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Book Review: Anna K Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 290 pages.

The Dilemmas of Liberal Intervention

Jeffrey Kopstein

This book brings together two important streams of political science that normally do not speak to each other, the broad literature on democratization and the smaller but formidable thinking on the theory and practice of postwar peacebuilding. Since the 1990s, the editors note, the introduction of democracy in the wake of civil war has become standard practice, especially for the international community which has frequently intervened to help end brutal and protracted civil wars, such as those in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Nepal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The contributors to this book each assess a different facet of this practice and essentially conclude that, while the theory may be appealing, the practice is full of pitfalls.

The rough-and-ready theory of the practitioners is simple enough: vote rather than fight. In the jargon of political science, interests can be articulated either through bullets or ballots, and the latter may be the solution to the former. This intuition is backed by a huge empirical literature in international relations theory which generally shows that democracies do not go to war with each other.

Or so the theory goes. Whether it translates to the domestic level and to new democracies is unclear and there is a strand of theory that disputes the latter assertion. In either case, whether propounded by a UN bureaucrat or a political science professor, the practice of democratizing war-torn societies is a sobering one and often it seems that democracy and peace seem to work against each other. After all, democracy is a system of institutionalized conflict, and, it stands to reason, the last thing that war-torn societies need is more conflict. In the short run, democracy may actually work against peacebuilding and peacebuilding may require restrictions on basic liberal rights, such as freedom of the press and mass demonstrations. But in the long run, covering the simmering pot may lead it to explode and it is hard for an outsider to get it exactly right.

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These are the dilemmas sorted through by one of Anna Jarstad's chapters. How much secrecy (bad for democracy) in negotiations between warring sides? How much involvement by outsiders? How important is it that the locals "own" the peace-making process versus its being controlled by outsiders? Everybody in, say, Kosovo and Afghanistan, knows that there would not have been early elections had it not been for the presence and insistence of outsiders. But just how important is it that Kosovars and Afghanis feel that this is "their" democracy as opposed to a foreign imposition? Not all good things, democracy and peace especially, go together.

What is a good liberal universalist to do? One thing that cannot be done is to sit by and let the two (or more) sides in a bloody civil war duke it out until one wins or all parties become exhausted. This is the realist solution but one that is no longer very realistic. It was the path taken in the West, with its long history of internal wars and genocides and no international community to intervene during its formative stages of state- and nation-building. We no longer live in that world and it is unrealistic to expect that we will return to it. For one thing, shocking and moving visual images and the pervasiveness of human right discourse ("somebody's got to do something to stop that!") shape public opinion. For another, civil wars in one area may destabilize another or spill over to disrupt the global economy. All of which means that foreign intervention and democracy promotion moved inexorably onto the agenda, even if the experiences of the international community in Afghanistan and Iraq—neither of which, it could be argued, was purely a civil war—have been depressing ones.

Jarstad sums up one of the findings of the book: "A minimal level of security is important before elections take place. Violence needs to be reduced to permit elections, if legitimate government is to result. In this way, securing a minimal level of peace is a first necessary step for successful war-to-democracy transitions. At the same time, it is important not to postpone elections for too long..." (p.35). It is not easy to get it right and it is all too tempting to intervene, hold elections, call it a democracy, and declare the mission accomplished. Similar to Roland Paris's pathbreaking *At War's End*, the authors of this volume remind us that it is not easy to be a liberal internationalist.

Virginia Page Fortna's cross-national statistical analysis of the effects of peace-keeping operations on democratization builds on the dataset compiled by Doyle and Sambanis and supplements it with other data, yielding almost sixty civil wars in the decade between 1989 and 1999. The analysis shows that, although peacekeepers are good at keeping the peace, the impact on democracy, judging by the movement of the Polity IV and Freedom House sources for individual countries, is far more ambiguous. Where peace holds, democracy scores rise. Where it does not, democracy falters. On the whole, she concludes, "the negative and positive effects of peacekeeping on democracy appear to cancel each other out..." (p.74).

Kristine Höglund's chapter highlights the central dilemma. Holding

elections, freeing up the media, reigning in the police—all measures to promote democracy—may have the unintended effect of promoting violence as well. On the other hand, many common measures to ensure security, such as including potential spoilers in the democratic process "may undermine the transition to democracy." This conclusion is echoed in Mimmi Soderberg Kovacs's chapter on the inclusion of armed and militarized groups in postwar politics. Although such inclusion may help end the war through a settlement, the militant and uncivil nature of many of these groups often undermines democracy in the medium run.

Ethnic or religious power sharing, Jarstad notes in an important second contribution, may also cut two ways. Even where it prevents violence in the short run, it may undermine democratization in the long run by cutting off incentives to form cross-ethnic and moderate political parties. It can also be a source of corruption and ineffective government. And those groups not included in the power-sharing agreement face strong incentives to defect from both peace and democracy. These are familiar but powerful critiques of Lijphart's consociational model, which privileges organized ethnic and religious groups and their representatives. Whom do these representatives represent in a less-than-democratic context? What right do warlords have to be considered "stakeholders?" Jarstad concludes that power sharing has a negative impact on war-torn society and international guarantees to uphold power-sharing agreements, such as those in Bosnia, are a recipe for long-term dependence on outsiders, which, in turn, undermines the legitimacy of the agreement itself.

Benjamin Reilly's excellent and well-framed chapter focuses on elections as tools of both peacebuilding and democratization. He goes straight to heart of the matter. Notwithstanding the fact that "post-war democratization is a difficult, uncertain, and often dangerous business," Western policy makers over the course of the 1990s came to see democracy as the default position of most societies. This inclination, Reilly notes, "may have reached its nadir with the truly extravagant claims regarding the beneficent impact of democratization and free elections made by the Bush administration in the post September 11 era" (p.162). Reilly is on to something here and to this one may add that the surprisingly peaceful transition to democracy in postcommunist Eastern Europe may teach policy makers the lesson that democracy is both far easier to establish than many of the democracy-has-prerequisites crowd had led us to believe and that it promotes peace. The script in Iraq was clearly drawn from 1989 Eastern Europe. Topple the regime, topple the leader's statue (ignore that it was done by Americans with token participation by an Iraqi mob), and then crown the whole thing with elections—a recipe that clearly did not work out as well as hoped for.

Reilly calls for a careful consideration of the timing, sequencing, and mechanics of elections. There is no overarching and universal recipe that guarantees early elections after war will be good for democracy in the long run. He uses the complex, interesting, and successful case of Bouganville to

illustrate what he means. An island at the eastern end of Paupa New Guinea, Bouganville was the site of a horrendous conflict in the 1980s and 1990s that involved rebel groups, foreign mercenaries employed by the central government, talks brokered by New Zealand, and a peace ultimately monitored by an Australian-led "Peace Monitoring Group" and a UN observer team. A peace agreement was ultimately signed in 2001. Election of an autonomous government, however, took place only four years later, in 2005, and the parliament was carefully designed to mitigate conflicts through the inclusion of reserve seats for specific regions, combatant groups, and women. Electoral rules will help future elections produce moderate parties.

The potential for unintended consequences abound. Foreign promotion of civic groups, as Roberto Belloni notes in his chapter, distorts civic development by having local groups focus more on their donors than on their local audience. The result is lots of copy machines and computers and a well-paid local staff, but not much connection to the real associations in society at large. Furthermore, Western donors tend to fund groups they like, leaving those they do not like to fend for themselves, the irony being that these "bad" groups end up doing the real spade work of developing connections to the society at large. Meanwhile, the really talented locals flock into Western-funded NGOs and stay out of party-politics government, where they are genuinely needed. As in other areas, it is hard to do good. This is the central dilemma of liberal universalism in international politics.

The real problem, of course, is that the knowledge acquired by Reilly in the Bouganville case is local knowledge and it is not clear that it can be exported anywhere. Indeed, that is the nature of local knowledge and the implication is that, if we are to be liberal internationalists, we need to know a great deal about individual cases before we become involved or attempt to try anything more ambitious than preventing the worst sorts of humanitarian catastrophes. Otherwise, any successes will be serendipitous and the potential to make things worse is enormous. That is the central message of this book and it is one worth keeping in mind.

The sobering lessons of the Clinton and Bush years have led to a clear diminution of democracy promotion as a tool of peacekeeping in the minds of America policy makers. When President Barack Obama was asked during a press conference in April 2009 whether laws infringing upon the rights of women in Afghanistan (the so-called "marital rape law") would be challenged, he made a perfunctory bow to the importance of human rights and democracy but added: "We have stated very clearly that we object to this law. But I want everybody to understand that our focus is to defeat al Qaeda...." Whether the new American liberal realism signals a long-term trend away from democracy promotion as a tool of peacebuilding remains to be seen. When it does return to the international agenda, democracy promoters and peacebuilders may want to read this book carefully.