

REVIEW ARTICLES

I) FOREIGN AID AND FOREIGN DEPENDENCE

A review and commentary on Andrzej Krassowski, The Aid Relationship: A Discussion of Aid Strategy with Examples from the American Experience in Tunisia, ODI, 1968. 25s.

by Douglas Ashford*

Krassowski's monograph on American assistance to Tunisia is a useful and balanced treatment of the aid relationship, but it raises more questions than it answers. Like most dedicated people, planners of any nationality have an extremely difficult time observing the significance of their own behaviour and the major strength of his work is the suggestion that aid may well become the devil's advocate in the developing society (p. 13). This is a provocative and potentially highly imaginative statement because the existence of planners and the non-existence of an opposition are two of the most basic characteristics of the developing country. Whether this combination ends in an unholy alliance or a mutually productive exchange will have major implications for the future of the society, not to mention the planners and the indigenous elite.

Before pursuing this thought further, it should be noted that Krassowski's work will be useful to many who may be going abroad to work next to American assistance officials, and its brief outline of the choices seen by AID, the handicaps and virtues of American organization abroad, and the quality of its generally harmonious relationship with the Tunisians are well set out. Because Tunisia has been a "most favoured" nation in America's world perspective, it is also an important case to follow for advance notice of errors and omissions that might be committed in other nations. But many of the

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Fundamental questions of development and America's strategy are skipped; why was Tunisia an attractive recipient of massive assistance; why did Tunisian leaders decide that massive assistance was desirable; and are the parties to Tunisia's growth interacting in a way that permits them to learn quickly about their errors as well as their achievements?

The aid relationship extends all the way from the impulses of the donor nation's population through its political system and leaders and to the leaders and people of the recipient country. Krassowski recognizes this with refreshing candor and his description of AID-Tunisian relations as a partnership is not incorrect, but is this relatively happy scene in Tunis and Washington reflected more broadly in the relationship? While it goes beyond the scope of Krassowski's book, the image of intelligent AID officials busily working alongside their Tunisian counterparts leaves out the political process which put them there. AID officials, perhaps more than representatives of other countries, are acutely aware of their supporting structure and much of the detailed and exhaustive reporting described by Krassowski can be attributed to aspects of American political life. Even his frank recognition that assistance has broader strategic purposes is reflected in widespread feelings in American life that as the world's most powerful nation they are also its target. Anyone who has talked with AID officials will detect their ambivalence between their professional political neutrality and their need to justify their work to Washington.

Moving up the decision-making ladder, the distinctions Krassowski makes about the American view of foreign aid should be qualified with reference to the complexities of how funds are allocated. American aid is influenced much less by "changing fashions among development theorists" (p. 11) than by legislative pressures and Presidential design. Every AID official is acutely aware that Rep. Passman and Sen. Fulbright's criticisms of aid are followed as closely as the Ambassador's cocktail conversation. The difficulties in getting aid funds are roughly proportionate to the level of conflict in the Congress, which has steadily increased with the Vietnamese war and racial tension at home. Nor is the AID official

immune to the jockeying for influence in the Department of State and rivalries in the similarly paid but highly sensitive status structure of the Foreign Service. Many older Foreign Service Officers are still faintly amused, if not bewildered, by discussions of a host country's school system or peasant communities. Within the AID mission itself all the differences Krassowski relates in the American evaluation and implementation of assistance are reflected in the mission's social relationships, official and informal.

The relationship of the AID mission to the government is naturally delicate and heavily dependent on personal contact. Krassowski is correct in pointing out that the level of skill on both sides has tended to make this a mutually rewarding one in Tunisia (p. 52). But one must go on to ask how deeply the feelings of involvement and self-respect penetrate Tunisian bureaucracy and political life. The very problems he outlines in the subsequent chapter on difficulties of finding projects and administering transactions suggests that in the capital itself Tunisian skills were more limited than the Gardner Report and other estimates detected. The suggestion that both Tunisian and American officials feel a need to be busy even if they cannot accomplish a great deal is not meant cynically. The pressures to deliver in a poor nation can be severe, especially in a one-party state. The studied neutrality of the foreign aid official is in many respects harmonious with requirements of the Socialist Destour. Mutual respect in a situation of confessed dependence on an outsider is not easy. The Tunisian official, like administrators in most developing countries, has the good fortune of playing a role that incorporates national service, good pay, high prestige and shelter from the turbulence of politics.

Krassowski's account of the Tunisian plan and the American contribution should also be read against the backdrop of Tunisian political life, which understandably could not be done in a short monograph. But he is almost too kind in reporting American reactions to Tunisian planning. Ben Salah and his aides had substantial social vision in their Perspective Décennale, the outline for the ten year development period. Perhaps they did not take

the discussion of the co-operative sector, for example, seriously, but it is even clearer that many American officials and their consultants viewed this notion with some alarm. Many of the very genial conversations about long-term support were directed at persuading the Tunisians to soft-pedal public housing, medical care and agrarian reform goals. The Tunisian plan can only be understood by assessing the internal pressures on Bourguiba to acknowledge socialism, which dominated Socialist (then Neo) Destourian discussion in the 50s and early 60s. The plan was an ingenious device to achieve this aim while simultaneously justifying much stronger party control and centralization of new activities. The issues of accountability, standardization and efficiency are quickly converted into political requirements to conform.

For these reasons it does not seem unreasonable to think of the massive assistance to Tunisia, and to other countries, as a surrogate for meaningful opposition activity. For the intelligent, trained Tunisian the battle of wits with an equally bright foreigner can become a substitute for party disputes and political activism. In a government dominated by an extraordinarily talented, but also politically astute, President there is safety, perhaps even some relief, in arguing in the private office rather than on a public platform. From this perspective, the foreign assistance official is, to mix metaphors, a straw devil's advocate because he fits conveniently within the constraints laid down by the political system. These may, in fact, be wise constraints, at least for a time, but no-one openly raises these problems and the energetic concentration on economic analysis and growth helps postpone the discussion. The symbiotic relationship conceivably can be as misleading and debilitating as colonial dependence was a generation ago. The Tunisian may wake up one day and find that while busily churning away at foreign distinctions about "general versus project" support he has succumbed to a new colonial mentality that saps his imagination and destroys his self-respect just as effectively as submission to foreign rule.

Even in very intimate situations in the family and among friends, giving, is performed in a distinctly ceremonial fashion. It is not easy to admit one's dependence on another nor is it comfortable to accept indebtedness.

The Tunisians and the Americans are aware of these complications as every sensitive person is, but it seems doubtful if we have fully explored the psychological implications of foreign assistance. Tunisia obviously is not about to become a model of America, but will it have an identity that the thousands of Tunisians being mobilized by massive social change can accept? For most of us playing with the devil is only a diversion, stimulating as it may be, but for the developing country it can become a way of life.

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