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Rebuilding Countries in a War and Post-War Context: Reconstruction Models and Their Impacts

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the results from the use of a model of reconstruction driven by security and economic concerns in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, and to compare those results with the situation in Rwanda, where a different model of sustainable development was used to help the country recover from conflicts. The results suggest that the frequently used reconstruction model, based on security arrangements and economic benefits, did not deliver well in selected Arab and Islamic countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine). In these countries, the approach produced dictatorial regimes that led their societies into further violence and corruption. This indicates a risk that the security- and economic-driven model would also be ineffective in current conflict-affected countries such as Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The case of Rwanda presents an alternative approach based on principles of sustainable development. This model led to interesting social, environmental, and economic development and resulted in security and stability. The comparison of findings from several case studies supports the assumption that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" model of reconstruction.

Keywords

conflict-affected countries; local environment; post-war developments; reconstruction; reconstruction models

1. Introduction

Human history has been replete with wars and local and global conflicts. Such conflicts unfortunately continue to exist today and cause death, injury, economic loss, and social harm. Conflicts negatively affect the quality of life both in the directly involved countries and in the worldwide populace (for example, because of emigration).

Conflict and post-conflict situations are characterized by the magnitude of the environmental, economic, and social damage inflicted on local communities. Some conflicts can set societies back for decades.

This article deals with the problem of post-conflict reconstruction and possible models for achieving the best possible results. Since the end of the Cold War, conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding have risen to the top of the international agenda (Ramsbotham et al., 2024). Therefore, the number of academic studies dealing with the question has grown yearly. Almost 5,000 documents are displayed by the Web of Science search engine if the expression "post-conflict" is checked in abstracts of indexed texts, and approximately 300 publications on this topic have been published yearly in recent years. Is there still a chance to add to this discussion? The fact that new studies appear on the academic level signals that such space still exists if proper methodology, a proper sample, and compelling research questions are used. Many authors (like Richmond, 2011) try to provide added value by focusing on the pros and cons of the use of the "liberal" model in selected Arab and Islamic countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine), which are still only partly covered by the academic literature. However, these countries deserve specific attention because of the local socio-political environment.

Most of the literature concerned with post-war conditions and conflicts (Cooper & Vargas, 2008) has argued that the "liberal" reconstruction model applied by the US and its allies in Iraq (after 2003), Afghanistan (after 2011), and partly also in Palestine, is inspired by the post-World War II reconstructions of Germany and Japan. This model of reconstruction focuses on security and economic dimensions. It succeeded in the past, probably because of particular aspects of the cultural context of both Germany and Japan and the Western (mainly the US) appreciation and understanding of this context (Cooper & Vargas, 2008).

The question is why this model does not deliver success in entirely different cultural, political, and social environments compared to Germany and Japan, specifically in Arab and Islamic countries. As this problem is rarely investigated by academic literature, this study examines the model of reconstruction driven by security and economic concerns used in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, and tries to explain the core failures. As a benchmark, the study compares the analyzed results with the results in Rwanda, where a different model of sustainable development was used to help the country recover from conflicts. The authors are aware that choosing Rwanda as the benchmark is not the "perfect" option. However, it is impossible to find any fully successful post-conflict country in the Arab region to serve as the benchmark.

This study is important because it confirms that different geopolitical conditions indicate that the same ideas and models that have been used successfully in the past may fail if re-applied mechanically in a different environment. Such a finding is critical today when the international situation once again becomes somewhat complicated, and the "peaceful" period (Ramsbotham et al., 2024) after the breakup of the Soviet Union is definitely over, at least from a short-term perspective.

2. Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

A substantial body of academic and professional literature investigates the different dimensions of armed conflict. The most frequently discussed questions are the sources/drivers of conflict, the transition from conflict to peace, the relation between the conflict and the quality of public administration/governance during and after the conflict, and the impacts of the conflict on the socio-economic situation in the country.

One of the most complex publications, providing the theoretical framework for the analysis of conflict and conflict resolution options used in this article, is the book by Ramsbotham et al. (2024). This book discusses a conflict's purposes, defines a conflict resolution model, classifies conflicts into symmetric (conflict arises between relatively similar parties) and asymmetric (conflict arises between dissimilar parties), and provides several other theoretical inputs for studying the topic.

Many other academic publications deal with conflict and conflict resolution. For example, according to Rummel (1979), international conflict can be caused by opposing interests and capabilities, contact and salience, significant changes in the balance of power, individual perceptions and expectations, a disrupted structure of expectations, and a will to conflict. Such conflicts might be aggravated by socio-cultural dissimilarity, cognitive imbalance, status difference, and coercive state power.

Several publications study civil wars as a specific type of conflict. Moyer et al. (2023) investigated the drivers of civil war by applying quantitative analysis to previous works focused on the issue. The independent factors used for the study were patterns of human development (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Fox & Hoelscher, 2012), economic development (Alesina & Rodrik, 1994; Sambanis, 2004), horizontal inequality (Forsberg, 2014; Rüegger, 2019), and political institutions (Goldstone, 2002; Saideman et al., 2002). Walter (2002) delivered a really comprehensive study, investigating why some civil wars end in successfully implemented peace settlements while others are fought to the finish. This study combines a historical sweep, empirical richness, and conceptual rigor to evaluate data on every civil war fought between 1940 and 1992.

The existing studies also deal with the relationship between conflict and public administration performance. Conflict as an extreme shock changes the status quo of public administration and its performance; however, well-performing public administration may have the capacity to affect the scope and scale of the conflict. Martseniuk et al. (2020) and Unger and Van Waarden (1999) argued that conflict can serve as a catalyst for future economic growth and public administration efficiency. Peters and Savoie (1996) considered as the main sources of incoherence to be the entrepreneurship of public sector leaders, interest groups, and empowerment of limited empowerment. Many authors have indicated that conflict is expected to have negative impacts on the state and on the public sector, as the general productivity of the public sector in conflict-affected countries is problematic: Skilled professionals emigrate in large numbers due to the conflict or are directly targeted by the conflict actors, disrupting the public sector. The problem of a lack of skilled staff was illustrated by Blum et al. (2019, p. xxi) in this quote from a civil servant in Liberia: "The capable were not available, so the available became the capable." Sound public institutions and effective governance are the fundamentals of progress, growth, and development in conflict-affected countries (Blum et al., 2019). However, the reality in most conflict-affected countries is a weak public administration performance, and many governance transformation initiatives fail in such states (Nemec et al., 2024).

Turning now to non-academic publications, for example a World Bank report (World Bank, 2003) stressed that crisis conditions, especially regional wars, create chaos, civil strife, and other extraordinary challenges that impede sustainable development efforts. The report also argued that war delays development, but development also reduces and delays the chances of war. This suggests that development can lead countries to become progressively more secure and to avoid violent conflict. On the other hand, failures of development (development that considers only the security and economic dimensions) make countries vulnerable to the trap of civil and regional conflicts that drain and destroy the economy and increase the risk

of future conflicts. The report added that civil wars attract less attention, but their impact extends across borders in terms of creating regional insecurity and instability, sending refugees across borders, and forcing regional and sometimes international powers to take a position in the conflict.

Conceptually, our study deals with efforts to achieve reconstruction and build stability in states and societies in war and post-war conflict environments. In the literature, such reconstruction refers to rebuilding the infrastructure, institutions, and capabilities—especially those that focus on security—of the conflict-stricken country and to achieving stability with allied countries (Beal, 2020).

Fukuyama (2006) pointed out that the term "reconstruction and rebuilding" was used for the first time after World War II to refer to the efforts of the US military to rebuild both Germany and Japan, with a focus on building economic infrastructure and state institutions and restructuring security institutions ("liberal model"). Fukuyama (2006) specifically noted that the goals for the occupied states were limited to restructuring the political system on democratic foundations that would serve their security. This "German-Japanese" reconstruction model has been used as a model for the efforts of the US and its allies to rebuild societies in cases such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. We discuss this model more in depth in the following sections of this article.

Other models and approaches exist, too. For example, Cooper and Vargas (2004, p. 3) proposed three basic pillars of post-conflict sustainable development, or "the triangle of sustainable development," which gives balanced attention to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Galtung and Tisné (2009) argued that an anti-corruption approach that builds on local resources and competencies in distinctive ways and that emphasizes local accountability is more likely to succeed in stemming corruption and increasing participation and trust in the reconstruction process.

Many publications (such as Alayasa, 2021) suggest that the approach to implementing development in post-war societies should include increasing partnerships within these countries to design and implement development projects and to reduce dependence on private contractors to develop, implement, and evaluate projects, to improve economic investments, and to build economic and security institutions or to reform existing ones. These publications stress that there is a lack of recognition of the importance of taking a balanced approach to the economy, the environment, and the social dimension, as well as the importance of investing in building societies' capabilities to support themselves, based on the concept of promoting sustainable development.

The issue of post-conflict reconstruction is covered in many reports by international organizations and think tanks. In a clear criticism of the strategies of the World Bank and the major countries for reconstruction and development in the post-war environment, the Brookings Doha Center carried an article that originally appeared in the Huffington Post entitled "The Case for a Regional Reconstruction Strategy for the Middle East," which stated: "There is an urgent need to find new ways of inducing development through international engagement" (Barakat, 2016, p. 1). This analysis implicitly acknowledged the failure of the model promoting reconstruction by focusing on security and the economy. The fact that the World Bank's previous strategies did not deliver is even accepted by the World Bank itself—the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank report (2020, p. xi) states:

Over the past 30 years, reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts have tended to follow state-building models, with a consolidated state centrally administering resource mobilization and allocation. The protracted conflicts in MENA, characterized by prolonged fragility, call this central state-building approach into question.

2.1. The German-Japanese ("Liberal") Reconstruction Model

After the end of World War II, the US, through the Marshall Plan, embarked on the reconstruction of Europe and the countries devastated by the war. The project aimed not only at rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by war, especially in Germany and Japan, but also at changing and developing cultural and social aspects such as the political system and social life. The project was aimed at changing economic, social, and political conditions so that democratic institutions could function well (McCullough, 1992).

Cooper and Vargas (2008) argued that the secret of the success of the German-Japanese reconstruction model is the use by the US administration and its international allies of vast capabilities and resources—including government departments, state bureaucracy, and the transfer of expertise—to help the two countries achieve democratic and economic transformation. Cooper and Vargas (2008) acknowledged that the ethnic and religious compositions of Germany and Japan played important roles in the success of the reconstruction process, in addition to the desire of the US administration and its allies to bring about radical political, social, and economic change in the two countries to ensure their transformation into democracies. This approach led to both countries becoming economically successful and stable nations and guaranteed that they did not return as international powers threatening the international system.

The model of rebuilding Germany and Japan focused on the main objectives of the US leadership, which were the democratic transformation and the reduction of the level of armaments. The US harnessed all its capabilities to support the government and society in both countries, which led to a radical change in their structures and eventually resulted in the existence of two democratic states with high and stable economic and social power (Alayasa, 2021).

The continued presence of military bases in both Germany and Japan is not generally described, at least officially, as direct military occupation. Rather, these bases are often seen as protection bases that have little direct impact on the local society in both countries. Historically, there has been some friction and abuse; this has mainly been viewed as resulting from the behavior of individuals, and the US administration hastened to rectify these events and generally acted as an ally, not as an occupier. For example, the US government declared mourning and a one-month curfew for its soldiers stationed in Okinawa, Japan, following the murder of a Japanese woman by a US military worker ("Okinawa rape and murder," 2017).

Neeson (2008) argued that the reconstructions of Germany and Japan were two of only four successful cases of US external interventions classified as reconstruction and stabilization operations. Describing the model used by the US in Japan, Neeson (2008) stated that General MacArthur, commander of the allied forces in Japan, in a gesture of respect for Japanese traditions and culture, did not subject the emperor of Japan to trial after the war, but instead removed him from political life while keeping him in an honorary position. In Germany, the denazification proceeded cautiously; prominent military leaders were tried, millions of Nazi activists and business people were pardoned, and state administration personnel were retrained and rehabilitated.

Many academic and professional studies deliver criticism of the "liberal" reconstruction model, which was applied relatively successfully in Germany and Japan after World War II but seems to fail in most, if not all, other cases. The "liberal" model rests on several pillars, especially on opening up to the global market, holding democratic elections as early as possible (democratic governance), human rights, and the rule of law (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2007). However, at least two main pillars of this model are somewhat problematic: Fully opening the domestic economy might be very risky for some countries, and democratic elections do not assure future democracy, as the opposite such opening may lead to violence and instability because "the civil war has ended, but inter-group antagonisms remain undimmed, political participation rates are low, and any peace dividend is unevenly shared" (Mac Ginty, 2007, p. 471).

One of the most visible criticisms of such a "liberal" model can be found in Richmond (2011). Richmond (2011, p. 26) states the following:

> The key feature of the dominant liberal approach to peacebuilding, which has been mainly responsible for its recent elision with statebuilding, represents a neoliberal marketisation of peace, rather than engagement with the agents and subjects of this peace, even on more traditional liberal terms.

Almost all authors stress that the top-down implementation of "Western values" into the specific environment of most conflict-affected countries does not deliver, as both local contents and local culture are not reflected (respected or similar). Local actors are not engaged, which produces an "artificial form of civil society, disconnected from local political, social, culture, customary and economic processes and expectations" (Richmond, 2011, p. 26).

3. Methodology

The goal of this research is to examine the results of a "liberal" model of reconstruction driven by security and economic affairs used in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, and to compare those results with the situation in Rwanda, where a different model of sustainable development was used to help to the country recover from conflicts. The authors are fully aware that similar studies already exist (for example, Guttal, 2005); however, the selected sample of countries has not yet been directly compared to our knowledge.

As in many other similar studies, we applied a multiple case study method to achieve our defined goal. The major advantage of this research method lies in cross-case analysis. This method shifts the focus from understanding a single case to viewing the differences and similarities between cases. The aim is not to conduct more case studies, but to develop a theory about the factors driving differences and similarities (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021, pp. 171-186).

Four countries were selected: Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and Rwanda. The selection is based on several aspects. As the focus is the Arab/Islamic region, we had to choose from many countries in this region affected by conflicts. Due to article size constraints, we decided to limit the countries to be studied to three. The first aspect determining the selection was the number of deaths and affected people. The second aspect was that the model used for the post-conflict reconstruction could be determined without doubt. The final aspect related to the effective visibility of results from the use of the concrete reconstruction model. Moreover, we wanted to cover more types of conflict (Afghanistan—a combination of invasion and civil war;

Iraq—invasion; and Palestine—liberation). All these countries represent examples where the post-war reconstruction somehow failed; moreover, in Afghanistan, and especially in Palestine, the conflict continues. As there is no obvious example of successful post-conflict reconstruction in the Arab/Islamic region, we had to look at other continents, with Africa as the best (closest) option. From the most frequently mentioned "success" examples, such as Mozambique, Rwanda, and Uganda, we decided to select Rwanda, considering the size of the conflict and the fact that the results seem relatively sustainable.

The study has an exploratory character and is based on a careful study of previously published analyses and data. The research questions are the following:

RQ1: What kind of model was used in reconstructing Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine?
RQ2: What are the results of applying such a model?
RQ3: What kind of model was used in reconstructing Rwanda?
RQ4: What are the results of reconstructing Rwanda?
RQ5: What can be learned from these cases?

To respond to RQ1 and RQ3 we use the secondary literature review method and construct our own figures to present the main features of models applied in the evaluated countries. To determine the "results" of reconstructing the country (RQ2 and RQ4), we also use the secondary literature review method, and as the measurable outcome, the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2010). This choice was relatively simple—we are unaware of any other long-term series database mapping governance performance from a comparative perspective. Like any other international ranking, we know that the Worldwide Governance Indicators are imperfect. However, this source is entirely sufficient to determine general trends. RQ5 is responded to in Section 6.

4. Case Studies

4.1. Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, international forces led by the US empowered armed group, called the Northern Alliance, a military alliance between a minority of Uzbeks and Tajiks who helped US and allied forces in their war against the Taliban. In June 2001, the leadership of the coalition forces led by the US met with the leadership of the Northern Alliance in the German city of Bonn and signed an agreement under which the Northern Alliance took control of the capital, Kabul, with the help of the international coalition forces; the Northern Alliance also controlled the transitional government that was formed according to the Bonn Agreement, especially the important ministries such as defense, foreign relations, and interior affairs. President Hamid Karzai was chosen from the Pashtuns who make up the majority of the population of Afghanistan. The transitional government worked with the help of the coalition forces to form a *Loya jirga* (council) as a transitional parliament, the membership of which was selected to reflect tribal bases maintained by warlords who supported the goals of the coalition, not on democratic grounds (Neeson, 2008).

The results from these arrangements cannot be counted as positive. In Afghanistan, corruption and the waste of public money (especially aid funds for reconstruction and stabilization) reached their peak in 2010, according to the report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (2010). The widespread corruption in Afghanistan was also confirmed by the 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index

from Transparency International published in January 2016, in which Afghanistan ranked 166 out of 168, as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

The report indicates that "6 citizens out of 10 are forced to pay bribes to facilitate their government transactions, as corruption eats away at the state's structures, and warlords are considered a major cause of corruption" (Transparency International, 2015). In the same context, 15 years after the start of the reconstruction process, the 2017 report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction again indicates the existence of administrative and financial corruption in the reconstruction process itself, including the involvement of some retired US military personnel who were not subject to accurate accountability. Corruption also affected US soldiers (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2017). However, the situation seems to have improved recently (Figure 1).

In general, though, the performance of Afghanistan, as measured by the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2010), does not show any systematic progress (Figure 1).

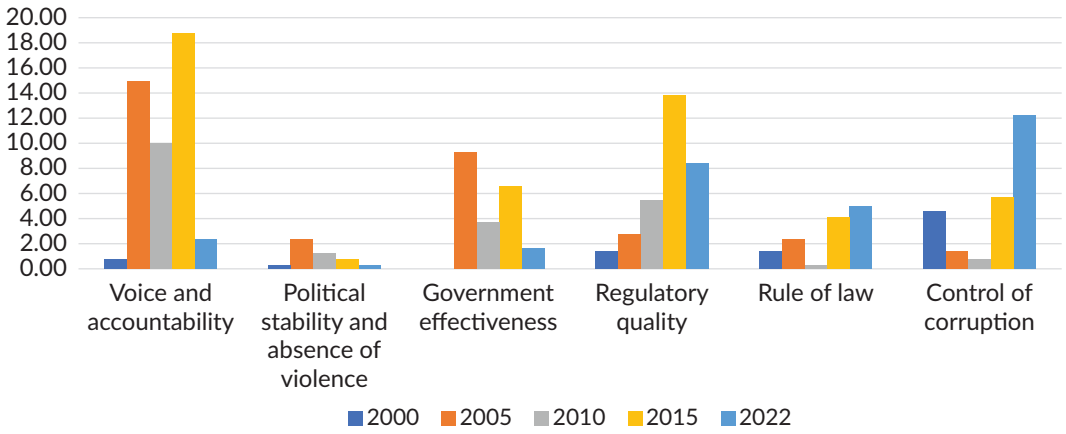

Figure 1. Worldwide Governance Indicators for Afghanistan, 2000–2022. Source: World Bank (n.d.). Note: "Voice" is the official name of the indicator as defined by the World Bank.

The final outcome of this case is really negative. In mid-2021, the Taliban rapidly started capturing major cities in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces. By August 2021, following the sudden collapse of the Afghan army and the escape of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, the Taliban controlled Kabul. The investments that were made by the US and other international actors in Afghanistan, particularly in the security forces, just disappeared, because of the corruption and lack of accountability that Afghanistan experienced during the years of reconstruction (Bateman, 2023).

4.2. Iraq

The Saddam Hussein era ended in 2003, with international intervention and occupation of the country. After the fall of Baghdad and the occupation of Iraq, the administration of US President George Bush, Jr., initiated the dissolution of the former Iraqi army and later supported an inequitable political process in which the leaders of the opposition that helped the coalition forces participated, while all those who opposed US policies were excluded. De-Baathification (eradicating Baath Party members), which affected hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Iraqis, deprived them of public jobs and excluded them from decision-making centers (Katzman, 2009). In 2005, national elections were held, and a new democratic constitution was adopted.

Reconstruction and rebuilding stability in Iraq did not provide real development, security, or stability. Despite billions of dollars spent on training and qualifying the army and security forces, civil peace and security still posed the biggest challenge. In 2014, a large part of Iraq's territory fell under the control of ISIS. To fight ISIS, the Iraqi government was forced to seek help from militias outside the scope of the army and internal security forces. This pushed the country into a new round of revenge and violence.

Moreover, the 2021 parliamentary electoral process culminated in low voter turnout, followed by demonstrations in some areas of the country, including Baghdad, indicating a persistent gap in trust between citizens and state institutions. A United Nations Development Program report concluded that the social contract remained fractured (United Nations Development Program, 2021).

Iraq continues to be one of the most fragile countries globally. Institutional capacity in Iraq is weak as a result of the decimation of the state following wars and sanctions and the de-Baathification decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority, which severely hampered reconstruction efforts. Early decisions by the Coalition Provisional Authority sharpened sectarianism and introduced a zero-sum approach to reconstruction efforts. Failure to stem the growth of sectarian groups within ministries weakened institutions, slowed decision-making, and "transformed corruption into a political agenda" (Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, 2013, p. 13).

Widespread corruption was exacerbated by a weak rule of law and a massive inflow of resources. A report issued by the Iraqi Commission of Integrity in December 2017 indicated that the cost of corruption had amounted to about $110 billion since the occupation of Iraq and the start of the reconstruction process. The report mentioned some evidence and indicators of corruption, such as "the existence of cases of non-disclosure of financial assets among senior state employees, including 273 deputies in the Iraqi Parliament, including the Vice President of the Republic" (Iraqi Commission of Integrity, 2017, p. 8). However, as in Afghanistan, the most recent data signal specific improvements regarding the control of corruption.

In general, though, the Worldwide Governance Indicators for Iraq show that the country struggled to improve the indicators between 2000 and 2022 (Figure 2).

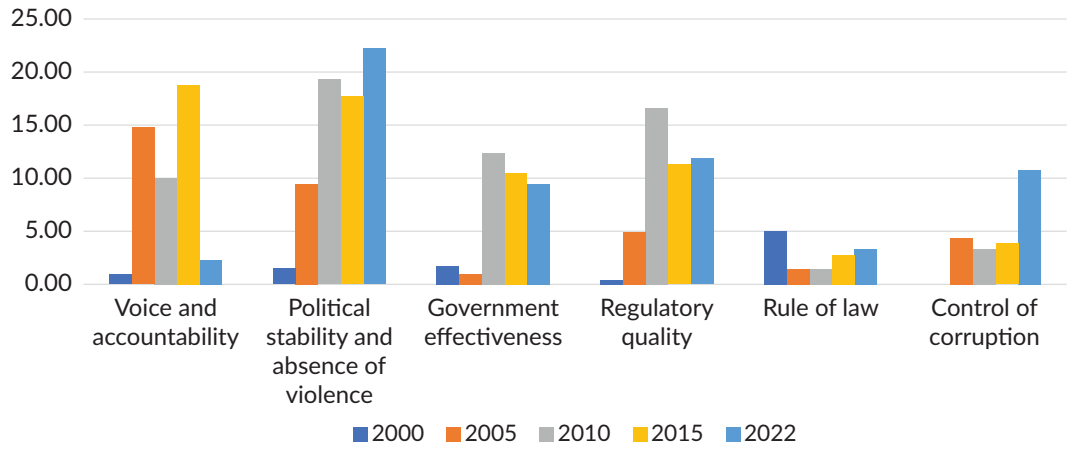

Figure 2. Worldwide Governance Indicators for Iraq, 2000–2022. Source: World Bank (n.d.).

4.3. Palestine

Palestine is an unusual case of conflict, as it has been in "semi-permanent" conflict with Israel since 1948. However, the mass destruction of the country happened during the four most recent wars, in 2008, 2012, 2014, and since October 2023 when the latest and the longest war started. The Palestinian public administration system came about as a result of a unique transformation from military resistance movements, which historically formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization, into a civil government represented by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The Palestinian Liberation Organization was established in 1964 as a political and military organization that represented Palestinian people inside historical Palestine and in the diaspora. Between 1967 and 1994, all Palestinian civil affairs were controlled by military orders and managed by Israel. The Oslo I Accord led to the establishment of the PNA in May 1994. In 1996, the first general election for the presidency of the PNA and the Palestinian Legislative Council took place. However, the PNA was not granted full sovereignty according to the Oslo I Accord. The PNA was granted full control over an area that constituted just 17% of the total area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Israeli forces have the right to act in this area when there is any security need). In other areas, which comprise 23% of the land, the PNA has control over civilian affairs, while security matters remain in the hands of Israeli security forces. In the rest of the land, both security and civil administrative affairs remain in Israeli hands. This territorial arrangement has prevented any real reconstruction of Palestine. Because of this limitation, the government performance of Palestine before 2023 shows problematic trends (Figure 3).

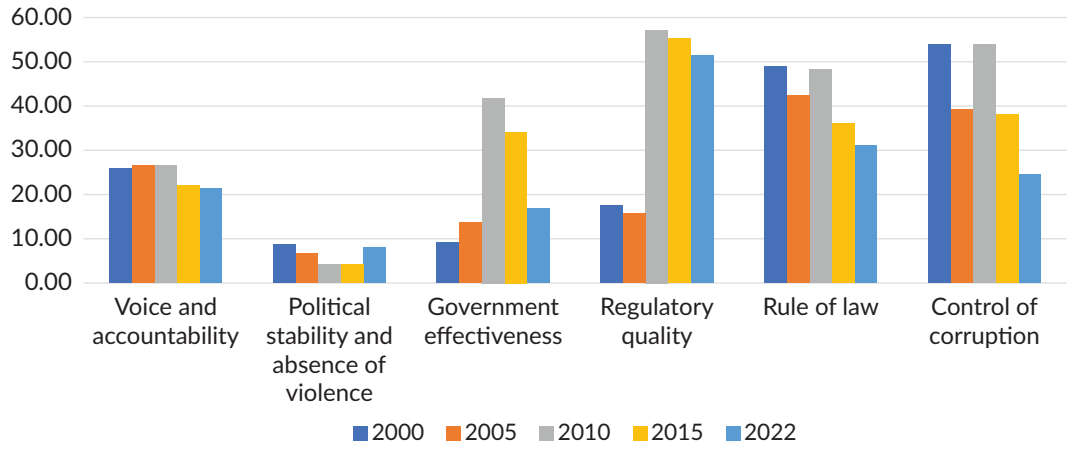

Figure 3. Worldwide Governance Indicators for Palestine, 2000–2022. Source: World Bank (n.d.).

Similar to Afghanistan, the most recent developments have brought reconstruction efforts back to the beginning. The current war started in 2023, and it has destructively affected Palestinian society in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In addition to the arrest of thousands of people (men, women, and children), thousands of homes and infrastructure have been totally or partially destroyed. Table 1 shows the situation in November 2024. Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has disrupted economic activities, leading to unemployment and poverty.

Table 1. Results of the current war in Palestine (as of November 2024).

Item	Gaza	West Bank	Notes
Killed (total)	44,383	301	
Injuries	109,179	3,365	
Children killed	17,029	70	More than 8,000 are missing in Gaza
Women killed	11,558	n/a	
Journalists killed	177	0	
Houses destroyed	360,000	n/a	69.1% of houses in Gaza
Schools destroyed	300	0	
Mosques destroyed	610	0	
Churches destroyed	3	0	
Bombings	100,000 tons	unknown	

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (n.d.).

4.4. Rwanda

The civil war in Rwanda started in 1990, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group composed of Tutsi refugees, invaded northern Rwanda. In 1993, the Arusha Accords were signed; a ceasefire started, but it ended on April 6, 1994, when the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana was killed. The Rwandan genocide began within a few hours after this assassination. Over the course of approximately 100 days, between half a million and a million people were killed. After this, the RPF restarted their offensive; they had taken control of the whole country by mid-July 1994. When the RPF took over, approximately two million people fled to neighboring countries. The RPF-led army was later a key aggressor in the First and Second Congo Wars (Jessee, 2017).

The people of Rwanda embarked on a rebuilding process driven by a shared *Vision 2020* based on three fundamental pillars: unity, ambition, and accountability. Rwanda's vision focused on five pillars of sustainable development (United Nations, 2019, p. 23): human capital development (quality of education and learning, and progress on nutrition); inclusive economic growth; sustainable environment and climate change; good governance and access to justice; and domestic resource mobilization, prudent debt management, and macroeconomic stability. Rwanda has adopted post-genocide strategies based on institutional reform, justice and accountability, economic reconstruction, reconciliation programs, security and stability, ethnicity and political dynamics, and local-level rebuilding (Rahman, 2025).

Regarding the results, the *Rwanda Voluntary National Review* report from 2019 (United Nations, 2019) indicates that since 2000, the country has registered inclusive growth, averaging 8% annually and leading to millions being lifted out of poverty, and good progress in all development sectors. Moreover, Rwanda has integrated the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the SDGs into its national development agenda through the draft Vision 2050, National Strategy for Transformation and related strategies at different levels.

Rwanda also adopted the international sustainable development strategic theme grounded in the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda which is Leaving No One Behind. Women, youth, and people with disabilities are represented at all levels of decision-making, with the highest African parliamentary

representation of women (61.3%) and an equal number of women in the cabinet. The extremely poor are supported through social protection programs. Rwanda is also piloting a comprehensive refugee response framework for the socio-economic inclusion of refugees (United Nations, 2019).

However, it is necessary to mention that Rwanda prioritized national development (launching programs that have led to development on key indicators including healthcare, education, economic growth, and other sustainable development areas); however, President Kagame's regime is considered authoritarian, and human rights groups accuse him of political repression (Weerdesteijn, 2019).

The Worldwide Governance Indicator trends for Rwanda confirm that the country's reconstruction model delivers results (Figure 4), although some recent stagnation is visible.

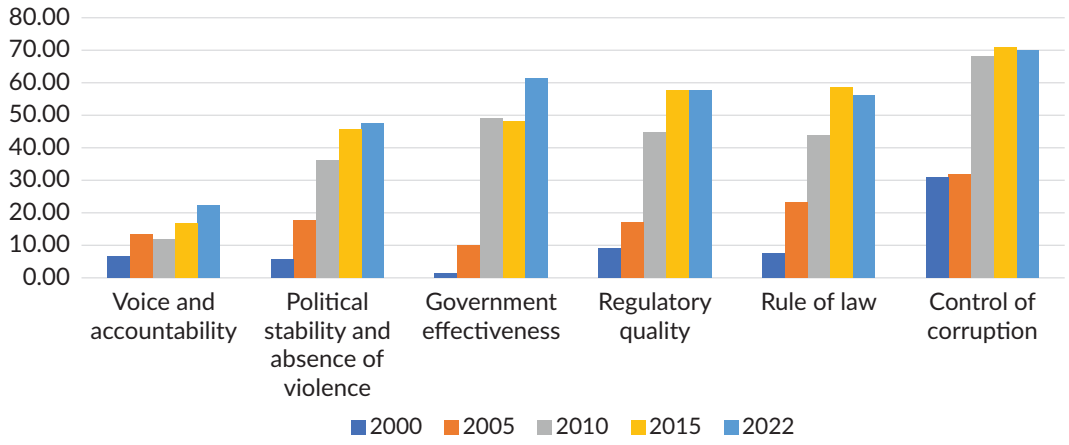

Figure 4. Worldwide Governance Indicators for Rwanda, 2020–2022. Source: World Bank (n.d.).

5. Research Results

This study used a multiple case study method based on data from four countries as the background input for a discussion of post-war reconstruction models. The five research questions, RQ1–RQ5 (see Section 3), are answered in the following sections.

5.1. The Model of Rebuilding Stability in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine

Cooper and Vargas (2008) suggested that the processes of rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan were nothing more than foreign policy tools to achieve security and advance the economic goals of the US. They asserted that the reconstruction model that had been used in Germany and Japan was adopted with the aim of establishing security and economic stability only in limited areas of Iraq and Afghanistan, accompanied by the building of institutions that achieved the required objectives while falling short of achieving the level of development, democratization, or positive change in society that had been reached in Germany and Japan.

Figure 5 shows the main features of this reconstruction model, using four main axes, namely: involving (US and allied) military teams in direct occupation of regions, including major cities and capitals; providing humanitarian relief and support; providing political support for groups and parties supporting the objectives of the coalition; and providing military support (training and equipment) to the security forces and the army.

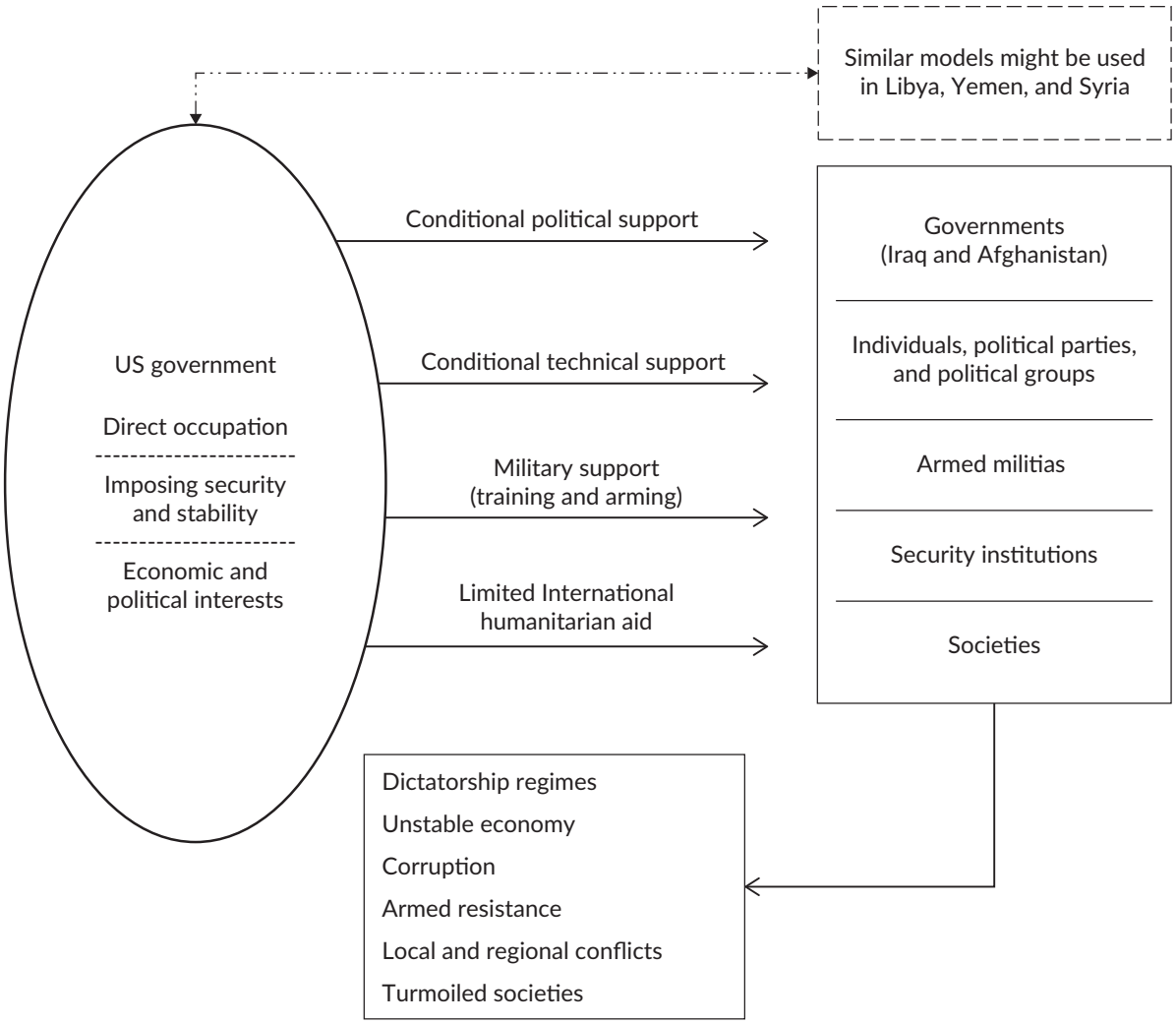

Figure 5. The model of reconstruction and stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan. Notes: Dotted lines mean that the cases do not exist now but could exist in the future because it has similar conditions; all information mentioned in different boxes are related to Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., armed militias = armed militias in Iraq and Afghanistan).

This model marginalizes or distorts the expected post-war development process; it also concerns incompatible or inconsistent elements, such as building corrupt armies and institutions. The government is weak and lacks legitimacy, and political parties and groups are feuding, sometimes with support from armed militias operating outside the scope of the government. All of this creates a fertile environment for the growth of corruption, the systematic waste of public money, and the obstruction of sustainable development, if any.

A very similar model was applied in Palestine, without direct US military involvement. In Palestine, the US, the United Nations, and other international players have produced security- and economic-based peace plans, including the Road Map for Peace (2003), Lt. Gen. Dayton's efforts to rebuild the Palestinian security forces (2010), and the John Kerry Parameters (2016). US president John Kerry's 2013 plan was criticized for focusing on "economy for peace."

This model, as applied today, serves mainly elites and large corporations. The reconstruction of physical assets is in the interest of companies that win reconstruction contracts and of the lobbies behind these companies that would enjoy applying the same model in the future. It is also in the interest of regimes ruling in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. By comparison, the people of these countries pay a heavy price for the occupation, and sustainable development guaranteeing a decent life for the current and subsequent generations is absent.

5.2. Results of the Model of Rebuilding Stability in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine

The case studies document that despite the hundreds of millions of dollars paid by the US administration and its allies in the process of rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq, the result was not satisfactory to any of the parties; rather, it was plagued by administrative and financial corruption in both countries. The inevitable result of the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan was the growing hatred of the official political system in both countries because of the dictatorial approach taken by the government and the exclusion and marginalization of key constituents, which also led to the presence of strong and armed oppositions to both governments and to destabilized civil and social peace. The focus of development investments was limited to rebuilding security forces and institutions that worked in support of the goals of the coalition and the US governments and parties supporting it.

Both countries entered a new cycle of violence and conflict, with ISIS taking control of large parts of Iraq in 2014. The Taliban took over Afghanistan after the sudden collapse of the Afghan army in August 2021 and the abrupt withdrawal of the US army. The Afghan army, despite the billions of dollars spent on its preparation and training, did not manage to defend its positions.

The results in Palestine are very similar. The compact Palestinian state territory does not exist, and the territory ruled by the Palestinian government represents “bits and pieces” of land, cantons surrounded by territories partly or fully controlled by Israel. The quality of governance in Palestine improved slightly during the previous decade, but the 2022 data show its critical deterioration. The new war started in 2023 and almost fully destroyed major parts of the Palestinian territory. The end of this war was still not certain in late 2024 when this article was prepared.

5.3. Rwanda: The Alternative Model—Sustainable Development Model That Leaves No One Behind

In contrast, Rwanda applied an alternative model: one of sustainable development. This model is characterized by focusing on providing solutions that address the problems of the present post-war conditions and go on to ensure the opportunity for future generations to live a decent and sustainable life. The model also focuses on the “triangle of sustainable development” that covers economic, social, and environmental development in a balanced manner (Cooper & Vargas, 2008, p. 6).

Figure 6 shows the model of sustainable development in the post-war period. This model is based on the assumption that internal leadership (national and local) is more capable of understanding and responding to the economic, social, and environmental needs of the society and adopting realistic overlapping solutions to deep problems imposed by the conditions of war, such as the destruction of infrastructure (food, water, air, soil, etc.), the economic structure (job opportunities, , business environment, etc.), and, most importantly, social

conditions (such as death, disability, displacement, asylum, destruction of education, increase in poverty, loss of security, etc.).

Compared to the model of reconstruction and building stability that was applied in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, the economic dimension of sustainable development focuses on building an economy that responds to the needs of society instead of focusing on corporate profit (domestic and foreign) or investments that benefit corrupt regimes and warlords. Sustainable development also focuses on environmental and social dimensions, starting by addressing the impacts of war on the environment and addressing the social and psychological impacts of war. Also, from the point of view of the sustainable development model, stability refers to the stability of society, and not simply military security (see Figure 6).

The output of this model, at least in theory, is a stable government, a stable society, and development for the well-being of future generations. The government's reliance, according to the model, on the community's capabilities to lead development enhances the trust that can be lost or shaken by the war, helps empower

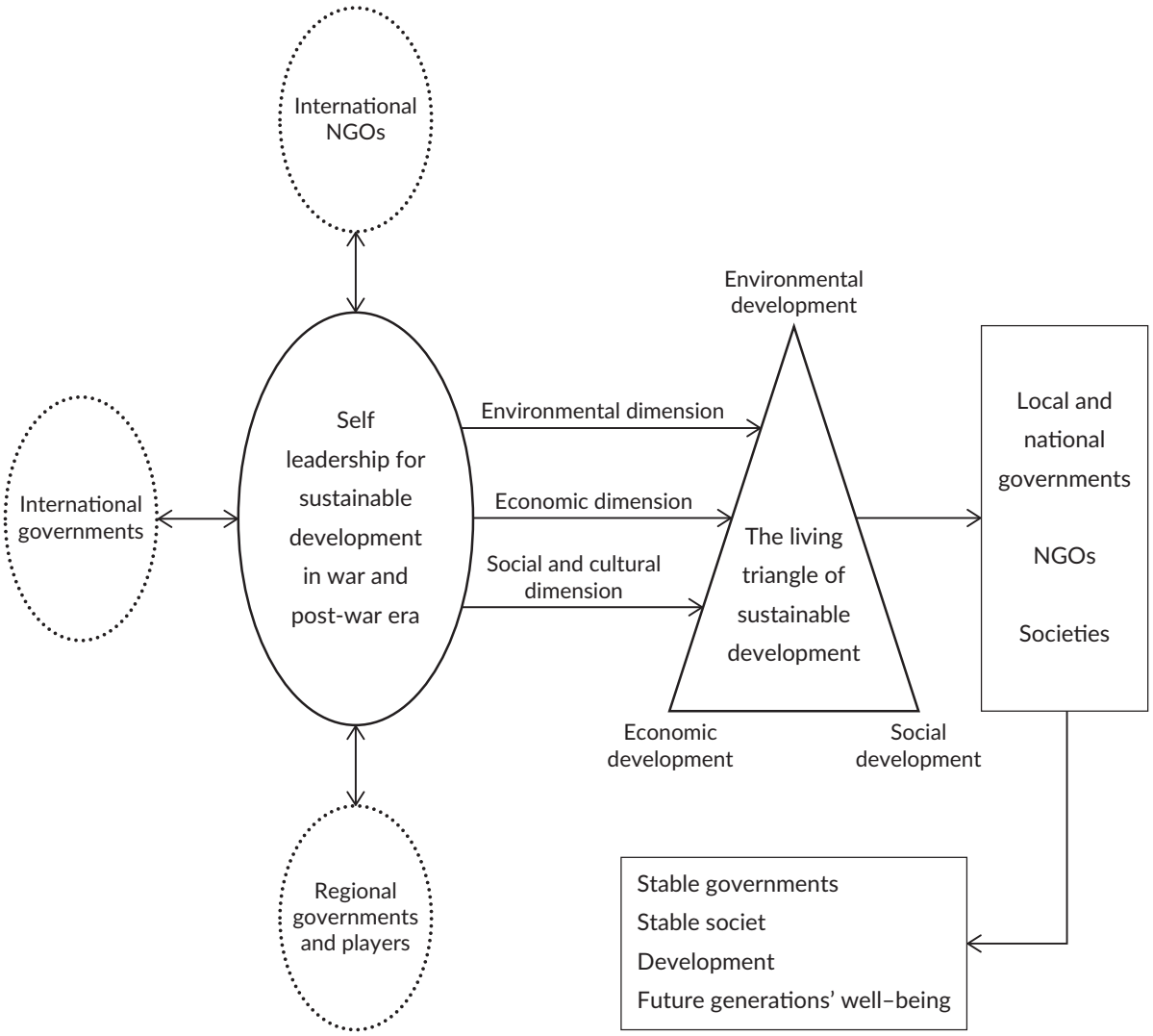

Figure 6. Rwanda's sustainable development model. Notes: Dotted lines indicate players who are supporters from outside; the information in the other boxes relates to the sustainable development model in Rwanda.

key elements of society (giving them rights and opportunities to participate), and promotes the longer-term sustainability of development instead of importing it from abroad.

5.3.1. Results of the Model of Rebuilding Stability in Rwanda

The data about the development of the quality of governance in Rwanda and many other indicators have suggested that the country is significantly and quickly progressing (at least as of 2020). The most important lesson to be learned from the Rwandan approach to sustainable development is the fact that visionary leadership, effective governance, and accountability are critical for achieving sustainable development goals. Solutions rooted in the Rwandan culture are resource-efficient and play a major role in enhancing ownership and accelerating development outcomes. Rwandan culture and its people's needs played a critical role in the success of the country's post-conflict reconstruction.

Technically speaking, Rwanda succeeded in fully integrating SDGs in the national planning besides building a monitoring framework which was critical for effective implementation (United Nations, 2019). Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, by adopting a sustainable development approach, Rwanda continued to achieve more sustainable development and progress, and the country succeeded in putting an end to what was historically considered one of the worst conflicts in modern history. However, the Rwanda model is not perfect, as President Kagame's regime is often criticized for the regime's authoritarian character (McNamee, 2020).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study discussed comparative models of post-conflict reconstruction. Specifically, it highlighted the challenges encountered during attempts to apply the "liberal" model of reconstruction of Germany and Japan, as enacted by the US after World War II, to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, and the reasons for the attempts' failures. The study showed that the approaches to reconstruction in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine did not consider the culture of these countries or the needs of their people, resulting in regimes that led their societies to more violence and wars, corruption, and an absence of meaningful development outcomes. These findings are unsurprising—many other studies delivered similar results (for example, Nemec & Reddy, 2021). Moreover, the fact that the peacebuilding and reconstruction attempts may fail in these countries can be connected with the character of the investigated conflicts. Ramsbotham et al. (2024) argue that asymmetric conflict does not have an effective solution, which is the case for all three countries analyzed. The main reasons for reconstruction failure have been proposed, for example, by Richmond (2011), who argues that successful peacebuilding and reconstruction are impossible without involving all stakeholders. Also, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank report (2020) argues that the top-down approach is insufficient; the same position is provided by Barakat (2016), Hughes et al. (2015), and many other authors.

Using the example of Rwanda, this article presented an alternative model, the sustainable development model, characterized by a focus on the most important needs of societies in the post-war phase, including cleaning the war environment, rehabilitating the resources of the state and society, and building an economy based on self-capabilities supported by available international aid instead of relying heavily on this aid. The sustainable development model also focuses on facing the social challenges left by wars, such as

homelessness and persons disabilities. However, regarding Rwanda, the democratic flaws connected with peacebuilding and reconstruction should be stressed—political persecution, arbitrary imprisonment, and even the disappearance of dissidents represent its non-separable part (see, for example, McNamee, 2020). Thus, success is just partial and controversial.

Based on our findings, it is possible to conclude that security is ensured not only by stopping bullets and cannons, but also by guaranteeing that current and future generations have social and personal stability, a clean environment, and job opportunities. Successful sustainable development would mean that, in addition to not fearing violence, an individual need not fear poverty or lack of access to water, clean air, and healthy food. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the sustainable development model is that it centers the human right to participate in development. Building security institutions and infrastructure is undoubtedly important for the post-war environment, but these must be integrated into a development framework that provides for social development, environmental quality, and broad economic welfare (see, for example, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development & World Bank, 2020).

This text does not propose that the sustainable model applied in Rwanda would be successful everywhere and under any social, political, economic, and cultural conditions. It is worth acknowledging that this model may seem difficult to achieve in corrupt regimes that seek to achieve their narrow interests and/or the interests of the major countries that support them. Moreover, Rwanda's solution lacks one dimension— democracy (McNamee, 2020).

The findings also suggest that each country should try to find its own way, based on its existing experience, its internal environment, and its external surroundings. The progress in Rwanda seemed to be mainly connected to its positive internal environment and the will to change. This precondition appears absent in Iraq and especially in Afghanistan. It may exist in Palestine; however, without ending the armed conflict and under the current institutional arrangements, which limit the chances of the Palestinian government to develop its territory, the opportunities for progress are more than limited.

To conclude, it is important to try to reorient the compass of reconstruction strategies towards sustainable development, and not to despair and accept the status quo. It is necessary to learn from the lessons of the past, from failures and successes, and to consider concrete local conditions and critical factors of the external environment, like the position of concerned governments and international and regional institutions.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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