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Book Review

Caplan, Richard. 2006. *International Governance of War-Torn Territories. Rule and Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, x + 291 pp. ISBN: 0-19-921275-9 (paperback). Price: £19.99.

by Bjørn Møller (29 November 2006)

This is a very detailed analysis of one particular and rare form of post-conflict peace-building, namely international transitional administration. Arguably the most radical of all forms, it entails a transfer of sovereign powers to international agencies.

The author surveys historical precursors of this form of governance such as the League of Nations' mandate territories and the United Nations' trusteeships – mainly tasked with ensuring smooth transition from colonial status to independence – just as he refers to the similarities with the post-WWII occupation regimes over Germany and Japan. Most of the book is, however, devoted to the U.N. administrations of Bosnia, Kosovo, Eastern Slavonia, and East Timor. Reference is made to Iraq, and to some extent Afghanistan, but mainly as examples of what *not* to emulate.

The book is divided into chapters dealing with the various challenges, and somewhat artificially subdivided into “practice” and “critical,” even though the analysis clearly shows just about everything to be “critical” and fraught with pitfalls and dilemmas to be addressed: how to reconcile local or national “ownership” (a new buzzword in the peace-building and development agencies) with the sovereign powers exercised by the international community; how to ensure legitimacy considering that the High Representatives (or equivalents) are mainly responsible and accountable to the international organizations that send them rather than to the local population that host them; how to avoid the international presence being viewed as a *de facto* occupation; and how to pave the way for post-war reconstruction without creating dependencies which may prevent sustainable development?

In most of these respects, Bosnia stands out as a failure, also because of the context. It is indeed difficult to establish legitimacy and democratic governance when an international representative exercises sovereign (and almost autocratic) power over a polity comprising two parts, each of which would prefer not to be united with the other. To some extent, the author says, lessons have been learned from these failures and been applied to East Timor and to Kosovo, even though the international administration of the latter suffers from the same flaw as that of Bosnia, i.e., that it keeps together parts that would prefer to go their separate ways.

As far as economic aspects of international administration are concerned, the general lack of funds is highlighted throughout the book, notwithstanding that some missions are more generously funded than others (say, the Balkans as compared to missions in Africa.) Reflecting this relative poverty of international administrations, “spoilers” in the form of former beneficiaries of the war economies can come to play an unduly important role. For example, militias such as the Kosovo Liberation Army have been moonlighting in arms and drug smuggling and other black market activities, even after having been “promoted” by NATO to a

bona fide freedom fighter movement. Thus, formidable obstacles to post-war economic recovery and development exist. They are unlikely to be overcome by means of traditional economic package deals imposed by the international community, including budgetary austerity and privatization, where the real need may be for growing public spending. Building on the theories and policies of Gurr, Collier, and others, the author warns, may entail sinister consequences. “It is vital to take measures in the immediate post-war environment that can improve the general welfare and thus weaken the economic foundations of political violence” (p. 136).

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