviet Union did in 1989, a region awash in weaponry to be taken up by the next generation of insurgents, warlords, terrorists and other enemies of liberal democracy.

The only instructive case study Coyne overlooks is America's own decade-long experience with Reconstruction in the post-Civil War South, which too proceeded at the point

of a gun. Neo-cons ignoring the lesson that liberal values require anchoring on deep institutional foundations and naively believing that elections are the hallmark of democracy should remember that the voting rights of the secessionists were not restored until they had sworn loyalty to the US Constitution. In Coyne's defense, however, it may be too soon to tell whether military occupation and carpetbagger rule of the former Confederacy can be counted as a success.

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