

Thursday 9:00 am session

Leader- Lincoln Mitchell

Question to answer- Some scholars maintain that Western states and international organizations have aided state formation by restoring peace in the face of conflict, encouraging bureaucratic institution-building, and promoting economic and political liberalism. Others argue that such external influences and interventions distort institutional development, undermine democratic practice, spark ethnic conflict, and can even lead to "failed states." How has Western intervention shaped state formation in the developing world and has its impact been, on balance, positive or negative?

Even though it has been more than 32 years since the end of the cold war, the ghost of the past still continues with the world divided into the affluent liberal first world Western states and from their perspective the 'rest', the developing world and the losers of the cold war. The Cold war era dovetailed on the colonial legacy of white man's burden, to civilize and modernise the locals through intervention, interference and this paper aims to analyse this Western intervention particularly in state formation throughout the developing world. For the sake of simplicity we will equate Western with the liberal world, democratic institution building and international organisations such as IMF, WTO under the patronage of primarily the USA, Canada and Western Europe. Throughout the paper I would present evidence for both positives and negatives for Western intervention, with the argument being that its impact has been on balance and would corroborate my stance with suitable examples and personal experiences from my home country India and South Asian region.

When we say Western interference, we define interference not merely as military interference but also across the dimensions of economics, culture, education and politics and the best

phenomenon that encapsulates this is globalisation. It is the unabated flow of ideas, human capital, goods across borders and has been synonymous with Western interference. Joseph Stiglitz in his book "Globalization and Its Discontents", provides valuable insights into how Western intervention, particularly through globalization policies, has shaped state formation in the developing world. On the negative aspect of globalisation, an argument is made that it has stifled the local governments freedom to make decisions for their populations just to comply with the global rules and standards. A prime example of this is the WTO restriction on developing nations to not provide more than 10% of the value of domestic production as support to domestic producers as it might distort trade. This goes against the principle of strong state formation as developing countries like India often need to exceed the 10% limit to ensure that appropriate support is available to the local producer to ensure development. Institutions such as the IMF and World Bank have a precedent set where the heads of these institutions would be from Europe and USA respectively that undermines the democratic fabric of representation, these institutions use their influence to promote corporate interests in advanced countries, rather than being shaped by the needs and interests of developing nations. Taking the example of Pakistan and the numerous IMF packages that the country has taken, it has practically sold its autonomy to set domestic economic and tax policies just to get aid packages sanctioned from the IMF.(Stiglitz)

On the flip side of things, globalisation did yield some benefits too. It has been a tantamount phenomenon to cause the spread of liberal ideas and as a consequence of them the spread of democratic institution building. The interconnectedness of markets expanded the demand of domestic goods causing a rise in the income of people and creation of a middle class in developing countries like India and China and moving many households above the poverty line. The interconnectedness created as a consequence of globalisation has yielded success in global cooperation particularly to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and towards fighting ozone

depletion as demonstrated through the Abuja, Montreal and Kigali declaration respectively thus creating stable states and world order.

Moving forward I want to make the case of Afghanistan as a prime example of a weak state getting affected by the interference of Western powers. Dipali Mukhopadhyay in her work “Warlords, Strongman Governors and the State in Afghanistan”, examines the consequences of Western interference and presents a complete picture. Afghanistan has long been called the graveyard of empires, from the inability of the British to govern it to USSR’s failure in controlling the state, this piece of land lacked any single point of authority ever since the fall of the Afghani ruling dynasty Barakzai. With a difficult geography and rise of numerous local warlords creating decentralisation of power, Afghanistan according to the Western context can be considered a basket case of a weak state. This dichotomy between warlord and state, tribe and nation is explored by Mukhopadhyay and how Afghanistan should not be dismissed as a failure but instead be studied particularly how the post 2001 era Western interference helped in creating democratic institutions and centralised governance structures. With the backing of USA and NATO, Hamid Karzai was selected as the ruler of the central government and ample military and financial support was given to the center to extend its reach further. Along with this, support to the local warlords to enlist them as allies for the fight against Taliban and al-Qaeda invigorated the periphery to oppose the center thus creating a democratic base. The intervention created numerous positive benefits such as infrastructure development like paved roads, schools, clinics, and other public works projects in provinces like Balkh ;economic growth through foreign assistance to develop trade routes like the Northern Distribution Network brought economic opportunities to some regions and governance improvement in provinces like Balkh under Governor Atta, there were improvements in areas like poppy eradication, tax collection, and public services delivery.(Mukhopadhyay)

Even with all the benefits the impact was not limited to positives, negatives such as distorted institutional development through an externally-imposed state-building project created a mismatch between formal Western-style institutions on paper and the informal warlord tribal patronage networks that actually governed, undermined democratic practice through the selection and propping up of leaders by foreign powers, rather than through organic democratic processes, empowered strongmen through Western support for warlords-turned-governors like Atta Mohammad Noor enabled them to consolidate power through patronage and coercion, rather than democratic accountability and finally created unstable political equilibrium through the bargains between the central government and provincial strongmen, facilitated by foreign aid. A culmination of all these impacts puts into perspective the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban in August 2021, with total disregard of the local warlords oligarchy and tribal identity, the foreign imposed democracy didn't sustain but what did sustain were the governance institutions, ministries and power centres that now provide a sense a stability to Afghanistan even though the nation is not democratic and liberal.

Now skipping from the heart of Asia to North Africa into the country of Libya I would examine the consequences of Western particularly NATO's intervention through the means of Alan Kuperman's work "Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure". Initiated with the stated goal to protect peaceful pro-democracy protesters from a crackdown by Muammar al-Qaddafi's regime, the interference soon turned into a series of negative outcomes that far outweighed the positive benefits. From the Western lens the intervention was deemed as a success as it nurtured the Arab spring, prevented an authoritarian lead genocide and stymied the spread of terrorism but these observations were parochial. Negative outcomes soon emerged such as political instability as Libya failed to evolve into a democracy and instead became a failed state with the country having seven

prime ministers in less than four years. Human rights abuses increased significantly after Qaddafi's fall widespread torture, arbitrary detentions, and attacks on journalists were reported with an estimated 400,000 Libyans have displaced. Economic Decline as oil production, Libya's economic lifeblood, got severely disrupted along with infrastructure deterioration, with frequent power outages in major cities. The intervention extended the civil war from less than six weeks to over eight months with estimates that the death toll increased more than tenfold due to the intervention. Libya became a haven for terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS, weapons from Qaddafi's arsenal, including dangerous MANPADs, spread across North Africa and the Middle East. According to the author, a balanced approach towards allowing Qaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, to implement his reform agenda would have been better. Saif had been preparing to transition Libya towards a more open and reformed system, including constitutional reforms, transparent elections, judicial reforms and media liberalization. The Western expertise in these areas could have been used through tacit and passive interference nudging Libya towards a democratic direction that would have avoided all the negative consequences of an outright military intervention.(Kuperman)

Stepping away from specific case studies now, I would like to examine the broader picture of Western interference through the use of Fareed Zakaria's work. He argues that while Western interference has increased the presence of democracies in the world there has been a rise of illiberalism around the world. Western states and organizations have strongly promoted democracy in the developing world, particularly since the end of the Cold War. This has led to a significant increase in the number of countries holding elections. As of 1997, 118 out of 193 countries were considered democratic, encompassing 54.8% of the world's population; however, this focus on elections and democratic procedures has often come at the expense of constitutional liberalism and institution-building. Examples such as Pakistan that had heavy

Western influence has failed to create a strong liberal ethos even though it has had 29 prime ministers with numerous elections held, the states carved out in middle east like Jordan, Lebanon have individual rights like freedom of speech and expression eroded away, and leaders like Erdogan have concentrated power in their hands turning the once liberal nation of Turkiye into an electoral autocracy. Through this we can say that while Western interference did promote democracies but disregard on strong institution building and liberalism among developing nations by the Western world is now manifesting as the gradual backsliding of democracies into electoral autocracies.(Zakaria)

Moving the discussion forward a more nuanced view of Western interference on developing countries is explored by Lisa Anderson in her 2008 work. She provides a balanced view of how this intervention provides for the state formation in developing states. Positive impacts have been to restore peace in conflict-prone areas done by the UN and other organizations like NATO through peacekeeping operations to stabilize fragile states with examples being the Serbian Kosovo conflict and the demilitarized buffer zone cutting across Cyprus. Western actors have supported the development of bureaucratic institutions in developing countries. This includes technical assistance for state-building activities like disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR). Western intervention has often aimed to encourage democratic transitions and liberal reforms. For instance, the U.S. policies in Afghanistan and Iraq were partly justified by the goal of facilitating democratization. While negative impacts include external interventions undermining local conflict resolution mechanisms and strengthening unjust social structures by reinforcing existing power dynamics for example the gender disparity that can be witnessed in many US allied Arab states. Western interventions, whether military or economic, have often infringed on the sovereignty of developing states. State-building led by external actors often driven by the Western donor community's own agendas, including

security concerns drags developing states into a quagmire of external problems example being Pakistan getting engaged into the American war in Afghanistan for exchange of money and support.(Anderson 2008)

In her 2004 article Lisa Anderson further explains that the current system of states is a creation of European colonial ambitions and perpetuated by the league of nations and UN in the post colonial period. She argues that European states emerged as a result of violence, consolidation of power , resources and strong central administration. They exported this ideal of a single cohesive Weberian state that has control and power over its citizens to all the lands that they colonized. This foreign imposition of the idea of state without any regard of local ethnic divisions along with colonial tactics to administer ethnicities differently created a recipe for weak states. Her argument is supported by Ian Lustick who also argues that European states emerged as a long-drawn consequence of waging wars, power consolidation and clear division of boundaries all of which was absent in the case of his comparative region the middle east while having foreign European interference. The post-colonial period ushered in the cold war era where support from foreign powers such as the USA and USSR meant patronage for the ruling elite to control the state but loyalty to the great powers not to the local population. This eroded the trust of people in the polity of these developing states, preventing any cohesive national identity, undermining democratic practices and creating local sources of power like ethnicities thus fomenting conflicts. Both authors agree that interference had negative impact on developing states yet also the argument can be made that for most states in the post-colonial and cold war era this interference helped in giving a direction to the chaos and carve out states as a geo-political concept out of the socio-cultural concept of the nation.(Anderson 2004 & Lustick)

In my country of India the Western interference by the colonial powers created ethnic divisions and caused the partition of the Subcontinent, it cannot be denied that the modern

political governance structure of the nations engendered from the erstwhile British India retain the same structure as the colonial power UK. This structure and inculcation of a national identity that transcends beyond the local ethnic identity is attributed to the UK as being the antagonist which catalysed it. The identity of being an Indian though contended by the political right, did emerge from the shared revolt against the British occupation transcending linguistic, religious, ethnic and geographic divisions.

In conclusion I want to say that Western interference through the course of history has played both a constructive and destructive role to varying degrees. A balanced approach that considers the sensitivities of the local population, developing nation and eschews from the hegemonic self serving nature of the West is needed by the world to promote a more liberal and democratic world order.

Works Cited

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