STATEBUILDING AFTER AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

Miles Kahler
University of California, San Diego

Contribution to Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, editors
The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations
(Forthcoming, Routledge, 2008)

STATEBUILDING AFTER AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

Miles Kahler[1]
University of California, San Diego

Over the past half-decade, three logics, supported by powerful intellectual and political constituencies, have converged to elevate fragile states and statebuilding on the international agenda. The humanitarian motivation, oldest of these logics, emphasizes the human and international costs of internal conflict and genocide. Humanitarian concentration on short-term, apolitical relief of human suffering was transformed during the 1990s to include attention to longer-term—and intensely political--causes of internal conflict, particularly weak institutions.

A second logic for statebuilding emerged from concern with economic development among the poorest countries. The economic consequences of violent internal conflict became clear: "development in reverse."[2] Good governance was closely linked with effective use of foreign aid and successful economic development. This new emphasis on institutional criteria for targeting aid threatened to marginalize fragile and failed states, however. New forms of international engagement with those states were required to avoid punishing poorly governed societies, whose populations were among the most economically deprived in the world.

---

[1] The author thanks Roland Paris, Timothy Sisk, Jens Narten, Astri Suhrke, and David Edelstein for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. Jeremy Horowitz and Benjamin Graham provided invaluable research assistance.

[2] Collier 2007, p. 27.

Finally, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 reoriented U. S. and NATO security policy toward risks emanating from territories that were not effectively policed. Afghanistan, a neglected and chaotic backwater since the end of the Cold War, had become a key base for al Qaeda. International public "bads" of all kinds, from infectious disease to refugee flows, were linked to failed states. Widespread skepticism toward interventionist "social work" during the 1990s quickly changed to state building as a strategic necessity.[3]

The proponents of each of these logics often agreed on little more than the importance of a shifting cluster of states labeled fragile or failed. Definitions of fragile and failed states depended on ultimate policy aims—an end to civil war, economic development and poverty alleviation, or a reduction in security threats. Those most concerned with security—either human security of those in the failed and fragile states or national security interests of more powerful states—defined the boundaries of state fragility by the incidence of violent conflict. Fragile and failed states were, in this view, beset by or emerging from internal conflict.[4] The World Bank and other development agencies accepted this association of internal conflict and state fragility. However, the Bank defined its larger universe of "Low-Income Countries Under Stress" (LICUS,

---

[3] Michael Mandelbaum (1996) leveled this criticism against Clinton Administration interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti.

[4] Exemplars of this view are the State Failure Task Force (Goldstone 2000; now the Political Instability Task Force: http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/) and the Foreign Policy/Fund for Peace Failed States Index ("The Failed States Index," 2006). The former equates state failure to "serious political instability," defined by four categories. Three of those four include internal conflict or state-led violence. The latter index purports to measure "vulnerability to violent internal conflict."

recently renamed fragile states) by poverty and "weak policies, institutions, and governance."[5] Overshadowing all of these larger groups of poor and generally small states are the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, one an example of state failure long ignored by the international community and now a centerpiece of the United States Global War on Terror; the latter a case of state failure induced by military invasion, an intervention ill-prepared for its subsequent statebulding enterprise.

At least rhetorically, these statebuilding projects converged on a model—the New York consensus--that found an ideological home at United Nations headquarters. As Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk point out, the complexity and transformational ambitions of the United Nations role in fragile and failed states grew over the course of the 1990s. At the same time, an increasingly rigid and detailed template has defined international statebuilding goals—the creation of liberal democratic polities that preside over vibrant civil societies and market economies. This template became as powerful as its much-criticized analogue in economic policy, the Washington consensus.

The ambitions of the New York consensus now meet with increasing skepticism. The cases of Afghanistan, analyzed by Astri Suhrke in this volume, and Iraq have clearly contributed to this increasingly pessimistic evaluation.

---

[5] Three out of four fragile states, as measured by the World Bank, are "affected by on-going armed conflict." The World Bank measures quality of governance through the Bank-generated Country Policy and Institutional Performance Assessment (CPIA). This internally generated metric includes sixteen criteria grouped into four clusters: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion/equity, and public sector management and institutions.

Even without those faltering (or catastrophic) efforts, however, each of the contending constituencies would have been challenged by recent statebuilding results. United Nations programs that once had been portrayed as successful models, such as Kosovo and Timor-Leste, now demonstrate the uncertain results of large-scale statebuilding interventions. Albanian Kosovars have grown increasingly resistant to UN tutelage; riots erupted in March 2004, directed at both the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the remaining Serb population. As designated trustee for Timor-Leste from 1999 until independence in 2002, the United Nations had enjoyed a broad mandate, substantial powers to fulfill that mandate, and resources on a large scale. Nevertheless, by May 2006, violence in the capital of Timor-Leste had produced a state teetering on the brink of failure. Renewed international military intervention was required to restore the peace.

Development agencies have produced equally uncertain results with their efforts to improve the governance of fragile states. The first independent review of the World Bank's LICUS (fragile states) initiative questioned the Bank's track record in improving governance.[6] Although the latest World Bank governance report describes both improvements and declines in governance indicators for regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the team concludes "we do not have as yet any convincing evidence of significant improvements in governance worldwide."[7]

[6] World Bank (Independent Evaluation Group), 2006.
[7] Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 2007: 22.

On the effectiveness of international intervention to end violent conflict, contemporary pessimism may be overdrawn. The Human Security Report argues that the new century's decline in internal conflict is owed to an increase in International involvement to settle ongoing civil wars.[8] Scholarly investigation supports this minimalist measure of international success in peacebuilding.[9] The counterfactual cannot be readily dismissed: although the results to date have been disappointing, internal conflict and poor governance might have been even worse in the absence of international assistance to fragile and failed states.

Whether the mixed results of statebuilding are best viewed as predictable and even promising, given the complexity of the task, or mediocre, given the resources devoted to statebuilding over the past decade, a diminishing number of practitioners and analysts argue for more of the same. As Paris and Sisk observe, the reinvestment option—staying the course by devoting more resources and more time to the existing model of statebuilding—has relatively few supporters in the wake of Afghanistan, Iraq, and other cases of ineffective international intervention. Instead, two alternatives, both critical of the New York consensus and existing statebuilding practices, point toward a rethinking and redesign of international intervention. A strategy of disengagement was rarely advocated after 9/11, as humanitarians, military interventionists, and proponents of good governance agreed on the importance of international support for statebuilding. Disengagement now claims substantial support for statebuilding

[8] Human Security Centre 2005.
[9] Fortna 2004.

through local initiative, initiative that is often stifled by international actors, however well intentioned. Revisionists, a second group of critics, are more sanguine that reformed international strategies can promote statebuilding in fragile and failed states.[10]

The contributors to this volume are uniformly skeptical of the New York consensus, whether they endorse a revision of the Washington consensus or disengagement. In both their analysis of international intervention in fragile and failed states and their policy recommendations based on that analysis, the authors deviate from the "stay the course" remedies of more resources and more time. Revisionist analysis, described in the next section, questions the unit of analysis for policy intervention and the key variables that shape strategic interaction between those intervening and those with local political power. The policy prescriptions described in the final section suggest that rethinking of the New York consensus is unlikely to produce yet another monolithic international consensus on statebuilding. Instead, if the authors here are representative, the next round of international intervention will witness an ongoing debate between those who espouse revised and more modest forms of engagement—but engagement nonetheless—and those who favor disengagement in favor of local solutions and local empowerment.

[10] Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk Paris and Sisk identify those who reject "reinvestment" as either those who counsel retreat ("scaling back international statebuilding efforts") or those who urge continuing engagement after a rethinking of existing strategies. Their categories are similar to those used here.

Revisionist analysis: thinking outside the state

Although fragile states by definition have weak control over their own borders and limited capacity to prevent meddling by outside parties, those who explain and evaluate statebuilding outcomes have often assumed a fixed and relatively closed territorial space in which intervention takes place. Accuracy demands that the radical openness of these societies, an openness that they often cannot control, be taken into account in any assessment of their prospects for statebuilding.

State fragility is often linked to regional effects. Bad neighborhoods make it more difficult to end civil wars and to establish new institutions of governance. Regional neighborhoods may alter the incentives of local political actors within fragile states; regional actors also directly, if covertly, intervene in the politics of those states. In many respects, the relevant unit of analysis is a failed region rather than failed states: regions in which norms against violent intervention are weak or non-existent, economic exchange is low, and regional institutions play a minor or ineffective role in quelling conflict. West Africa, with its extensive spillovers of rebel armies and contraband trade, was an exemplar of a failed region during the 1990s, a particularly striking case in light of its past of relative prosperity and peace. Northeast Africa is now a site for covert and overt intervention by neighboring states and by great powers, drastically lowering the prospects for alleviating conflict and re-establishing political order in Somalia and Ethiopia. Post-apartheid South Africa, in contrast, has served as

an anchor of regional stability, lending economic and political support to successful statebuilding in Mozambique and Namibia.

Changes in regional configurations of power can also diminish conflict, even if statebuilding success is not guaranteed. The eruption and decline of conflict in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union can be explained in part by the internal demise of hegemonic communist parties and the regional retreat of the Soviet empire before new hegemonic powers, the European Union and NATO, could replace them. Cambodia's civil war ended when both the great powers and its regional neighbors—Vietnam and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—accepted that further conflict was no longer in their interest. Cambodia's evolution, into a relatively peaceful but corrupt and authoritarian state, was cemented by its membership in ASEAN and by the acquiescence of those same neighbors. Private security companies (PSCs) have played an ambiguous role in developing the military capacity of post-conflict states. Deborah Avant awards "democratically dense" regional institutions a primary role in determining the effects of PSC intervention in fragile states. In the presence of a democratic regional network, PSCs are more likely to strengthen a centralized state apparatus; PSC involvement in the absence of such a network undermines statebuilding by fragmenting political and military power.[11]

The global political and military environment also shapes statebuilding outcomes. The ambiguous effects of the Cold War's end—eliminating

[11] Deborah Avant, chapter 5 in this volume.

destabilizing interventions in Central America and Cambodia, and, at the same time, removing foreign subsidies that propped up dependent states—took more than a decade to resolve. David Edelstein notes that the international threat environment widens tolerance for military intervention in local populations. If the intervening force is perceived as a shield against neighboring predatory states (Serbia in the case of Kosovo or Indonesia for Timor-Leste), external military force and international trusteeship may continue without a concomitant increase in local resistance.[12] A primary determinant of international intervention and its scale is the attitude of the major powers. If no major power perceives a strategic or political interest in a particular fragile state, international involvement will be less likely; if it occurs, fewer resources will be mobilized.

International economic and political networks are another, less noted, feature of the global environment in which fragile states are embedded. As nodes in global networks for contraband goods (diamonds, illicit drugs), states such as Sierra Leone, Haiti, and Afghanistan have been overwhelmed by network resources in the hands of local political competitors. In similar fashion, diaspora networks linked to conflict and post-conflict states can provide both political incentives and resources for either peacebuilding or continued conflict.[13]

If revisionist analysis of statebuilding interventions forces attention to regional and global environments, disaggregation of the state as sole unit of

---

[12] David Edelstein, chapter 4 in this volume.
[13] Lyons 2005.

analysis is another revisionist move. Entire states are typically arrayed on the spectrum of state fragility and failure. Despite disclaimers, the construction of lists, such as the World Bank's LICUS or fragile states category, tends to make state fragility one half of a dichotomous distinction: states are fragile or failing, or they are not. States, however, may fail in only parts of their domain: sub-national and spatial circumscription of state failure is often ignored. In such territories as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, northwest Kenya, or northern Uganda, the central government's authority is minimal or absent, and violent conflicts of differing intensities may persist for years. (None of these states appears on the World Bank's list of fragile states.) A second filter may screen out states where low and persistent levels of violence have serious consequences for political stability and economic development, even if that conflict does not threaten a civil war. In Nigeria, for example, the National Commission for Refugees has estimated that more than three million Nigerians were driven from their homes between 1999 and 2005; at least 14,000 died in ethnic, religious, or communal fighting during the same period.[14] Despite this level of persistent violence, Nigeria is often omitted from lists of fragile and failed states.

Revisionist analysis: statebuilding outcomes as strategic interaction

[14] "Violence Left 3 Million Bereft in Past 7 Years, Nigeria Reports," *New York Times*, 14 March 2006. Also "Internal Displacement in Nigeria: A Hidden Crisis," Norwegian Refugee Council, Global IDP Project, 1 February 2005 (www.idpproject.org).

The outcomes of international intervention in fragile and failed states are best modeled as the result of strategic interaction between those intervening and an array of local actors, some welcoming the intervention and others hostile to it. Michael Barnett and Christoph Zuercher model a game among peacebuilders (PBs), state elites (SEs), and rural elites (REs) in order to explain why, given their initial goals of social and economic change, so many peacebuilding ventures produce conservative results: consolidating the power of existing state and rural elites.[15] Whether one accepts their specific model or not, Barnett and Zuercher's approach illuminates a critical feature of statebuilding that is often ignored in evaluating particular cases: progress in statebuilding does not result solely from the aims, intentions, or errors of the peacebuilders. Peacebuilders do not act on a tabula rasa: rather, their programs become part of an intricate set of political calculations on the part of existing elites and their rivals. Whatever the asymmetries in power, local actors possess bargaining power and often use it effectively. Even in the aftermath of violent conflict and apparent state collapse, local political actors and their response to the peacebuilding program will be critical to any explanation of the outcome.

This strategic approach suggests one likely prerequisite for success: sophisticated political analysis by international statebuilders that allows them to play this game with maximum sophistication. Case studies, however, suggest that peacebuilders often rely on rules of thumb or unreliable allies. As Jens

[15] Michael Barnett and Christoph Zuercher, chapter 2 in this volume.

Narten documents in the case of Kosovo, peacebuilders are likely to choose local partners on the basis of superficial characteristics (language skills or rhetorical support for the intervention's goals) rather than careful analysis of converging political interests.[16] The importance of local knowledge also undermines efforts to construct universal templates for intervention: each statebuilding game will incorporate different players with different preferences and bargaining advantages.

Bargaining with local actors: state control and capacity as a baseline

How do the preferences, resources, and strategies of the key players vary to produce progress or stalemate in statebuilding? A systematic answer to that question can shed light on the ability of international intervention to further statebuilding *under specific political conditions*. One of those conditions is particularly important in determining the bargaining power of local actors in fragile and failed states: the baseline of state control and capacity that they enjoy when international intervention begins. At least three variants of initial state capacity can be identified. Each, in the hands of local political actors, can transform the statebuilding bargain.

Violent internal conflict need not result in a weakening of the state. The American Civil War, the bloodiest in U. S. history, is only one example of an internal conflict that strengthened and expanded state institutions on the winning side. International intervention in such cases is typically directed toward the reform of an existing state in the interests of peace, rather than

[16] Jens Narten, chapter 11 in this volume.

building a new state. Outside guarantors often insure a power-sharing arrangement that awards some control over the state apparatus to the contending parties and prevents the use of state coercion by one party against the other. The presence of a state apparatus, even if its writ does not extend throughout the national territory, might seem to simplify the task of international statebuilders, since state reform is less complicated than state construction. Control of the state provides a key bargaining resource to local actors, however, and transforms the bargaining relationship with international peacebuilders. The paradoxical result may be a successful end to conflict, but less external influence on the future state and its reform.

Cambodia and El Salvador provide examples of this trajectory and its hazards. Cambodia's statebuilding, described by David Roberts, began with Hun Sen and his regime in control of a party-state apparatus that reached to the village level.[17] The Paris Peace Agreement of 1991 had set a liberal democratic state as Cambodia's political goal. Instead, following surprisingly free and fair national elections in November 1992, Cambodia's state remained rooted in traditional networks of patronage and clientelism. Power-sharing meant the construction of a second, parallel patronage network to support the royalist FUNCINPEC.[18] Despite large infusions of foreign aid over more than a decade, Cambodia's state remains corrupt and largely unaccountable, even though

[17] David Roberts, chapter 7 in this volume.
[18] FUNCINPEC: The National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia.

peace has been maintained.[19] El Salvador is another instance of successful international peacebuilding without thoroughgoing reform. The military regime accommodated its leftist opponents by opening the political process, although reform of the military and police were difficult and imperfect. State-led social and economic reforms, designed to attack the original causes of violent conflict, were largely set aside.[20]

In a second cluster of fragile and post-conflict states, the reconfiguration of state power becomes a key issue in postwar political conflict. In these cases, the repressive apparatus of the state (military, secret police, paramilitaries) is well developed, but other political goods are inadequately provided or provided according to political or ethnic criteria to selected portions of the population. North Korea is an extreme example of such a state: fully capable of maintaining political control of its population through a massive security apparatus, but incompetent in providing food security and economic development.[21]

For international actors, states of this second type endanger statebuilding by placing the state itself at the center of political conflict. South Africa and Iraq illustrate two contrasting outcomes for over-developed, repressive states. South Africa was able to maintain its existing state apparatus under new political management through commitments to both policy change and political

---

[19] Between 1999 and 2003, World Bank CPIA scores for three of the five governance indicators remained largely the same or declined, with slight increases in two dimensions. Cambodia in 2003 scored worse than the average for IDA recipients in all five governance criteria, an outcome that reduced the World Bank's IDA allocation for the country. (World Bank 2004: 122)

[20] Doyle and Sambanis 2006: 200-208; Paris 2004: 122-128.

[21] On famine and food security in North Korea, Haggard and Noland 2007.

incorporation of the majority population. That bargain maintained political stability and international confidence during a difficult transition, a remarkable achievement in the absence of more intrusive forms of international intervention. In Iraq, the newly empowered Shiite majority (or self-appointed spokesmen for that majority) insisted on measures that effectively demolished the Iraqi state, particularly a sweeping de-Baathification and a dismantling of the Iraqi military. These steps are now uniformly viewed as fatal blows to subsequent efforts to construct a new, more legitimate political order in Iraq. In contrast to South Africa, the contending Iraqi parties and the international coalition (the United States and the United Kingdom) were unable to overcome their distrust to forge a credible bargain that would have reformed the state without destroying it.

Finally, in a third cluster of cases, state capacity is inadequate for provision of the key political good of security or any of the ancillary goods that are necessary for successful statebuilding. Under these circumstances, the bargaining game changes once again. Local political actors may possess resources, but their bargaining chips do not include a state apparatus. International statebuilders confront a new paradox: political elites may have few incentives to build state institutions that deliver critical political goods to the entire population. If, as Barnett and Zuercher accurately stipulate, the principal goal of local actors is to maintain themselves in power, then obtaining an adequate supply of external, private goods for their own selectorate—those

enfranchised to choose the local leadership--will be their primary goal.[22] Statebuilding that dilutes those resources among the population at large (or even among a minimum winning coalition) may seem unnecessary or even dangerous.

Under these circumstances, international statebuilders confront the "dangers of a tight embrace" described by Astri Suhrke.[23] As local elites under-perform at statebuilding (in order to extract more resources for their own political supporters), international peacebuilders are tempted to pour in more resources, often using their own personnel (trusteeship) or expatriates (such as Avant's private security companies). The capabilities of the local state fail to improve; the moral hazard created by the flood of resources produces even lower effort on the part of local elites, and the cycle continues. Many policy recommendations in this volume and elsewhere center on this dilemma and to the need to create local capacity from the earliest stage of the statebuilding intervention.[24]

Explaining bargaining power: the international statebuilders

Although an asymmetry of power between international statebuilders and local actors often appears overwhelming, international statebuilders vary substantially in their preferences, resources, and instruments. As described earlier, at least three political constituencies, varying in influence across the

[22] On the selectorate and the provision of private goods, Bueno de Mesquita *et al*., 2003, pp. 42-43.
[23] Astri Suhrke, chapter 10 in this volume.
[24] For example, Narten, who argues for immediate "training of trainers" so that capacity building can be assumed early on by local personnel. (chapter 11 in this volume).

industrialized countries, compete to define the bargaining preferences of international statebuilders: human security (an end to internal conflict), economic development (good governance), and national security (defined post-9/11 as an end to terrorist sanctuaries and regional instability). Multilateral institutions are often important contributors to statebuilding, with authority delegated by their members for designing and implementing programs. Ultimately, however, one or more of these three logics of intervention, refracted through the aims of their most powerful member governments, also sets their institutional preferences.

Barnett and Zuercher argue that security, defined as political stability, will dominate the aims of international statebuilders, although the presence of that bias requires empirical verification. Subordination of liberalization—the creation of a liberal democratic and market-oriented regime—to stability is key to their finding that co-opted peacebuilding is the likeliest outcome. Such a clear ordering of preferences within the international coalition is unlikely, however. More likely is competition among constituencies with different statebuilding goals, producing volatility in the preference ordering of the coalition and a weakening of their collective bargaining posture.

Available resources also influence bargaining outcomes between external statebuilders and local political actors in fragile and failed states. Political pressure in donor countries for less costly intervention reinforces preferences for stability over political change. Resource availability is set primarily by the major powers, which adds weight to their preferences within the international

statebuilding coalition. As a recent RAND report concluded, "full-scale peace enforcement actions are feasible only when the intervening authorities care a great deal about the outcome, and even then, only in relatively small societies."[25] Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, echoing the UN's Brahimi Report, argue that successful peacebuilding requires a match between resources and mandate, and that both must fit the "ecology of authority" on the ground.[26]

Revisionist analysis suggests, however, that the absolute level of resources alone is unlikely to predict statebuilding progress. The effective deployment of aid and other resources in a bargaining setting is often difficult. In bargaining with local actors, credible promises to provide resources must be coupled with credible threats to withdraw those resources. Conditionality of this kind has been ineffective in changing the behavior of established governments, even when it could be implemented.[27] Little evidence exists that conditionality will be more successful in the political conditions of fragile states. Major powers have often undermined the conditionality of multilateral organizations in favor of their strategically important clients. International financial institutions and bilateral aid agencies also have powerful incentives to continue financial assistance, even when conditions have not been met. The threat to withdraw resources has, as result, seldom been credible. Because threats to reduce or suspend resources are not credible, revisionists note that large-scale resource flows may have perverse effects, creating moral hazard and reducing local

[25] Dobbins, Jones, Crane, and DeGrasse, 2007: xxxvii.
[26] Doyle and Sambanis 2006.
[27] For a critique, Collier (1999).

incentives for statebuilding and reform. In the case of Afghanistan, Astri Suhrke describes the purchase of stability through construction of a dependent, rentier state that fails to develop either autonomy or capacity.[28]

Resources are related to bargaining outcomes through the mediation of policy instruments available to the statebuilding coalition. The menu of those instruments is often more restricted than official accounts allow. Categories of foreign assistance are often labeled statebuilding or nationbuilding in post-conflict settings, even though they have only modest effects on building local capacity and institutions. Available instruments are also scattered across a fragmented international coalition. No multilateral organization has a primary mandate to build local institutional capacity; expertise is found in a myriad of bilateral agencies and multilateral institutions, often with overlapping mandates. The International Monetary Fund offers technical assistance for building central banks and other fiscal and monetary institutions. Assistance to key elements of the security sector, such as police, is divided among national and multilateral agencies: United Nations Civilian Police (CIVPOL), regional organizations, and a growing number of bilateral assistance programs.[29] New actors, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have expanded their operations to include support for civil society and democratization. Neither NGOs nor the PSCs described by Avant can be defined as "instruments," however, since they

---

[28] Suhrke, chapter 10 in this volume.
[29] Call and Barnett 2000: 47-50.

are only partially funded by the intervening governments. They add both new capabilities and additional fragmentation to the statebuilding mix.

In reviewing statebuilding outcomes, one puzzle recurs: the absence of a clear relationship between an apparent asymmetry in bargaining power between the international coalition and local political agents on the one hand, and statebuilding outcomes on the other. Revisionist analysis of bargaining between international and local actors explains this apparent disjuncture between power and outcome. Local actors may control some portion of a nascent or derelict state apparatus, awarding local actors a substantial advantage through access to those institutions. Even when statebuilding begins at ground zero, local actors may choose to divert external assets toward maintaining themselves in power rather than building effective institutions.

The international coalition, on the other hand, finds it difficult to translate resources into success: squabbling over immediate goals (as between the United States and its NATO allies in Afghanistan), failing to manage the myriad of agencies that claim a statebuilding role, and swamping local institutions because of political pressure to show short-term results. The policy instruments at hand, whether bilateral or multilateral, are often ill suited for statebuilding. All of these weaknesses redress the apparent imbalance between international and local actors. The outcome, though often more complex in its origins than indicated in the model of Barnett and Zuercher, is the same: co-opted or captured peacebuilding, in which resources serve primarily to maintain post-conflict political elites in power. That outcome, often far from the liberal state of

the New York consensus, has produced revisionist rethinking of the goals of statebuilding and a parallel re-examination of statebuilding strategies.

Recalibrating goals and strategies: from the desirable to the feasible

As the option of reinvestment or staying the course has declined in appeal, those counseling disengagement and those recommending a revised engagement with fragile and failed states increasingly dominate debate over statebuliding goals and strategies. Advocates of disengagement do not argue primarily on the basis of cost or lack of progress. Rather, they claim that the international coalition fails because it swamps local solutions and local empowerment. Loosening the “tight embrace” becomes a means to more successful statebuilding in the longer run.

Supporters of disengagement share a vision of bottom-up, organic evolution in indigenous political institutions that may, under certain conditions, produce an effective state. In certain respects, their perspective replicates arguments for indirect rule during the colonial era: reliance on local elites (and their local knowledge) to guarantee minimum conditions of order. Jeremy Weinstein, for example, claims that war making leads to statebuilding, which he labels autonomous recovery, under certain “rare and difficult to create” conditions.[30] The key incentives for state-building must be generated internally and autonomously: external intervention in most cases will only interfere with those indigenous processes, by either creating a dependent, rentier state

[30] Weinstein 2005.

(Suhrke) or undermining the statebuilding effects of warfare (Weinstein). In both cases, less international intervention may produce state formation in the "much longer run" rather than statebuilding "with its connotations of social engineering in a shorter-term perspective."[31] Somalia, particularly breakaway Somaliland, which has developed indigenous political institutions and a functioning economy in the absence of recognition or official development assistance, figures prominently in discussions of positive disengagement.[32]

The inevitability of aid dependence, the moral hazard that it creates, and its erosion of local capacity is one issue that divides those promoting disengagement from revisionists who advocate a reformed version of the New York consensus. Another disagreement centers on the time horizon permitted any foreign intervening power. Advocates of disengagement view any foreign intervention as necessarily short-lived, too short-lived for institution-building that will last; revisionists are more willing to contemplate strategies that will reduce, though not eliminate, what Edelstein terms the duration dilemma.

The revisionist response

Although revisionists and those who favor disengagement share a critical view toward the New York consensus, revisionists advance a set of policy recommendations that will sustain international engagement with fragile and failed states in the interests of statebuilding. They envisage reforms that will make international intervention more effective and less self-defeating over time.

---

[31] Suhrke, chapter 10 in this volume
[32] Menkhaus 2006/2007; Weinstein 2005.

Five revisionist policy responses can be identified among the authors in this volume and in the wider policy debate: a lowering of expectations in favor of "good enough governance"; earlier and more intensive concentration on local ownership; effective multilateral coordination; new means for maintaining a less intrusive presence in fragile states over the longer term; and finally, an experimental outlook that both supports promising local initiatives and subjects international policies to rigorous evaluation.

"Good enough governance" and liberal democracy

No single aspect of statebuilding better illuminates the sharpening debate among proponents of the original New York consensus, revised engagement, and disengagement than democratization and elections. Revisionists increasingly accept political outcomes that postpone or set aside transformation of political institutions and processes. Subversion of the liberal statebuilding project by local elites, the most likely outcome in many cases, now "might be the best of all possible worlds."[33]

The issue of democratization and elections illuminates variations on a revisionist theme. The New York consensus had incorporated democratization and respect for human rights as a necessary element in statebuilding for several reasons. A liberal democratic internal peace was viewed as a safeguard against a new eruption of civil conflict. Democracy insured effective governance through transparency and accountability. Elections were a key means for legitimating new state institutions. Contemporary controversy over the

[33] Barnett and Zuercher, chapter 2 in this volume.

necessity or even the desirability of electoral democracy for statebuilding is particularly striking, since democratization has long been part of the foreign policy agenda for most industrialized democracies.

The critics of early electoral democracy level several distinct charges. First, elections and democratic political competition may undermine other goals of statebuilding, particularly political stability and a fragile internal peace. Roland Paris has argued in favor of "institutionalization before liberalization" (IBL), timing elections only when conditions will permit them without endangering political stability and effective administration. Political competition in the IBL model is also circumscribed through a ban on organizations that advocate inter-group violence and a prohibition of hate speech on the public media.[34] Paris does not dismiss the ultimate value of democratization; democratization and particularly elections should simply follow other, more critical items on the statebuilding agenda.

Others are more critical of elections as a necessary element in state legitimation. David Lake, for example, argues that the legitimacy of political authority is based primarily on its provision of political goods, including security, for the population that it governs. A successful international trustee must first provide those goods in order to sustain the legitimacy of its intervention. The trustee must then transfer that legitimacy to indigenous political authorities if statebuilding is to succeed in the longer run.[35] Michael Barnett has pointed to

---

[34] Paris 2004.
[35] Lake 2007.

risks associated with liberal democratic statebuilding (and the low probability of its success), urging instead a more modest republican model that encourages deliberation, constitutionalism, and representation. This alternative model for political legitimacy renders formal liberal institutions, such as elections, less essential.[36]

Finally, liberal statebuilding may be an unwarranted imposition on local political practices, interfering with the development of indigenous institutions. David Roberts portrays much of the liberal program as a failure to accept the “otherness” and durability of local political institutions. Democratic imposition becomes an analogue to economic shock treatment: a painful and destructive effort to jump-start political change that is likely to fail. Roberts’ account of Cambodian politics converges with the endorsement of co-opted statebuilding by Barnett and Zuercher: elites will aim to maintain themselves in power; international actors should accommodate themselves to that intractable reality.[37]

These criticisms of democratic institution building are met with skepticism by other revisionists who admit the importance of sequencing and appropriate constitutional design. Timothy Sisk, for example, views continuing international engagement after elections as essential to maintaining the course toward liberal statebuilding.[38] Elections have too often served as a false panacea for post-conflict societies, providing useful political cover for a precipitous end to international intervention. Declaring democracy and then

[36] Barnett 2006.
[37] Roberts, chapter 7 in this volume.
[38] Sisk, chapter 9 in this volume.

departing is no substitute for a more durable commitment that would ensure the security of political institutions. Ill-timed or ill-designed elections may produce captured statebuilding, in which entrenched elites prevent further political and economic reform. At the same time, Sisk claims that democratic elections make a central contribution to the legitimacy of any modern political order, in the eyes of both the international community and the local population.

The elitist perspective accepted by some revisionists and proponents of disengagement leaves the less powerful with little recourse if their prospects for economic development and political empowerment are crushed by the greed and ruthlessness of those elites; little recourse, that is, apart from a return to violence. Even if those elites are successful at providing political goods for their populations in the absence of democratic institutions, there is little guarantee that long-term state legitimacy will be guaranteed. After all, many colonial rulers and authoritarian regimes, such as the Shah's Iran, were relatively successful at such goods provision. Nevertheless, their political opponents were able to successfully undermine the regime's legitimacy and ultimately, the social order through attacks on their international backing and lack of democratic standing.

The debate over democratization reflects revisionist acceptance of an end to the perfectionism of the New York consensus, accepting "good enough governance" rather than a model of states based on the Western (and Asian) industrialized world.[39] Barnett's republicanism represents a retreat from liberal

[39] I have borrowed the phrase "good enough governance" from Grindle 2004, although giving it a somewhat different meaning.

democratic standards for institutions, one that is more accommodating of local political conditions. Political institutions that are both inclusive—avoiding political divisions that could lead to violent conflict—and open to the future political change could provide another, more modest alternative to liberal statebuilding. Minimal political standards might also be framed with regard to outputs: decent (if not good) governance, a permissive economic environment (no political predation), and broad provision of human security. Violation of other international standards, such as the outbreak of genocidal violence, would continue to require more forceful international intervention.

Local ownership, sooner rather than later

Both revisionists and proponents of disengagement advocate a second change: local ownership of statebuilding and rapid development of local capabilities for governance. Revisionists, however, believe that current statebuilding practices can be changed to encourage, rather than undermine, local initiative. Narten, for example, urges "building capacity of local trainers from the first days of their presence in a postwar environment." In similar fashion, Edelstein presses for building of local security forces from the start of an intervention.[40] Although lip service to local empowerment and capacity is a familiar mantra in the statebuilding liturgy, early dedication of resources to building local capacity would break with past practices and override political incentives for short-term results. Statebuilders have often relied on expatriate contract personnel for many of their immediate statebuilding needs, since few

[40] Narten, chapter 11 in this volume; Edelstein, chapter 4 in this volume.

local personnel appear to be qualified. Building local qualifications has uniformly ceded priority to efficient and rapid supply of key political goods. Breaking those powerful precedents would require both new international instruments and a willingness to pay political costs for failures and poor performance on the part of local personnel.

Coordination, to what end?

Faulty management of large and unwieldy international coalitions has led to persistent calls for better coordination, or, under its most recent label, harmonization. Paris suggests that coordination often provides cover for deeper disagreement in the donor community on the aims and methods of statebuilding, rather than a solution to those disagreements.[41] Revisionists accept that calls for coordination are often rhetorical shams. Nevertheless, developing a more coherent ordering of statebuilding priorities among donors, particularly the major powers, remains a worthwhile goal.

Achieving coherence among aid donors and multilateral institutions could satisfy two different purposes, however. One of these would clearly benefit the governments of fragile states: reducing the burden of negotiation and implementation that is imposed on overstretched officials by multiple international partners. More controversial, however, is the aim of increasing donor bargaining power through a coordinated strategy. Coordination could also produce a clear division of labor among international actors, one that would increase overall levels of expertise and capacity through specialization.

---

[41] Paris, chapter 3 in this volume.

However defined, recent multilateral steps to improve coordination, such as the new Peacebuilding Commission described by Paris, are unlikely to overcome competition and disagreement in the donor coalition. The most successful route to such harmonization in particular countries may be the designation of lead roles for the most engaged national governments (or the European Union), embedding those leading actors in a multilateral process of consultation. This route may have advantages over more unwieldy formal mechanisms or the unilateral route take by the United States in Iraq. Multilateral forums will remain valuable for the exchange of new knowledge and for establishing best practices. The latter role, which has been undertaken by the OECD, may be deepened by the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Maintaining engagement over the long run

Revisionists part company with advocates of disengagement in their fourth proposal for reform: a search for ways to maintain engagement beyond an initial and costly period of direct intervention. The strategies that they contemplate resemble the “off-shore” redeployments of military force that have been recommended in Iraq. After establishing minimal standards of governance, longer-run means of monitoring performance and calibrating resources to that performance must be designed: “trusteeship lite,” or, to borrow a term from the International Monetary Fund, enhanced surveillance. The regional environment and regional institutions can provide one, less intrusive means for such monitoring. Unfortunately, regional institutions in many parts of the developing world are underdeveloped or unwilling to intrude in

matters of domestic governance. Paul Collier recommends governance conditionality, rather than policy conditionality: requirements that governments be accountable to their own citizens, ownership writ large. Collier also suggests military guarantees of constitutional governments as another form of more distanced yet effective shaping of broader political development.[42] In designing these mechanisms for less intrusive surveillance, revisionists seek to avoid intensive oversight that erodes local confidence and impedes the development of indigenous solutions to local problems. At the same time, such initiatives would accept that building legitimate and effective political institutions, often in the face of local opposition, will require long-term engagement.

Experimentation and evaluation

Finally, revisionists stand ready to support promising local initiatives in statebuilding and governance, whenever they appear. The attitude of international actors should become more experimental; their stance should more closely resemble a venture capitalist investing in promising, locally generated innovations in governance. At the same time, measurement of progress should be grounded in more systematic evaluation of what works in different contexts. The often narrowly conceived statebuilding prescriptions of the New York consensus would be tested thoroughly in the demanding environments of fragile states. One dismal failure of statebuilding over the past fifteen years has been its inability to move beyond "lessons learned" to develop more rigorous evaluation protocols.

---

[42] Collier 2007.

Conclusion: statebuilding revised

Each revisionist prescription carries risks. "Good enough" governance and temporary retreats from democratization may produce second-class governance and toleration of elite abuses in the name of public order. An immediate emphasis on local ownership and capacity building, endorsed by both revisionists and advocates of disengagement, will almost certainly impose lower levels of service provision and higher degrees of corruption on the populations of fragile states. Coordination based on the multilateral leadership of major powers will fail if no power accepts responsibility. Low-profile strategies of engagement for the longer run may cause important constituencies in the donor countries to lose interest in the statebuilding project, while failing to satisfy those opposed to international tutelage in fragile states. Finally, international actors could capture any turn toward an experimental stance, promoting their own programs and priorities as locally grown.

After allowing for these risks, the revisionist agenda faces tests of political feasibility in both the major donors, particularly the EU and the United States, and in the societies of fragile states. The incremental and tentative character of the revisionist program is unlikely to win it much political applause. Advocates of disengagement will continue to note cases of aid dependence and institutional backsliding. Revisionist recommendations are unlikely to satisfy simultaneously the security, development, and humanitarian constituencies that have supported statebuilding in recent years: too activist for those searching for political

stability, not activist enough for many NGO advocates of human rights and human security. Nevertheless, alternative approaches—the New York consensus and the disengagement option—are arguably more difficult to sustain politically. Perhaps, however, the best outcome will not be another monolithic consensus, whatever its label. With states from Angola to Pakistan confronting crises of governance that have momentous regional and global implications, the debate over statebuilding has only begun. For now, continuing that debate is likely to produce a sturdier and more reliable revision of the statebuilding formulas that have produced such mixed results.

REFERENCES

Barnett, Michael, 2006. Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States after War. *International Security*, 30, 4 (Spring): 87-112.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Call, Charles T. and Michael Barnett. 2000. Looking for a Few Good Cops: Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding and CIVPOL, in Tor Tanke Holm and Espen Barth Eide, eds., *Peacebuilding and Police Reform*. London: Frank Cass: 43-68.

Collier, Paul. 1997. The Failure of Conditionality, in Catherine Gwin and Joan M. Nelson, editors, *Perspectives on Aid and Development*. Washington, D. C.: Overseas Development Council: 51-77.

Collier, Paul. 2007. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dobbins, James, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Beth Cole DeGrasse, 2007. *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Doyle, Michael and NIcholas Sambanis. 2006. *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

"The Failed States Index, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2006: 50-58.

Fortna, Page. 2004. Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War. *International Studies Quarterly*, 48, 2 (June): 269-92.

Goldstone, Jack A. et al. *State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings* (30 September 2000).

Grindle, Merilee S. 2004. Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries. *Governance*, 17, 4 (October): 525-548

Haggard, Stephan and Marcus Noland. 2007. *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Human Security Centre (University of British Columbia) Human *Security Report* (2005; http://www.humansecurityreport.info/).

Kaufman, Daniel, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, *Governance Matters VI: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996-2006*. World Bank Research Working Paper 4280, July 2007. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank.

Lake, David. 2007. "Building Legitimate States After Civil Wars: Order, Authority, and Institutions." Paper presented at the conference on Building Peace in Fragile States, La Jolla, CA.: 27-28 April.

Lyons, Terrence. 2005. Diasporas and Homeland Conflict, in Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, editors, *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 11-129.

Mandelbaum, Michael. 1996. Foreign Policy as Social Work. *Foreign Affairs*, 75, 1 (January/February): 16-32.

Menkhaus, Ken, 2006/2007. "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoliers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security*, 31, 3 (Winter): 74-106.

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

Weinstein, Jeremy. 2005. Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective. Washington, D. C.: Center for Global Development Working Paper Number 57 (April).

World Bank. 2004. *Cambodia at the Crossroads: Strengthening Accountability to Reduce Poverty*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank.

World Bank (Independent Evaluation Group). 2006. *Engaging with Fragile States: An IEG Review of World Bank Support to Low-Income Countries Under Stress*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank.