State-Building and Nation-Building in the Post-Conflict Phase: The Arab Region

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Lessons learned from the 20 years of state-building in Afghanistan. I agree with Mr. Jackson that political transition and post-war recovery is exceptionally challenging and state building cannot be reconstructed under external supervision and aid. Mr. Jackson offered a set of recommendations that enhance the likelihood of succeeding in building inclusive and sustainable institutions that in turn are crucial for peacebuilding.

I would like to build on Mr. Jackson's identified shortcomings of the approach applied in Afghanistan to build a state by focusing on why Efforts to help end wars and establish peace in the Arab region are inadequate. My emphasis will be on three (3) shortcomings that are particularly frequent and damaging, in the Arab Region and how to overcome these deficiencies to forge effective and durable peaceful coexistence, building legitimate state and institutions and launching the wheel of reconstruction and development.

The three (3) points that I will discuss are:

1)   Conflict dynamics and the low priority given by international players to Nation Building

2)   Human capital destruction and catching up with the lost generations

3)   Low priority given to rebuilding of effective and inclusive national institutions.

1)   Conflict dynamics and the low priority given by international players to Nation Building

The Arab region confronts a bewildering array of intense, complex, and interlocked armed conflicts exacerbated by regional and international politics. Iraq, Libya, Syrian, and Yemen are countries where civil conflict has followed long periods of authoritarian regime. While these countries are moving to de-escalation, post war reconstruction will be complicated. It is necessary to consider 2 basic facts that have a direct impact on the issue of Nation building and peacebuilding:

First, the nature of wars and conflicts, and the importance of understanding their characteristics, results, and repercussions on rebuilding centralized, efficient and legitimate states:

o   Violent internal/civil is taking place simultaneously in several Arab countries.

- Not only A direct threat to citizens, but also to the structure of the state, to the social fabric (60 million people are threatened by the wars taking place in a number of Arab countries, 1/5 of the total population of the region);
- Wars are becoming more intense, destructive and prolonged.
- Multiplicity of domestic and foreign actors and state structures are facing insurmountable difficulties in exercising effective sovereignty
- Very high rates of displacement and forced displacement.
- Cross-border spill over in different forms and means (displaced persons and displaced persons, smuggling of weapons and money, fighters, extremist ideas...);

The resulting fragmentation has often served to empower local actors and communities and to enforce community identities, with clear implications for the future (re)building of a centralized state

Second, The paradox today is that neither the local elites nor the dominant external forces or those directly interfering in the affairs of the region have produced or provided alternatives to the crumbling system of governance. This fact cannot be ignored when designing and planning a process of state-building and nation-building intended to restore social fabric, building peaceful coexistence, and managing diversity in the post-war and conflict stages.

Based on the above, when launching the process of recovery and development there are core issues and areas that have a direct impact on peacebuilding and preventing recurrence of conflict. These issues cannot be overlooked and must be the priority of priorities in the recovery and rebuilding process.

Among the most important of these issues are the following:

• The issue of Societal reconciliation. There is no stability and peaceful coexistence without true and real societal reconciliation.

Particular emphasis must be put on the need for building consensus around governance mechanisms that can reconnect local- and national-level institutions and manage resource distribution.

One of the conditions for promoting and ensuring the success of societal reconciliation is ensuring that the reconstruction and development process is to address the structural problems, inequalities and differences that existed before the outbreak of the conflict or those that resulted during the conflict.

• Local reintegration, by achieving a sustainable economic, social and cultural return of the displaced, in order to restore the social fabric that was shattered by the war. The sustainable return is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and peaceful coexistence.

Evaluating how conflict dynamics in each country affect state capacity and authority increases the understanding of the key challenges facing policymakers in rebuilding centralized, efficient and legitimate states.

2)   Reversing Human capital destruction and the need to catch up with the lost generation.

Prolonged periods of conflict destroy human capital during childhood with direct effects on children, such as lack of education, malnutrition, deteriorating health conditions and psychological stress, which affects their future opportunities and their ability to enter the labor market and build and properly engage in social life. According to the World Food Program, nearly seven million people are living on the brink of famine in Yemen, including three million children under the age of five who need urgent food support, while 17 million people in Yemen are considered vulnerable to malnutrition in Yemen. According to ESCWA estimates, more than 3.4 million Yemeni children of learning age are out of school. According to UNICEF estimates, 2.8 million Syrian children of learning age are out of school, which is equivalent to half of Syria's children. Two-thirds of the Syrian people are on the poverty line

Since the foundations of later-life successes are built in early years, children exposed to conflict will carry effects of conflict throughout their lives. In the absence of critical interventions designed to enhance opportunities of children affected by conflict, inequalities will be reinforced. Evidence from Iraq, libya, Syria and Yemen suggest that stunting appears to be the most damaging effect on children, as it will impair all future developments.

Therefore, the proposed development process is supposed to allocate the necessary investment in accordance with a clear national vision, in basic areas such as education to make it respond to the need for rebuilding human capital and fill the skill gap, on health (physical and psychological/mental), and nutrition, to prevent famine, social safety nets can help improve coping strategies against hunger and financial distress…

Investment in Yemen's human capital now, specifically in geographic areas away from frontline fighting, should hasten the speed of the post-conflict economic recovery and lay the foundations for the sustainable development of the economy beyond the war.

3)   Low priority given to rebuilding of effective and inclusive national institutions.

•   Rebuilding effective, accountable, and inclusive state institutions, at the central and local levels are taking the back seat to efforts focusing on security issues.

•   Successful institutional transformation requires addressing local context and active citizen's engagement and participation in public affairs and in managing their affairs. This can be done through convergence, and openness between different individuals and groups, linking the state with societies and to achieve sustainable development. Moreover, successful institution building should by synced with the political scope for a change and with a holistic approach towards rebuilding efficient and legitimate security structures.

In addition to the responsibility of national governments to maintain peaceful coexistence and manage the development process, there is paramount importance to developing regional approaches and solutions to confront challenges and transnational repercussions, which require concerted national, regional and international efforts to solve them. The crisis of forced displacement, extremism and cross-border terrorism, the spread of a culture of hatred and

rejection of others, etc., are all issues that require answers, solutions and interventions at the level of the Arab region that address the roots of problems and their intellectual and cultural dimensions, and not only address their consequences.

- Another issue that is overlooked in the discussions of rebuilding inclusive institutions in Syria, Iraq and Yemen is depletion of human resources and brain drain which continues to weaken states, the administrative capacity, and the capacity of post conflict recovery,

In addition, the rapid proliferation of international NGOs provokes "brain drain" from the public sector by luring workers away with higher salaries, leading to further crumbling of institutions and fragmentation of services. International community should not contribute to the draining of skilled human resources from local enterprises and institutions but build and enhance capacity in governments at all levels to be able to steer and support transition and recovery.

Moreover, provided that countries emerging from violent conflict face extraordinary constraints mobilizing the human and financial resources, international community must ensure that their work does not contribute to the fragmentation of national institutions or deepening existing divisions (Libya and Yemen). Rebuilding institutions and strengthening capacities should be based on national priorities of recovery.

To conclude, the use of violence to achieve political objectives has had a deep, and most probably lasting, impact on the states themselves. In addition, the limits of state-building processes, without concerted efforts simultaneously to build the nation (the focus of state building at the expense of nation building – fostering social cohesion) has already been demonstrated by the experience of Iraq since 2003. In Iraq liberal peace (driven from above by external actors, forming liberal institutions, market economy…) has been implemented without success. Significant investment in nation-building activities is needed in areas such as addressing the legacies of conflict and violence, fostering social cohesion between communities, and strengthening ongoing dialogues within and between societies.