In favour of sequencing?

By Chris van der Borgh

Contribution made to the discussion Sequencing for Stability of the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law (24 January 2014), http://www.kpsrl.org/online-debate/online-debate_discussion/t/in-favour-of-sequencing

Thanks Erik for this interesting contribution. You emphasize good leadership, as well as the importance of a comprehensive approach addressing issues like security provisioning, emergency aid, political and economic reforms simultaneously. You mention countries like Singapore and China, as well as Indonesia, Ghana, Ethiopia and Rwanda, as success stories of state-building. Since a number of these countries (such as Rwanda, Ethiopia and China) score 'not free' in the Freedom House ratings, this implies that political liberties and civil rights do not necessarily have to be guaranteed in the short term for a country to be called a 'success'. This sounds to me like a defence of political sequencing.

The idea of sequencing is of course not new. Francis Fukuyama writes in his foreword to the re-edition of Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (first published in 1968) that in the decades after World War II, modernization theorists emphasized that 'all good things tended to go together […] economic development would fuel better education, which would lead to value change, which would promote modern politics, and so on in a virtuous circle'. That assumption was challenged by Huntington who argued that the good things of modernization could be at cross purposes. Huntington warned against the dangers of early democratization in the absence of functioning institutions, political parties, and unions. Some thirty years later, Fareed Zakaria, a student of Huntington, made a similar point in his book *The Future of Freedom. Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. He pointed at the limitations and dangers of democratization in the absence of functioning state institutions and argued that (in certain cases) it can be better to postpone democratization or simply to accept the existence of authoritarian regimes or transitional authoritarianism (assuming that the push for democracy would come when internal conditions are ripe).

This view resonated in the discussions about democratization in post-war states. This was most explicitly expressed by Roland Paris in *At War's End* published in 2004. Analyzing fourteen peace operations that took place in the 1990s, Paris argued that they had failed to build stable peace because these missions promoted political and economic liberalization in contexts where institutions (state and civil society) were still too weak. His conclusion was that institutions needed to be built first and that, if necessary, political and economic liberalization should be postponed. The main difference with Huntington and Zakaria was that Paris proposed that international actors – not local leaders – should take on this directive role.

The idea that civil liberties and political rights may be (or have to be) postponed is highly controversial. In the *Journal of Democracy* of 2007, Thomas Carothers responded to those arguing for sequencing. In Carothers' view it is better to 'find a way for countries where few circumstances favour democratization to take incremental but definitive steps toward open political competition, while simultaneously pursuing state-building and rule-of-law reforms'. Carothers called this strategy gradualism.

I would argue that the peace-building and state-building policies of international donors resemble the gradualist approach. Even in countries where international actors decided to administer a country (like Kosovo), elections were already organized after a couple of years. The idea is not only that state-building

and democratization can and should go together, but also that these processes can be complemented with economic reform programmes and security measures.

This does not mean that gradualism is a road to success. The suggestion that external actors can help improve the economy, the state, the political process and the security situation simultaneously and step-by-step seems far too ambitious. Charles Tilly shows in his book *Democracy* the patterns of state building and democratization in different countries over the past centuries. He argues that there is no unique trajectory, while it becomes clear that most of the trajectories are unpredictable and experience periods of democratization and de-democratisation as well as state building and weakening. This is also the case in those countries that we have come to call fragile states. In most of these countries some democratization and some state-building has taken place, but these are often highly unstable processes that can easily reverse. Most of these countries are still characterized by weak state apparatuses and hybrid or partial democratic systems.

The idea that a democratic state can be established overnight is too simplistic, as most of us will recognize today. The course of state-building can only partially be influenced – certainly by external actors – and often turns out differently than was expected or planned for. In this regard it is understandable that international actors endorse authoritarian governance when it seems to work. But despite all the risks of democratization in fragile states, I would prefer a more gradual approach. Not because it will shape a heaven on earth. But because good leaders need to hear it when others disagree with their ideas and plans.

References:

Carothers, Thomas, 2007, 'How Democracies Emerge. The "Sequencing" Fallacy', in *Journal of Democracy*, 18:1, pp.12-27.

Huntington, Samuel P., 2006 (1968), *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Paris, Roland, 2004, *At War's End. Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Tilly, Charles, 2007, *Democracy* , Cambridge**,** Cambridge University Press.

Zakaria, Fareed, 2004, *The Future of Freedom. Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York and London: N.N. Norton & Company.