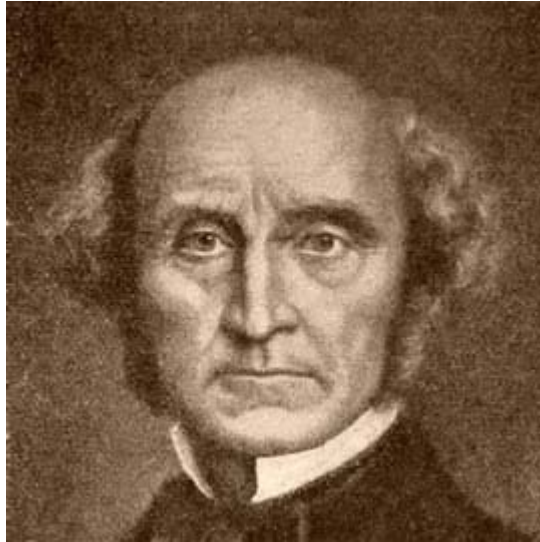


PICTURE STORY

Liberal imperialism

June 2003

Liberal imperialism



Since decolonisation in the 1960s the debate on the virtues of liberal imperialism and the limits of democracy has never appeared more contemporary than now. Here are some of the most relevant voices - both moderns and classics.

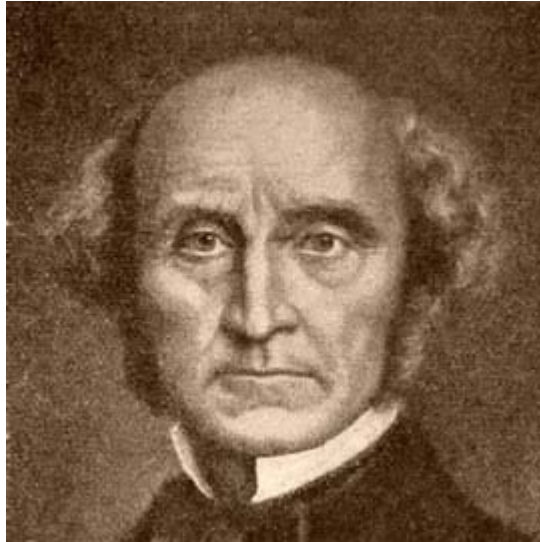


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John Stuart Mill



John Stuart Mill was born in London in 1806, the son of James Mill, the disciple of Jeremy Bentham and Chief Examiner (Chief Executive Officer) of the East India Company. Mill's youth was spent mostly in an exceptionally rigorous experimental education directed by his father; but he also put his Utilitarian ideas into practice, and was arrested and briefly imprisoned in 1823 for agitating in favour of contraception. In the same year, he joined the East India Company as a clerk, and was to work there for most of the next forty years, finally achieving the post of Chief Examiner in 1856.

In 1858, Mill retired from the Company and devoted himself to philosophy and writing for several productive years. *On Liberty* was published in 1859, and *Utilitarianism* and *Considerations on Representative Government* in 1861. After a brief spell as Member of Parliament for Westminster, Mill retired to Avignon in France, where he died in 1879.

Mill's thought is of particular interest for the current debate. Not only was he one of the leading philosophers of liberal democracy and an early advocate of many aspects of the rights of women, universal suffrage and religious tolerance; but throughout his life, he was intimately involved with the British Imperial rule in India, and amongst the leading figures of the high tide of the liberal, Utilitarian project between 1828 and 1857.

Good Government is Self-Government

In his *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill argues that "the ideally best form of government is representative government":

"There is no difficulty in showing that the ideally best form of government is that in which the sovereignty, or supreme controlling power in the last resort, is vested in the entire aggregate of the community; every citizen not only having a voice in the exercise of that ultimate sovereignty, but being, at least occasionally, called on to take an active part in the government, by the personal discharge of some public function, local or general." (*CORG*, Ch. III)

The reason for this is that good government is nothing other than government in the interests of the governed. Hence self-government is the ideal form of government, because only self-government can ensure that the executive maintains "that complete and ever-operative identity of interest with the governed."

The Authoritarian Temptation

The chief competitor to self-government in Mill's eyes is some form of despotic rule: and it is dangerously seductive:

"It has long ... been a common saying, that if a good despot could be ensured, despotic monarchy would be the best form of government. I look upon this as a radical and most pernicious misconception of what good government is . . ." (*CORG*, Ch. III)

For a despot, no matter how benevolent, to realise government in the interests of the people in the same manner that representative self-government, would require "one man of superhuman mental activity managing the entire affairs of a mentally passive people" – a combination, in other words, of the impossible with the utterly undesirable.

The price of democracy is compromise and sometimes indecisiveness. As a result, Mill argues, the illusion that good government may be had more cheaply is all too attractive, and entertained just as often by well-intentioned modernisers as by self-seeking dictators:

"It is not much to be wondered at if impatient or disappointed reformers, groaning under the impediments opposed to the salutary public improvements by the ignorance, the indifference, the intractableness, the perverse obstinacy of a people, and the corrupt combinations of private interests armed with the powerful weapons afforded by free institutions, should at times sigh for a strong hand to bear down all these obstacles, and compel a recalcitrant people to be better governed." (*CORG*, Ch. III)

Civilisation and the 'general scale of humanity'

How then did Mill square these views on the primacy of democratic self-government with his own career as an officer of a colonial regime? The answer lay in the concept of the 'general degree of ... improvement' of a people – their position within the 'general scale of humanity'. Peoples that are not sufficiently civilised may not at first be able to sustain representative self-government, and for them, 'real good government is not compatible with the conditions of the case. There is but a choice of imperfections.' In such cases, the best feasible form of government may well be undemocratic imperial rule by foreigners:

"Thus far of dependencies whose population is in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative government. But there are others which have not attained that state, and which, if held at all, must be governed by the dominant country, or by persons delegated for that purpose by it. This mode of government is as legitimate as any other, if it is the one which in the existing state of civilisation of the subject people, most facilitates their transition to a higher stage of improvement" (*CORG*, Ch. XVIII)

The imperial mandate is therefore a serious business: 'the highest moral trust that can devolve upon a nation'. It is fraught with dangers: although 'the thing appears perfectly easy to superficial observers', 'it is quite certain, that the despotism of those who neither hear, nor see, nor know, anything about their subjects, has many chances of being worse than that of those that do'.

Nevertheless, so long as the goal of the imperial project is always religiously fixed as the eventual self-government of the people concerned – the goal that distinguishes liberal imperial rule from mere despotism – then 'a government of leading strings' is justified as the optimal means of bringing a less civilised people to the stage when they can themselves enjoy self-government.

Edmund Burke



Edmund Burke was born on New Year's Day, 1729, in Dublin. Since Ireland and England were at that time one country, it was natural for him to pursue a literary and political career in London after graduating from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1748. An energetic campaigner and exceptional orator, Burke was first elected to the House of Commons in 1765, and thereafter was one of the leading British parliamentarians for nearly thirty years, finally retiring from Parliament only in 1794.

Burke's political views defy modern categories. On the one hand he is often claimed to be the father of modern conservatism – because he vociferously opposed Jacobinism, and argued in favour of the merits of tradition and status in the maintenance of social order. On the other hand, he was a hero to radicals on a variety of issues. He was an early and controversial critic of slavery. He was amongst the most popular writers of America's constitutional founders, and condemned British policy in America before and during the War of Independence.

Burke and British India

Above all, however, Burke waged a practically life-long campaign against the injustices of British rule in India. By the time of Burke's entry to Parliament, the East India Company, a private trading company that had gradually extended its control over India with the help of British troops, was the *de facto* government of a large part of the subcontinent. Burke saw in this arrangement not only irresistible opportunities for gross corruption on the part of the officers of the East India Company, but a fundamental outrage against the human rights of millions of Indians – 'we are usurpers of other men's rights there', as he put it.

The first governor-general of India, Warren Hastings, became in time the foremost target of Burke's efforts to awake in the British public some realisation of the outrages being perpetrated in India in their name. In his *Speech on Fox's East India Bill* delivered in 1783, Burke argued that the unaccountable power of the governor-general was both illegitimate and ultimately ineffective. Hastings, he argued, had begun to confuse the professional authority of his mandate with discretionary authority associated with him personally:

"Such is a British governour's idea of the condition of a great zemindar [Indian landowner of the upper classes] holding under a British authority; and this kind of authority he supposes fully delegated to *him*; though no such delegation appears in any commission, instruction, or act of parliament." (*Speech on Fox's East India Bill*)

Hastings had claimed to Parliament that he required '*absolute* authority' over the Indians to prosecute Company policy. He had written that 'I left Calcutta, impressed with a belief that *extraordinary means* were necessary, and these exercised with a *steady hand* . . .' Burke argued that in fact, Hastings' unregulated authority had turned the rule of law into a sham,

where justice had dissolved into expediency, and trials were conducted without due process. Burke gave the example of Hastings' indictment of an Indian prince on a capital charge:

"Did he cite his culprit before a tribunal? Did he make a charge? Did he produce witnesses? These are not forms; they are parts of substantial and eternal justice. No, not a word of all this, Mr. Hastings concludes him, in his own mind, to be guilty, he makes this conclusion on reports, on hearsay, on appearances, on rumours, on conjectures, on presumptions; and even these never once hinted to the party, nor publickly to any human being, till the whole business was done." (*Speech on Fox's East India Bill*)

Moreover, Burke argued that not only were these strategies unjustified – but that they could not, and did not, in fact achieve the Company's goals. Remarking on the steep decline in Indian revenues, he commented, 'here, Sir, mark the effect of all these *extraordinary* means, of all this policy and justice.'

The Pragmatics of Empire

It was not only the unregulated activities of the East India Company that irked Burke, however: he deeply distrusted many of the principles upon which the imperial project was being built.

He was a passionate believer in the nuts and bolts of interest politics, and did not believe in the grand design of 'civilising' other peoples:

"We Englishmen stop short of the principles upon which we support any given part of our Constitution . . . All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter. . . Man acts from adequate motives relative to his interests; and not on metaphysical speculations." (*Speech on Conciliation with America*)

He foresaw that arguments for imperialism based on technocracy, and claims that the officers of imperial administrations would be experts, were more likely than not to founder on the realities of recruitment for official service in parochial backwaters. He was scathing about the situation in India, where:

". . . the natives scarcely know what it is to see the grey head of an Englishman. Young men (boys even) govern there, without society, and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people than if they still resided in England . . . There is nothing in the boys we send to India worse, than in the boys whom we are whipping at school, or that we see trailing a pike, or bending over a desk at home. But as English youth in India drink the intoxicating draught of authority and dominion before their heads are able to bear it, and as they are full grown in fortune long before they are ripe in principle, neither nature nor reason have any opportunity to exert themselves for remedy of the excesses of their premature power." (*Speech on Fox's East India Bill*)

Bad Government Abroad Means Bad Government At Home

Burke also argued that imperial rule abroad was not only bad for the Indians, however – but must inevitably rebound to the detriment of Britain's own society and government as well. Bad government abroad means government by bad governors abroad – who may later become bad governors at home:

"If we are not able to contrive some method of governing India *well* which will not also of necessity become the means of governing Great Britain *ill*, a ground is laid for their eternal separation; but none for sacrificing that country to our constitution." (*Speech on Fox's East India Bill*)

This point – the irony of a democratic country implementing despotic rule in far away lands, and the deterioration of the domestic political sphere that might result – was for Burke one of his central criticisms of the imperial project more generally. He summed it up memorably during his impeachment of Warren Hastings before the House of Lords in 1788:

"Today the Commons of Great Britain prosecute the delinquents of India: tomorrow the delinquents of India may be the Commons of Great Britain." (*Speech on Fox's East India Bill*)

Niccolò Machiavelli



Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469. He held a series of high offices in the Florentine Republic, and as chancellor of the *Nove di Milizia* he organized an infantry force which fought at the capture of Pisa in 1509. When the Republic was defeated by the Holy League in 1512, the Medici returned to Florence, and Machiavelli was imprisoned, tortured, and afterwards exiled to his farm in San Casciano. There, he devoted himself to study and writing, until he was rehabilitated in to Florentine public life by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in 1520. He died in 1527.

Machiavelli described his daily life in exile in a famous letter to his friend Francesco Vettori: consorting with the local people in the fields and taverns by day, "when evening comes, I return home and go into my study, and at the door I take off my daytime dress covered in mud and dirt, and put on royal and curial robes; and then decently attired, I enter the courts of the ancients, where affectionately greeted by them, I partake of that food which is mine alone and for which I was born ..." Amongst the products of these nocturnal sojourns were his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*. By contrast to his better known work *The Prince*, the *Discourses* are a part historical, part philosophical treatise on the form of government that Machiavelli himself held to be the best – republican government, or what we would today call constitutional democracy. Many of his observations and arguments are of great interest to the current debate on democratization.

Princes to Create States, Republics to Maintain Them.

To many readers, Machiavelli is best known as the author of *The Prince*, and hence thought of as an advocate of absolutism. But such an interpretation captures only half of Machiavelli's political thought. In his *Discourses*, Machiavelli makes clear that the authority of an absolute monarch is appropriate to some circumstances – the conquest of states, or their total revolution – but in the long run, only republican government can generate security and prosperity:

"And if princes are superior to populaces in drawing up laws, codes of civic life, statutes, and new institutions, the populace is so superior in sustaining what has been instituted that it indubitably adds to the glory of those who have instituted them."

Conflict is Essential, Rather than Detrimental, to Republics.

Machiavelli argued that the strength and stability of the republican state lies in its ability to reconcile the interests of opposing factions. A republic draws its strength from political conflicts; and these are even to be encouraged. He cited the example of the ancient Roman Republic:

"To me those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and the plebs, seem to be cavalling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome's retaining her freedom, and that they pay more attention to the noise and clamour resulting from such commotions than to what resulted from them, i.e. to the good effects which they produced. Nor do they realise that in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace, and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them." § 1.4

Institutional means of dispersing power between different interest groups are therefore a particular virtue of republics, since they facilitate political conflicts:

"Squabbles between the populace and the Senate should, therefore, be looked upon as an inconvenience which it is necessary to put up with in order to arrive at the greatness of Rome. For, besides the reasons already adduced to show the authority of the tribunes was essential to the preservation of liberty, it is easy to see what benefit a republic derives when there is an authority that can bring charges in court, which was among the powers vested in the tribunes, as will be shown in the following chapter." § 1.6 finit.

The Importance of Emergency Powers.

Of course, if political conflicts are allowed to rise to such a level of violence as to endanger the state itself, they can become counterproductive, and must be quelled. The fundamental importance of conflict to the system means that the bar must be set high for intervention, but when it is required, the introduction of princely rule for a limited time is justifiable. Once again, the Roman Republic, with its constitutional provision for the Senate to appoint a Dictator in times of emergency, provides Machiavelli's example:

"... without such an institution [as was the Roman dictatorship] cities will with difficulty find a way out of abnormal situations. For the institutions normally used by republics are slow in functioning. No assembly or magistrate can do everything alone. In many cases, they have to consult with one another, and to reconcile their diverse views takes time. Where there is a question of remedying a situation that will not brook delay, such a procedure is dangerous.

In conclusion then, I claim that republics which, when in imminent danger, have recourse neither to a dictatorship, nor to some form of authority analogous to it, will always be ruined when some grave misfortune befalls them." § 1.34

Thomas Hobbes



Thomas Hobbes was born in Armada year – 1588 – and educated at Oxford. He spent most of his life employed as a tutor and secretary to the Earls of Devonshire. In 1640, he moved to Paris, where he was appointed tutor to the exiled Stuart Prince of Wales. From there, he followed with horror the progress of the English Civil War throughout the 1640s. In 1651, Hobbes published *Leviathan*, called by Michael Oakeshott "the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language". In 1652, he returned to England and died at the age of 91 in 1679.

Hobbes is often cited as a powerful apologist for the merits of authoritarian government, and as such is an important point of reference in the current debate.

Hobbesian Man and the Basis of Civil Association

Hobbes argues that man is by nature self-seeking – a conception that is the prototype of modern economists' *homo oeconomicus* – but he exists amongst his competitors, and this leads to a constant potential for conflict. It is true that reason leads men to realise that cooperation may profit them individually; but reason cannot overcome the powerful self-love that generates conflict. As Hobbes puts it:

"... all men are by nature provided of notable magnifying glasses (that is their Passions and Self-love,) through which, every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute of those perspective glasses, (namely Moral and Civil Science,) to see a farre off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoyded." (Leviathan, Ch. XVIII)

As a result, the civil order is always fragile, and civil strife always imminent – eternal truths concerning civil association that Hobbes felt had been demonstrated in his own time in the particular circumstances of the English Civil War.

This fragility leads men to acquiesce in the institution of the sovereign, whose laws all men obey not out of reason, but out of fear:

"The final Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by fear of punishment to the performance of their Covenants . . ." (Leviathan, Ch. XVII)

The Rule of Law and the Best Form of Government

Only the brute fear of the sovereign can counteract the brute impulses generated by every man's self-love. The 'rule of law', therefore, consists of nothing but obedience to the sovereign; since the essential virtue of the law is simply that it is obeyed, so that peace is preserved. The optimal form of the sovereign institution – whether it should be a monarchy, a parliamentary government, some other arrangement – should be decided depending on circumstance: there is no universal formula. The important thing is, however, that it is not to be judged by how representative it is of the opinions of the governed, but by how well it keeps peace between them – for "Power in all formes, if they be perfect enough to protect [the governed], is the same" (*Leviathan*, Ch. XVIII).

Bees, Ants, and the Citizens of 'Failed States'

Does Hobbes' philosophy provide a basis for the autocratic powers of international missions? Do the citizens of 'failed states' represent mankind in the Hobbesian state of nature, lacking the essential authority of the sovereign, whose worth is to be judged by the obedience it commands of its subjects, and the efficiency with which its laws pacify society?

There is an important stumbling block. Hobbes's theory of the state is deduced from his theory of human nature. So unless we believe that this theory of human nature applies only to the citizens of 'failed states', we are bound to accept Hobbes' theory of the state as an argument for authoritarianism in developed, democratic countries as well. In Hobbes' terms, we would have to believe that whilst the Americans and the French are "Bees, and Ants" – creatures amongst whom social harmony is "Naturall" – the citizens of Bosnia and Kosovo are members of Hobbesian mankind, for whom all agreement is "by Covenant only", and who therefore require "Common Power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the Common Benefit" (*Leviathan*, Ch.XVII). Such a distinction, quite apart from being repugnant on the face of it, is not made by Hobbes, for whom all mankind are in the same predicament.

The fact is that Hobbes' political philosophy does not underpin the liberal democracies of Europe and America: so we are bound to ask how it could serve as a justification of international missions that seek to democratise and develop elsewhere.

Bernard Crick



Over forty years ago, **Sir Bernard Crick**, then a young academic, published an essay 'to justify politics in plain words by saying what it is'. *In Defence of Politics* has been in print ever since, and remains one of the most widely-read and influential discussions of democratic politics in English. Biographer of Orwell; teacher at Harvard, Berkeley, the LSE, Sheffield, and Birkbeck; enthusiastic (and recently successful) advocate of the teaching of citizenship as a subject in British schools; Crick is a lucid, activist, and unpretentious partisan of democratic politics in action. Many of his arguments are highly relevant to the current debate.

Emergency Powers and Good Government

Like Machiavelli in his Discourses, Crick argues in *In Defence of Politics* that whilst there may be an argument for suspending democratic politics in times of emergency, there is no substitute for them when it comes to good government in normal times:

"When the choice is really between any order at all and anarchy, then it is enough just to govern; but more often the task of preserving a state must be seen in terms of governing well. Governing well means governing in the interests of the governed and, ultimately, there is no sure way of finding out what these interests are, but by representing them in the politically sovereign body; and there is no sure way of convincing people that all their interests may not be realisable together or at once, but by letting them try, letting them see for themselves the conflict of interests inevitable in any state." (*In Defense of Politics*, p.114)

Democracy's 'False Friends'

Another theme is that dangers to democracy all too often come not from its outright opponents, but from the confusion of political traditions that ostensibly hold democracy to be the best form of government.

To "socialists", for instance, democratic politics can appear a pointless diversion – "the characteristic danger of socialist parties and thinkers is an impatience which breeds a quest for certainty and a contempt for politics" – and as a result, "they pretend that revolutions, 'transitional periods', 'world in the making' are the normal state of affairs for which their talents are uniquely suited." (*In Defence of Politics*, p.131-3)

The non-political "conservative" claims to be above politics. He is conserving the essential order of the state against all those politicians, lobbyists, and careerists who exude self-interest and intrude into statecraft. His dislike of any fanaticism may prepare the ground for politics; but he despises politicians. Crick's conservative has mysterious antenna which pick up intimations from the general will or the common good with prescience and sensitivity. The plain truth, however, is that what holds a free state together is neither general will nor a common interest, but simply politics itself.

The most interesting temptation, in the context of the current debate, is that represented by the "liberal" who allows himself to become a-political. "He wishes to enjoy all the fruits of politics without paying the price or noticing the pain. He likes to honour the fruit but not the tree; he wishes to pluck each fruit – liberty, representative government, honesty in government, economic prosperity, and free or general education, etc. – and then preserve them from further contact with politics." (In Defense of Politics, p.123)

Faced with the messy reality of interest politics, the a-political liberal all too often finds solace in a self-contradictory belief in enlightened autocracy:

"The corrupt democratic politician . . . seems a hard case of politics to defend, . . . [b]ut he must be defended against both the liberal prude who shies away from real political problems – him to whom class and ethnic discrimination 'do not really exist' – and against the man who would rather have honest autocracy than corrupt politics. Most liberals, one suspects, would prefer autocracy to corruption, because it is tidier and because it may honour personal virtues more – like honesty and sincerity (in which the liberal places an excessive trust: 'if men were honest and sincere, all politics would disappear' – says the liberal)." (In Defense of Politics, p.126)

Is this the fate of the international community in Bosnia?

Sebastian Mallaby



Sebastian Mallaby grew up in Great Britain. He studied modern history at Oxford before joining the staff of *The Economist* in 1986. In the late 80s and early 90s, he was *The Economist's* correspondent first in Zimbabwe, and then in Japan. In 1996 he moved to the paper's Washington office, becoming bureau chief one year later. There he wrote on foreign policy and national affairs, but also extensively on American politics and society. Since 1999 he has worked at the *Washington Post* as a columnist.

Of special interest to the current debate are Mallaby's positions on nation-building as expressed in his article "The Reluctant Imperialist" in the March/April 2002 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

Mallaby argues that 'failed states' are increasingly trapped in cycles of poverty, instability and violence. Current strategies – foreign aid for development and technical assistance for democratisation – have not been able to free those countries from this trap. The only solution, in Mallaby's view, is to revive the institution of imperialism. As the world's only superpower, the United States must play a decisive role in building new institutions, especially an effective legal system, in unstable countries. On the other hand, international legitimacy is not only desirable, but necessary to the success of this new imperialism. The UN, however, with its gridlocked one-country-one-vote system and the veto powers of the permanent members of the Security Council, is unworkable as a nation-building agency. Mallaby therefore advocates a new international organisation, combining multilateral participation with American leadership on the model of the Bretton Woods institutions, which would take over from the United Nations the role of nation-building round the globe.

Michael Ignatieff



Michael Ignatieff was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1947. He read history at the University of Toronto, and wrote a doctorate at Harvard University. He is currently the Carr Professor and Director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University. He has published widely on human rights, the Balkans, and international relations.

The Need for a New Imperialism

In his most recent book, *Empire Lite: Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, published earlier this year, Ignatieff argues that the 'institutional collapse' of failed states has become more and more common since the end of the Cold War, so that we have now reached a point where "there is enough failure to create an ongoing crisis of order in a globalised world". State failure is a problem that generally cannot be remedied internally: "nations sometimes fail, and when they do only outside help – imperial power – can get them back on their feet". Since national power equates in the final analysis to military muscle – "September 11 rubbed in the lesson that global power is still measured by military capability" – the United States is the natural nation-building power in the world, and must shoulder the burden of the new imperialism.

Conflicts of Interest

What the new imperialism should look like – how to go about nation-building, in other words – is a less simple matter. Ignatieff argues that there are intrinsic conflicts of interest within the evolving models of democratisation and development that he documents in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. "The conflict at the heart of the nation-building enterprise everywhere" is "between the imperial interests of the intervening powers ...and the local interests of the people and their leadership to rule themselves." (vii). Or again between "the desire of local elites to run their own show and the international concern to keep them in leading strings". Ambitions for democratic transition are, for both citizens of failed states and potential imperialists, defined by "the titanic anti-colonial figures of the twentieth century – from Gandhi to Mandela" who "succeeded in making the idea of self-determination ... triumph over the imperial idea of racial hierarchy"). This is particularly true for the elites of most of the potential subject countries, who "are all the creations of modern nationalism, and modern nationalism's primary ethical content is the imperative of self-determination". All this represents a potent dynamic of contention at the centre of any nation-building project, between local elites and new imperial administrations.

Establishing the Rule of Law

Ignatieff argues that the main lesson for Afghanistan of the nation-building efforts in the Balkans is that "democracy only works when it goes hand in hand with the rule of law". The most important element in a nation-building programme, therefore, is "helping the Afghans to

rewrite the criminal and civil code and train a new generation of lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and criminal investigators". These are the "legal foundations" without which "no country can make the transition from a war economy to a peace economy". When it comes to rebuilding the economy, Ignatieff argues that Afghanistan "needs fewer humanitarian bureaucrats and more civil and electrical engineers". Nevertheless, "infrastructure does not create a nation. Bosnia has all the roads and schools it needs, yet its ethnic groups remain as divided as ever". Economic aid without the building of the state will come to nothing, for in the end it is only the state which can provide "the schools, roads, and hospitals that distinguish society from the jungle".

Europe and America

Will Europe play a major part in this project of nation-building in the next few years? Ignatieff thinks it unlikely. The reason for this is principally that Europe's "national identity became post-military and, in this sense, post-national". Without the military might, Europe does not have the power to engage in the new imperialism. The US is "the West's last military nation state", and as such, the task of stabilising and democratising failed states will fall to it.

ESI on the European Raj



What is the true justification for the extraordinary powers that the international mission in Bosnia enjoys? The conditions that obtained in 1996 and the conditions that obtain today are separated by a gulf too wide to be bridged by the assertion that both represent a state of emergency that only a decisive and unquestioned authority can handle.

In fact, the history of the international mission in Bosnia suggests that its affinities with the British Raj in early nineteenth century India are more than superficial.

While the Bonn powers were conceived as emergency powers to confront concrete threats to the implementation of the peace accords, they have today become the regular instruments of an open ended attempt to develop institutions by decree. The OHR has been allowed to evolve into a latter day version of the Utilitarians' "vigorous despot," assuming ever wider responsibilities in the name of preparing society for self governance. Far from planting the seed of democratic politics in Bosnia's postcommunist political culture, this transformation implicitly teaches that technocratic rule at arm's length from the people is perfectly good governance after all.

This disappointing conclusion raises a further question. On the one hand, the early days of the Bosnian mission clearly demonstrated that some coercive powers were required in order to enforce the peace agreement. On the other, the introduction of these powers has led to the creation of a European Raj.

Does this mean that there was an inherent contradiction between the demands of democratization and the imperatives of peace building in an unstable environment? Or is there a way to institute extraordinary powers such that they do not expand indefinitely?

The problem of unaccountable power has also been highlighted by a recent ESI report on policing in Bosnia: On Mount Olympus. How the UN violated human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and why nothing has been done to correct it.