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Stabilization and Reconstruction Civilian Management Act of 2004

JAMES DOBBINS

CT-218

March 2004

Testimony presented to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on
March 3, 2004

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Statement of James Dobbins¹
Director of RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center

Before the Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

March 3, 2004

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Committee for have invited me here today, for having taken up the subject of postconflict stabilization and reconstruction, for having organized the Policy Advisory Group on which I was privileged to serve, and having submitted the legislation on that subject which we are here today to discuss. All of us who served on the Policy Advisory Committee are particularly appreciative of the time and effort you and Senator Biden devoted leading and participating in our discussions. It is particularly satisfying to see the results of those discussions reflected so accurately in legislation you have submitted.

After more than a decade of intense American involvement in nation-building it is right that Congress and the Administration should be giving thought to how our nation can perform these unavoidable and important tasks more effectively? The participation in this Policy Advisory Group of senior representatives from the White House, State and Defense, of Congressional leaders from both parties, and of former officials from this and previous Administrations provided unusual, perhaps unique breadth of experience to our discussions on this topic. I believe that the results of those discussions, and the high degree of consensus they revealed are well embodied in the legislation you have submitted.

In our discussions we were able to draw upon the results of work done on postconflict stabilization and reconstruction by several of our nations leading research institutions, to include CSIS, the US Institute for Peace, the National Defense University and my own home, the RAND Corporation. What is striking in this work, as in our discussions, is the degree of consensus to be found on the essentials – that nation-building in some form will remain an inescapable responsibility of the international community and its most powerful member, that we have conducted these missions successfully in the past and are capable of doing so more effectively in the future, that our most recent efforts have not drawn fully upon the experience gained, often at some cost, over the past decade, and that better performance requires both that improved bureaucratic structures for planning and execution, and sustained investment in the capacity to conduct stabilization and reconstruction missions. Finally, there was uniform agreement that the successful conduct

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of these missions requires a broadly based response from our government, in particular from both the Departments of State and Defense, and this responsibility cannot be delegated to a single agency.

In its own recently published history of American role on nation-building over the past sixty years RAND concluded that: “In its early months, the U.S.-led stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq has not gone as smoothly as might have been expected, given the abundant, recent, and relevant U.S. experience highlighted in this study. This is, after all, the sixth major nation-building enterprise the United States has mounted in 12 years and the fifth such in a Muslim nation. In many of the previous cases, the United States and its allies have faced similar challenges immediately after an intervention. Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, and Afghanistan also experienced the rapid and utter collapse of central state authority. In each of these instances, local police, courts, penal services, and militaries were destroyed, disrupted, disbanded, or discredited and were consequently unavailable to fill the postconflict security gap. In Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, extremist elements emerged to fill the resultant vacuum of power. In most cases, organized crime quickly became a major challenge to the occupying authority. In Bosnia and Kosovo, the external stabilization forces ultimately proved adequate to surmount these security challenges; in Somalia and Afghanistan, they did not or have not yet.

Over the past decade, the United States has made major investments in the combat efficiency of its forces. The return on investment has been evident in the dramatic improvement in war fighting demonstrated from Desert Storm to the Kosovo air campaign to Operation Iraqi Freedom. There has been no comparable increase in the capacity of U.S. armed forces or of U.S. civilian agencies to conduct post combat stabilization and reconstruction operations. Throughout the 1990s, the management of each major mission showed some limited advance over its predecessor, but in the current decade, even this modestly improved learning curve has not been sustained.”

The reason for this lack of investment is not hard to find. Nation-building has been a controversial mission over the past decade. The intensity of our domestic debate has inhibited agencies from making the investments that would be needed to do these tasks better. Institutional resistance in departments of State and Defense, neither of which regards nation-building among their core missions, has also been an obstacle. As a result, successive administrations have treated each new mission as if it were the first and, more importantly, as if it were the last. Each time we have sent out new people to face old problems, and seen them make old mistakes. Each time we have dissipated accumulated expertise after an operation has been concluded, failing to study the lessons and integrate the results in our doctrine, training and future planning, or to retain and make use of the experienced personnel in ways that ensure their availability for the next mission when it arrives.

If agencies are to make the investments necessary to improve their capacity to conduct postconflict reconstruction and stabilization missions, they will need, first of all, a clear sense of their future responsibilities. In the 1990's, in the aftermath of the Somali debacle, the US militaries role in nation-building was excessively circumscribed. The

State Department was sometimes called upon to manage tasks better left to the Defense Department -- training the Bosnian and Croatian armies for instance. More recently we moved to the opposite extreme, with the Department of Defense assuming responsibilities for a wide range of essentially civil tasks.

The draft legislation we are discussing today represents only a beginning at addressing this problem, but it is an important start. Both State and Defense need to improve their skills and increase their institutional capacity to conduct stabilization and reconstruction missions. But the US military, at least, already has in place mechanisms to study prior campaigns, including nation-building campaigns, to draw appropriate lessons and to integrate these in ongoing doctrine and planning. Nothing comparable yet exists on the civil side of our government.

This legislation is designed to provide State greater authorities and resources to carry out its responsibilities for postconflict stabilization and reconstruction. But in the long run agencies will sustain investment only in capabilities that they know will be used. The next step therefore, is to design an enduring division of labor between State and Defense for the management of stabilization and reconstruction missions, a division that both Departments buy into, that both the Congress and the Administration support, and that both Republicans and Democrats will be content to work within, no matter which controls the White House or the Capitol. Just as the Goldwater/Nichols Act and preceding legislation provides the institutional framework through which America goes to war, so, in my judgment, should a similarly enduring arrangement should be established for the conduct of postconflict reconstruction and stabilization missions.

This legislation will encourage and assist the Department of State to build up a cadre of people with the special skills, interests and commitment needed for such missions.

Nation-building always requires a broad array of US agencies to work together continuously in unfamiliar circumstances, both in Washington and on the ground. Nation-building diplomacy is always multilateral, not only in Washington, New York and Brussels, but also in the field, where the absence of any functioning host government means even the simplest tasks have to be coordinated locally among a wide range of state and non-state actors. These actors include not just representatives of other US agencies and other governments, but also a myriad of NGO's and an even wider array of local leaders and would be leaders. These latter must be dealt with individually because the instrumentalities for dealing with them collectively have disintegrated.

Even low-level officers working in a failed or occupied state deal on a daily basis with more agencies, more governments and more local leaders than many Ambassadors Encounter over months in more settled circumstances.

Nation-building also requires the early mastery of both policy and program management. These two types of responsibility do not come together in most Foreign Service careers until one reaches the Deputy Chief of Mission level. Nation-building missions routinely require even relatively junior officers to both administer programs and set policy

priorities, often while having to deal with the press and local notables and negotiate with other governments. These responsibilities must be carried out on the basis of limited instructions and inadequate communications with Washington.

The scale of programs also normally exceeds those managed by even our largest Embassies. In the late 90's aid to both Bosnia and Kosovo was, for instance, larger than for all the rest of Europe combined. This year aid to Iraq will be larger than that for the rest of the world combined.

Finally, nation-building takes place in the most dangerous, devastated and generally unpleasant places on earth.

Traditional diplomacy and crises response tend to appeal to different personality types. State-to-state diplomacy calls for calm judgment, reflection, patience, attention to nuance, and carefully crafted prose and disciplined service within a well understood hierarchy. Failed state diplomacy calls for self-confidence, enterprise, initiative, calculated risk taking and an ability to work comfortably in highly unstructured environments.

We face here the familiar prototypes of the cowboy and the farmer. They can be friends, but it doesn't come naturally. At the moment we have a Foreign Service of farmers, in which cowboys are regarded with suspicion. The State Departments task, which this legislation will help them tackle, will be to create an environment in which both types find a home and rewarding careers.