The UN's Record in Nation Building

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Since the end of the Cold War, the UN has invested significant military, political, and economic resources into operations conducted in the aftermath of interstate wars and civil unrest. A number of recent reports have examined the UN’s performance during these operations. For example, the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change concluded in 2004 that “[i]n both the period before the outbreak of civil war and in the transition out of war, neither the UN nor the broader international community, including the international financial institutions, are well organized to assist countries attempting to build peace.” The Panel on UN Peace Operations led by Lakhdar Brahimi examined the UN’s ability to conduct peace operations. This study, generally referred to as the Brahimi report, offered a similarly frank assessment: “The United Nations was founded, in the words of its Charter, in order ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’. . . . Over the last decade, the United Nations has repeatedly failed to meet the challenge, and it can do no better today.” These conclusions indicate that the UN has faced significant challenges in attempting to establish peace and democracy in states transitioning out of conflict. What is less clear, however, is how UN operations compare with efforts by other international institutions and states, including the US.

In short, how effective has the UN been in conducting nation-building missions? How do these missions compare with those of other actors, especially the US? What steps should the UN take to improve its ability to conduct nation-

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building missions? We define nation-building as the use of armed force in the aftermath of major combat to promote a transition to peace and democracy. Other terms, such as peacebuilding, peacekeeping, or state-building capture only elements of this paradigm. Peacekeeping and peacebuilding are often employed for less far-reaching objectives, and do not fully capture broader efforts to rebuild security, economic, political, and other institutions after major conflict. State-building is generally synonymous with development assistance, which is much broader and longer-term than our definition of nation-building. In addition, as William Maley correctly notes in this issue, the concept of "post-conflict transition" is something of a misnomer. Conflicts rarely end neatly and, as the current cases of Iraq and Afghanistan highlight, conflict can continue during the transition period. Nevertheless, we distinguish between the major combat phase and the transition phase that follows. This is fairly straightforward in most cases. In Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, nation-building includes the period after major combat, which began in May 2003 in Iraq and December 2001 in Afghanistan.

Contrary to most assessments, our examination of UN nation-building missions since World War II shows that the UN has been fairly successful in placing post-conflict societies on the path to enduring peace and democratic government. Most alternatives to the UN are either vastly more expensive or considerably less capable. Critiques of the UN—including several critiques in this issue—are generally plagued by three methodological problems. The first is selection bias. Most nation-building books and articles examine a single case or small number of cases but fail to look more broadly at a range of cases. Single

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observations can lead to indeterminate results, since they do not control for random error and can make it impossible to determine which of several alternative explanations is the most viable. Second, other critiques fail to compare the UN’s experience with those of other states and international organizations. How has the UN performed relative to other actors? Third, others fail to offer a systematic methodology for measuring success. In this issue, for example, Kirsti Samuels rather bluntly concludes that UN missions have been characterized by a “lack of success.” But it is unclear how she defines or measures success, how the UN compares with other states and international organizations, and whether the cases she cites are representative. As explained in more detail below, we examine two primary outcomes—peace and democracy—and use the State Failure and Polity IV data sets for each of our cases.

Despite the UN’s achievements, however, the organization continues to exhibit weaknesses that decades of experience have yet to overcome. Most UN missions are undermanned and under-funded. UN-led military forces are often sized and deployed on the basis of unrealistic best-case assumptions. Troop quality is uneven. Police and civil personnel are always of mixed competence. And all components of UN missions tend to arrive late, with police and civil administrators arriving even more slowly than soldiers. These weaknesses limit UN operations to those that do not require forced entry, assume at least some measure of compliance from the various conflict parties, and need no more than twenty thousand troops. UN operations are generally confined to countries where there has been a peace settlement and opposing sides have largely stopped fighting, as illustrated by the UN experience in El Salvador, Namibia, and Mozambique. No UN nation-building operation has exceeded twenty thousand troops. Operations that exceed one or more of these limits generally require the US, NATO, EU, or another major power to take the lead and provide the core military force.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section I provides a brief overview of the UN’s historical experience in nation-building. Section II examines key UN

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There are several comparative case studies of UN operations. See, for example, William J. Durch, ed, UN Peacekeeping, American Politics, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s (St Martin’s 1996); United Nations Department of Public Information, The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peacekeeping, UN Doc DP1/1800, UN Sales No E.96.1.14 (1996); William J. Durch, ed, The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis (St Martin’s 1993).


inputs into nation-building operations, such as levels of military and police, duration, timing of elections, and economic assistance. Section III examines such outcomes as the ability to achieve peace and democracy. Section IV outlines key UN reforms to improve its ability to conduct nation-building missions. Section V concludes with implications for future UN missions.

I. A HISTORY OF UN NATION-BUILDING

This section provides a short overview of the UN’s experience in nation-building by outlining eight cases: Congo (1960–64); Namibia (1989–90); El Salvador (1991–96); Cambodia (1991–93); Mozambique (1992–94); Eastern Slavonia (1995–98); Sierra Leone (1998–present); and East Timor (1999–present). All of these cases fit our definition of nation-building: they involved the use of armed force in the aftermath of major combat to promote a transition to peace and democracy.

During the Cold War, UN troops were largely used to monitor ceasefires and patrol disengagement zones on contested ground in areas such as Cyprus, Palestine, and Kashmir. Their purpose was not to facilitate resolution of these longstanding disputes and assist in reconstruction but rather the more limited purpose of preventing the escalation of violence. However, there were two notable exceptions. One was the 1950 Korean War, in which the defense of South Korea was undertaken by a UN-mandated, US-led multinational coalition. The second was the Congo, where the UN organized and led a robust nation-building mission beginning in 1960. The first was facilitated by an ill-conceived Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council and the second by an unusual conjunction of US, Soviet, and non-aligned interests in keeping Africa’s decolonization on track.  

Among UN-led military operations, the Congo mission was unmatched in size, scope, and ferocity of combat. The Congo mission remains the only operation in which UN-led forces engaged in sustained combat, mounted a series of set-piece offensives, and employed fixed-wing attack aircraft. In

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11 The UN assisted in at least one other decolonization case during this period. In 1962 it deployed a small peacekeeping force to West New Guinea to facilitate the transfer of territory from Dutch to Indonesian control. The territory had been a Dutch colony since 1828. The UN established a temporary executive authority to administer the territory, maintain law and order, protect the rights of the population, and supervise the buildup of a local police force. In May 1963, the UN transferred full administrative control to Indonesia.

December 1961, for example, the UN launched a military operation in Elisabethville in response to the secession of the Katanga province. The ensuing battle involved six thousand UN and three thousand Katangan troops. UN forces possessed mortars, artillery, and an air force provided by India, Sweden, and Ethiopia and were thus able to conduct offensive combat operations. Overall, UN-led units sustained more combat deaths in the Congo (135) than in nearly all subsequent UN nation-building operations combined. The UN also lost Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, whose plane went down en route to a rendezvous with Katangan president Moise Tshombe in 1961.

Given the unprecedented nature of its mission and the consequent lack of prior experience, existing doctrine, designated staff, or administrative structure to underpin the operation, the UN performed fairly well in the Congo. Significant forces began to arrive within days of the Security Council’s authorization, a performance matched in few subsequent UN peacekeeping missions. Measured against the bottom line requirements of the international community—that decolonization proceed, colonial and mercenary troops depart, and that the Congo remain intact—the UN was largely successful. Democracy did not feature heavily in the various Congo resolutions passed by the UN Security Council. The Congo never became a functioning democracy, but large-scale civil conflict was averted for more than a decade following the UN’s departure. The country also held together for another three decades, albeit under a corrupt dictatorship. Of at least equal importance to the Security Council sponsors of the Congo intervention, the principle of territorial integrity was preserved, and decolonization was able to proceed throughout the rest of Africa. But UN achievements in the Congo came at a considerable cost in troops lost, money spent, and controversy raised. To some critics, the UN’s apparent complicity in the apprehension and later execution of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba overshadowed its accomplishments.

As a result of these costs and controversies, neither the UN’s leadership nor its member nations were eager to repeat the experience. For the next twenty-five years, the UN restricted its military interventions to conducting

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inter-positional peacekeeping, policing ceasefires, and patrolling disengagement zones in circumstances where all parties invited its presence, and armed force was to be used by UN troops only in self-defense.

But the end of the Cold War presented the UN with new opportunities and new challenges. The early post-Cold War UN-led operations in Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Mozambique followed similar patterns. The international community, with US and Soviet backing, first brokered a peace accord. The Security Council then dispatched a UN force to oversee its implementation. In each case, the responsibilities of the UN mission included initiating an expeditious process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; encouraging political reconciliation; holding democratic elections; and overseeing the inauguration of a new national government. Operations in each of these countries were greatly facilitated by war-weary populations, great power support, and cooperation from neighboring countries. The UN became adept at overseeing the disarmament and demobilization of willing parties, but it did not have sufficient resources to successfully reintegrate former combatants into society. Economic growth accelerated in most cases, largely as a result of the cessation of fighting. All four of these operations culminated in reasonably free and fair elections. All four also resulted in a sustained period of peace that endured after the UN withdrew soldiers and police. But peace, growth, and democracy were often accompanied by an increase in common crime, as old repressive security services were dismantled and demobilized former combatants were left without a livelihood.

Cambodia had the least successful democratic transformation and experienced the greatest renewal of civil strife, although not to the level that preceded UN intervention. Indeed, following the fall of South Vietnam in 1976, the Khmer Rouge launched a genocidal campaign of collectivization in Cambodia in which 1.7 million of its citizens died—over 20 percent of the population. Following a period of border clashes between Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese forces, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978, defeated the Khmer Rouge and, for the ensuing decade, occupied Cambodia with some


250,000 troops.\textsuperscript{19} The UN’s challenges in Cambodia can be attributed to the deeper trauma that society had experienced during the decades of genocidal conflict; the unwillingness of the Khmer Rouge and the ruling party, the Cambodian People’s Party, to live up to their commitments; the absence of nearby democratic role models; the more limited international inputs in the form of troops, money, and time; and the briefness of the UN intervention—less than two years.\textsuperscript{20}

These nation-building operations were followed by missions in Eastern Slavonia in 1996 and East Timor in 1999. The operations in Eastern Slavonia and East Timor suggest that the UN is capable of executing a robust peace enforcement mandate in circumstances where the scale is modest, the force includes a core of capable troops from major powers, and the venture has strong international backing. Eastern Slavonia was the last Serb-held area of Croatia at the end of the Balkan wars. The UN was responsible for governing a territory in transition, in this case from Serb to Croat control. The operation was generously manned, well-led, abundantly resourced, and strongly supported by the major powers, whose influence assured the cooperation of neighboring states. Not surprisingly, given these advantages, the UN peace enforcement mission in Eastern Slavonia was highly successful.\textsuperscript{21}

East Timor was an ideal showcase for UN capabilities. Like Eastern Slavonia, East Timor was small in both territory and population. International resources, in terms of military manpower and economic assistance, were unusually abundant. Major power influence secured cooperation from neighboring states. A multinational coalition led by Australia initially secured the territory and then quickly turned the operation over to UN management.\textsuperscript{22} Remaining combatants were disarmed, new security forces were established, a local administration recreated, elections held, and a democratically-elected

\textsuperscript{19} For a general history of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, see Evan Gottesman, \textit{Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building} (Yale 2003); David P. Chandler, \textit{The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution Since 1945} (Yale 1991).

\textsuperscript{20} See Trevor Findlay, \textit{Cambodia: The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC} (Oxford 1999); Doyle, \textit{UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia} (cited in note 6); Brown and Zasloff, \textit{Cambodia Confounds the Peacemakers} (cited in note 6); Doyle, Johnstone, and Orr, eds, \textit{Keeping the Peace} (cited in note 6).

\textsuperscript{21} Interview with Ambassador Jacques Paul Klein, Special Representative, UN Secretary-General to Eastern Slavonia, Washington, DC (Sept 21, 2004); Christine Coleiro, \textit{Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes: Legacy of the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia and Transitional Missions} (Canadian Peacekeeping 2002).

government was inaugurated in 2002. However, the UN still faced several challenges. International police and civil administrators were slow to arrive and of variable quality. Once ensconced, UN administrators were somewhat slow to turn power back to local authorities. These were minor blemishes, however, on a generally successful operation.

Even in less benign circumstances, such weaknesses continued to threaten the success of UN operations. In Sierra Leone, inadequate UN forces were inserted under unduly optimistic assumptions, encountered early reverses, and eventually suffered the ultimate humiliation of being captured and held hostage in large numbers. Poised on the verge of collapse, the Sierra Leone operation was rescued by the United Kingdom and turned around, thanks in large measure to extraordinary personal efforts by the UN Secretary-General and the British prime minister. British forces arrived and extricated UN hostages, intimidated insurgent forces, and began to train a more competent local military. The US threw its logistical and diplomatic weight behind the operation. The regime in neighboring Liberia, highly complicit in Sierra Leone’s civil war, was displaced. Additional manpower and economic resources were secured. With British assistance, the UN was able to oversee a process of disarmament and demobilization and hold reasonably free elections.

II. UN INPUTS

Each nation-building mission takes place in a unique environment. But the objectives, instruments, and techniques remain largely the same. This makes it possible to compare across cases the level of international inputs (such as troops, police, money, and time) and outcomes (such as peace and democratization). While the measures available provide crude approximations of the level of effort and results at best, this methodology does permit more than merely impressionistic or anecdotal comparisons across case studies. Nation-building outcomes are naturally caused by much more than the quantity of inputs. Success depends on the wisdom with which such resources are employed, and the susceptibility of the society in question to the changes being

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23 See Interview with Peter Galbraith, Director for Political, Constitutional, and Electoral Affairs for UNTAET, Washington, DC (Jan 9, 2004); Michael G. Smith, Peacekeeping in East Timor: The Path to Independence (Lynne Rienner 2003); King’s College London, A Review of Peace Operations: A Case for Change (King’s College London 2003); Jonathan Steele, Nation Building in East Timor, 19 World Poly J 76, 76–88 (2002).

24 See Mark Malan, Phenyo Rakate, and Angela McIntyre, Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL Hits the Home Straight (Institute for Security Studies 2002); Frederick H. Fleitz, Jr., Peacekeeping Fiascos of the 1990s: Causes, Solutions, and U.S. Interests (Praeger 2002).

fostered. Some strategies work better than others, and some societies are more ready to change. Nevertheless, success depends in some measure on the quantity of international military and police forces, the duration of the mission, organization of elections, and economic assistance committed. The data indicate that UN operations that were well-resourced—such as East Timor and Eastern Slavonia—were also most successful in terms of peace and democracy.

A. MILITARY AND POLICE PRESENCE

The data on UN military and police deployments show a rough correlation between the number of soldiers and police deployed per capita and the outcomes of peace and democracy. Those countries with more robust deployments were more likely to be peaceful and democratic. In the immediate aftermath of civil or inter-state wars, a period of anarchy emerges in which groups and factions seek to arm themselves for protection.26 These “spoilers” can include a variety of organized criminal groups, militia, and insurgents.27 Troops are critical for defeating and deterring these groups, patrolling borders, securing roads, combating organized crime, and conducting general law enforcement functions such as policing streets. Many of these functions are best performed by military police and troops specially trained for urban patrols, crowd control, civil reconstruction, and peace enforcement, such as the French gendarmerie, Italian carabinieri, and Spanish guardia civil.28 Total military force levels for UN missions have ranged from nearly twenty thousand UN troops deployed to the Congo and sixteen thousand to Cambodia, to just over four thousand in Namibia.29

But there are significant limitations in using aggregate numbers, since they do not control for the different sizes of the populations and economies of these countries. Force-to-population ratios varied widely. Large numbers of UN military forces were deployed to Eastern Slavonia and East Timor at thirty-four and ten soldiers per one thousand inhabitants, respectively. Force levels in Namibia and Sierra Leone were smaller at three soldiers per thousand

inhabitants. And those in Congo, El Salvador, Cambodia, and Mozambique had one or fewer soldiers per thousand inhabitants.  

International civilian police are an increasingly important component of most UN nation-building operations, in some cases representing ten percent or more of the overall force. The UN has deployed international police to help UN military forces restore security, build and train local police forces, and provide security for local inhabitants. In El Salvador, for example, the UN deployed a peak of six hundred UN civilian police observers. These police lacked arrest authority, were unarmed, and depended on the Salvadoran police to make arrests. In contrast, the UN deployed over one thousand civilian police to East Timor and nearly five thousand to Kosovo—all possessed arrest authority and were required to carry sidearms. As with the figures for military presence, the UN operations in the smaller societies of Eastern Slavonia, East Timor, and Namibia had the largest civilian police contingents per capita at 3.1, 1.7, and 1.1 police per 1,000 inhabitants respectively. Although UN civilian police forces usually left with the troops, in El Salvador, Haiti, and Eastern Slavonia they stayed a year or more after the military component withdrew. The US pioneered the use of armed international police in Haiti, but looked to the UN to supply police for the NATO-led operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. The US did not include civil police in its last two nation-building operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. UN-led operations have possessed much higher ratios of police to military soldiers. The absence of any international civil police in Afghanistan and Iraq has increased the burden upon US and coalition military forces to handle public security and police training functions there.


For police data, see The Military Balance (cited in note 30); UN Dept of Peacekeeping Operations (cited in note 30); Jane's Information Group (cited in note 30); Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, Encyclopedia of International Peacekeeping Operations (cited in note 30); UN Dept of Public Information, Yearbook of the United Nations, UN Sales No 1947.1.18 (1946/47); Oakley, Dziedzic, and Goldberg, eds, Policing the New World Disorder (cited in note 28). For population data, see US Census Bureau International Database (cited in note 30).
B. DURATION

The data also show a rough correlation between the duration of nation-building missions and the outcomes of peace and democracy. Those countries with longer nation-building missions were more likely to be peaceful and democratic. In the early 1990s, both US-led and UN-led operations were usually terminated quickly, often immediately following the completion of an initial democratic election and the inauguration of a new government. The UN remained in Namibia for one year; El Salvador for four; Cambodia for two; and Mozambique for two. The US stayed in Somalia and Haiti for three years. In this period, the US and the UN tended to define their objectives rather narrowly, focusing on exit strategies and departure deadlines. As experience with nation-building grew, however, both the UN and the US recognized that reconciliation and democratization could require more than a single election. By the end of the decade, both UN-led and US-led operations became more extended and peacekeeping forces were drawn down more slowly rather than exiting en masse following the first national election. Examples include the UN deployments to Sierra Leone and East Timor, which have lasted for six years and are still ongoing.

C. TIMING OF ELECTIONS

Elections were roughly correlated with success, especially repeated elections over time. The establishment of a democratic political system is a core objective of most nation-building operations. Central to this process has been the planning and conduct of democratic elections. Local elections rarely preceded national ones. In Cambodia, the first local elections were held ten years after the intervention—in Eastern Slavonia they were held just fifteen months after the operation began. National elections preceded or were held at the same time as local elections in every UN-led operation except Eastern Slavonia. The US-led cases showed more divergence. In Japan and Bosnia, local elections were held well after national elections. In Haiti, they were held simultaneously. In Germany and Kosovo, local elections preceded national polls by at least eighteen months. Initial elections were determined to be free and fair in nearly all of the cases studied. Elections are a prerequisite for democracy, but speed in organizing elections is not necessarily an indicator of ultimate success. Haiti, for instance, had one of the quickest elections but never became a viable democracy. There are other drawbacks of quick elections. In Bosnia, early elections brought to power the most belligerent and nationalistic political parties within the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serb communities: the Muslim Party of Democratic Action, the

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Croatian Democratic Union, and the Serbian Democratic Party. As American negotiator Richard Holbrooke pointed out: "The election strengthened the very separatists who had started the war."34 In addition, as Jack Snyder has argued, transitions to democracy can be violent and destabilizing. Promoting democratization and free-market economies in institutionally weak and conflict-prone environments can further weaken the government.35

D. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Finally, the data show a rough correlation between the level of economic assistance and the outcomes of peace and democracy. Those countries with greater per capita levels of assistance were more likely to be peaceful and democratic. External assistance on a per capita basis varied greatly among UN cases. Eastern Slavonia received the most per capita funds at $290 per individual—more than ten times the amount given to Cambodia at $28, Sierra Leone at $25, and Congo at $24. Because of its proximity to Europe and the desire to succeed after the previous five years of failure in the Balkans, European donors were especially generous. Since the region also had a small population of barely one hundred thousand, funds went much further on a per capita basis than in those countries with much larger populations.36 East Timor also received relatively high levels of assistance at $233 per capita for its comparatively small population of 1.1 million.37 In general, small societies tended to receive more assistance on a per capita basis than larger ones, with Bosnia, Eastern Slavonia, East Timor, and Kosovo leading this group. Iraq, the largest of the modern nation-building missions, has also been particularly well funded at $206 per capita.38

34 Richard Holbrooke, To End a War 344 (Random House 1998).
36 1996 Eastern Slavonia population figures obtained from Coleiro, Bringing Peace to the Land of Scorpions and Jumping Snakes at 168 (cited in note 21).
37 2000 East Timor population figures obtained from US Census Bureau International Database (cited in note 30).
IIII. PEACE AND DEMOCRACY OUTCOMES

Post-conflict operations tend to be heavily scrutinized by the media, politicians, and public. Progress toward the mission's goals is hard to measure and defend. Yardsticks are often inadequate. The measurements for effective security often are the amount of money spent on police and army training or the number of police and soldiers trained, rather than the level of political violence. Without the ability to measure performance, policymakers lack an objective method for judging success and failure in ongoing crises. This makes it difficult to generate mid-course corrections.

We measure nation-building outcomes by examining whether there was sustained peace and democracy. While we believe peace and democracy are the most immediate and critical outcomes, we recognize that most outcomes are interconnected. As Amartya Sen has argued:

Political freedoms (in the form of free speech and elections) help to promote economic security. Social opportunities (in the form of education and health facilities) facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities (in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production) can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities.39

We break the cases into two categories: US-led and UN-led operations. US-led operations are those in which the US played the lead role in using armed force. Examples range from the US-led efforts to overthrow the governments in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the US-led efforts during the bombing campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo in 1995 and 1999, respectively. UN-led operations are those in which the UN played the lead role in using force. However, the UN has participated in virtually all US-led operations, as have a number of other countries, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The converse is also true—the US is typically involved in UN-led missions. We now turn to our two measures of nation-building outcomes.

First, peace is a critical outcome of nation-building. Without peace, neither economic growth nor democratization is possible. With peace, some level of economic growth becomes almost inevitable, and democratization is at least possible. Definitions of peace may vary from case to case, but a peaceful environment is one in which violence-prone groups such as insurgents or criminals are subordinated to legitimate governmental authority, reintegrated into society, or defeated. A peaceful environment is also one in which the population is free from major threats to their safety, and national and international actors are able to rebuild political, economic, and other key

governance institutions.\textsuperscript{40} To measure the level of peace, we used information from the State Failure data set at the University of Maryland’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management.\textsuperscript{41} Of the eight UN-led cases, seven are at peace. Of the eight US-led cases, four are at peace and four are not (or at least not yet). These categorizations are necessarily provisional, particularly for the ongoing operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Peace in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, and Sierra Leone has been sustained but so far only with the ongoing presence of international peacekeepers.

War severely disrupts the economies of not just states in conflict but also their neighbors. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler have attempted to quantify some of the economic costs of civil war. They find that on average civil wars reduce prospective economic output by 2.2 percent per year for the duration of the conflict.\textsuperscript{42} However, once peace is restored, economic activity resumes and, in a number of cases, the economies grow. In all the cases studied, conflict resulted in a fall in output and living standards in the societies concerned. Peace brought economic growth in all but two cases five years after nation-building began. High levels of external economic assistance resulted in rapid economic recovery in Bosnia at 21.3 percent, East Timor at 7.1 percent, and Kosovo at 5.7 percent. Persistent violence and limited domestic capacity for good governance resulted in slower rates of growth in Sierra Leone at 1.9 percent. In Mozambique and Congo, these same factors resulted in continued falls in per capita GDP at negative 1.7 percent and negative 0.02 percent, respectively. Countries like El Salvador and Cambodia enjoyed strong growth despite less generous inflows of aid.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} For a general discussion on peace and nation-building, see Kimberly Zisk Marten, Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past (Columbia 2004); John Mueller, The Remnants of War (Cornell 2004); Paris, At War’s End (cited in note 18).


Second, democracy is also a critical outcome. Democracies tend to be more peaceful than other forms of government. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has argued: "There are many good reasons for promoting democracy. Not the least—in the eyes of the UN—is that, when sustained over the long-term, it is a highly effective means of preventing conflict." We categorized each of the countries studied as democratic or not democratic. To code cases, we used data from the Polity Project at the University of Maryland. Among the UN-led cases, all but the Congo and Cambodia remain democratic today. Among the US-led cases, Germany and Japan are democratic; Bosnia and Kosovo are democratic but still under varying degrees of international administration; Somalia and Haiti are not democratic; and it is still too early in Afghanistan and Iraq, though the recent elections are encouraging. Table 1 highlights the cases and outcomes.


# Table 1. Nation-Building Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Peaceful in 2005</th>
<th>Democratic in 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UN-Led Missions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Slavonia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>US-Led Missions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Germany</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somalia (UNITAF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bosnia*</td>
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<td>Afghanistan*</td>
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<td>Iraq*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Ongoing Operation
IV. UN REFORMS

Despite the UN’s achievements and experience, it still exhibits weaknesses. Key weaknesses include a chronic shortage of personnel and money; poor quality of troops, police, and civilian personnel; late arrival; and coordination problems.

First, UN missions tend to be undermanned and under-funded and are frequently staffed and led subject to the expectations of unrealistic best-case scenarios. This is not because UN managers generally believe smaller is better (although some may), but because member states are rarely willing to commit the troops, police, or money any prudent military commander would desire. As a result, small and weak UN forces are routinely deployed into what they hope, on the basis of best-case assumptions, will prove to be post-conflict situations. When such assumptions are ill-founded, UN forces often have to be reinforced, withdrawn, or occasionally rescued. In Sierra Leone, inadequate UN forces were inserted under unduly optimistic assumptions, encountered significant challenges, and had over five hundred troops captured and held hostage by Revolutionary United Front forces. Decisive action by the British helped revive the mission. An elite British military task force defeated Revolutionary United Front fighters near Freetown and captured the group’s leader, Foday Sankoh.47

Second, troop quality is uneven and has worsened as several Western powers have followed US practice and become less willing to commit their armed forces to UN operations. Law enforcement and civil personnel are not uniformly competent. Even in the successful UN mission in East Timor, civilian police officers were of mixed quality and virtually none of the international police spoke the local language.48 The failure of UN missions in both Somalia and Bosnia, when contrasted with the more robust US-led multinational efforts that succeeded them, led to a general conclusion that, although the UN might be up to peacekeeping, peace enforcement was beyond the organization’s capacity. This conclusion, not uncongenial to the UN’s own leadership, is nevertheless belied by that organization’s performance thirty years earlier in the former Belgian Congo.

While the UN can and does engage in peace enforcement operations, there are practical limitations on its capacity in this field. When a nation-building operation requires a forced entry, a coalition of the willing led by a global or

47 Paris, At War’s End at 223 (cited in note 18); Michael Chege, Sierra Leone: The State that Came Back from the Dead, 25 Wash Q 3, 147–60 (2002).
48 Interview with Peter Galbraith, Director for Political, Constitutional, and Electoral Affairs for UNTAET, Washington, DC (Jan 9, 2004); See also Smith, Peacekeeping in East Timor, 74–75 (cited in note 23).
regional power is generally necessary.\textsuperscript{49} As international relations realists have long noted, great powers are pivotal global and regional actors because of their superior military and economic capabilities.\textsuperscript{50} These capabilities are important for operations where forced entry is required. Core combat forces from the Australian Defense Forces, for example, led the International Force East Timor, and had conducted extensive training in counterinsurgency operations and the disarmament and detention of hostile individuals and groups.\textsuperscript{51} Fully capable countries include only a handful of militaries, such as the US, United Kingdom, France, and Australia. While numerous developing countries have contributed forces to UN operations, most lack the training, financial resources, and expeditionary capabilities to act as the lead military actor. As the Brahimi report concluded:

Some countries have provided soldiers without rifles, or with rifles but no helmets, or with helmets but no flak jackets, or with no organic transport capability (trucks or troops carriers). Troops may be untrained in peacekeeping operations, and in any case the various contingents in an operation are unlikely to have trained or worked together before. Some units may have no personnel who can speak the mission language. . . . This must stop.\textsuperscript{52}

Third, all components of the mission arrive late—police and civil administrators arrive even more slowly than soldiers. An inevitable characteristic of nation-building operations is the time required to deploy personnel, collect pledges of financial assistance, and turn these pledges into actual payments. These delays translate into on-the-ground delays in terms of employing contractors, building facilities, or providing equipment. Having on hand a reserve fund and stocks of appropriate equipment and supplies, along with a framework of contracts with suppliers of critical services and infrastructures, could mitigate these problems. Another answer lies in modifying peacetime accounting and contracting regulations to take account of the urgent security requirements of post-conflict situations. Even if the political commitment is available to deploy police or judicial personnel, or the funds are available to

\textsuperscript{49} See Fearon and Laitin, 28 Intl Security at 5–43 (cited in note 3).


\textsuperscript{51} See Ryan, \textit{Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks} (cited in note 22); Ryan, 9 Intl Peacekeeping 23 (cited in note 22); Marten, \textit{Enforcing the Peace} at 140–43 (cited in note 40).

deploy contractors, there is a lag in the speed with which international personnel can be deployed. Funding, equipment, and supplies are relatively easy to arrange ahead of time. But significant effort is necessary to identify and mobilize professionals into post-conflict situations.

Fourth, coordination problems among donor states, international organizations, NGOs, and host states have become an unfortunate trademark of UN missions.\textsuperscript{53} The UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change concluded that “at the field level, many different elements of the United Nations system and the broader international community engage in some form of peacebuilding, but they work too slowly and without adequate coordination.”\textsuperscript{54} Poor coordination can have serious consequences during nation-building missions. It can weaken fragile states by scattering assistance among an assortment of projects or by failing to sufficiently tackle key priorities. The number of actors involved in nation-building has increased exponentially since the end of the Cold War, making coordination more challenging. One way to improve coordination is the careful crafting of organizational arrangements to help overcome collective action problems.\textsuperscript{55}

There are a variety of potential arrangements: a lead nation, such as the US in Japan and Iraq; a lead international institution, such as the UN in Kosovo and East Timor; regular host nation consultations with major donors; and a lead nation or institution for specific sectors, such as the approach in Afghanistan.

A lead nation or institution such as the UN is usually most effective to coordinate planning and funding, especially when the host government has little national capacity. It can be difficult to agree on a lead actor, since donor states, international institutions, and NGOs generally have different priorities, interests, and strategies. But a lead actor is critical to maximize command and control, efficiency, and effectiveness. This can include coordinating and overseeing the undertaking of joint assessments, preparing shared strategies, coordinating political engagement, establishing joint offices, and introducing simplified arrangements such as common reporting and financial requirements. Crucial to the task of establishing a lead actor is “buy-in” from the host government, and support from key donors, international organizations, and NGOs. The creation of a Peace Building Commission, recommended in the Secretary-General’s recent report on UN reform, should serve to strengthen coordination between the UN and Bretton Woods systems of institutions. One of the Commission’s

\textsuperscript{53} United Nations Development Group and World Bank, \textit{An Operational Note on Transitional Results Matrices: Using Results-Based Frameworks in Fragile States} (2005); Fearon and Laitin, \textit{28 Intl Security} at 5–43 (cited in note 3).

\textsuperscript{54} United Nations, \textit{A More Secure World} at 61, ¶ 226 (cited in note 1).

primary functions is to improve coordination with such organizations as the World Bank and IMF in the aftermath of major war by creating more efficient institutional arrangements, information-sharing processes, and funding mechanisms.\footnote{United Nations, \textit{In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All}, UN Doc A/59/2005 at 31–32, 37, 45, 58, 61 (2005); United Nations, \textit{Addendum 2: Peacebuilding Commission}, UN Doc A/59/2005Add.2 (2005).}

In addition, there is a strong need to consolidate lessons learned and best practices for coordination. NGOs and other organizations have worked out effective ad hoc organizational arrangements at national and local levels to improve coordination. One important aspect should be to coordinate with those international institutions or non-governmental organizations that were involved in development efforts before and during the conflict. Such experience provides an invaluable understanding of the country and the major challenges within the country. Since reliable statistical information on security, economic, health, and other conditions is often unavailable during the initial post-conflict phase, prior knowledge is crucial. Bilateral donors, international institutions, and non-governmental organizations should utilize actors with in-country experience to assist in coordination and planning.

V. CONCLUSION

Nation-building is difficult work. Challenges encountered by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq put earlier UN failings in some perspective. UN-led nation-building operations have been smaller, cheaper, and, at least by our sampling, more successful than American operations. But US-led operations have taken place under more demanding circumstances. Experience demonstrates that neither the US nor the UN is yet fully equipped for these tasks, and both have much to learn. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that despite these shortcomings, UN-led and US-led nation-building efforts have saved millions of lives and freed many societies from war and oppression.\footnote{Human Security Centre, \textit{The Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century}, available online at <http://www.humansecurityreport.info/> (visited Nov 19, 2005).}

Although the US and UN styles of nation-building are distinguishable, they are also highly interdependent. It is rare that both are not involved. In Somalia, for instance, a US-led coalition rescued a faltering UN-led operation, and UN-led troops came to the rescue of beleaguered American soldiers. Blue-helmeted UN troops covered the American withdrawal and remained in Somalia for another year until finally the US Navy and Marines returned to extract the remaining UN forces. In Haiti, UN-led missions have twice relieved US-led intervention forces over the past decade. In Bosnia, the UN supplied the police
components of a NATO-led peacekeeping mission. In Kosovo, the UN and NATO divided responsibility for securing and governing that territory between them. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the US turned to the UN to oversee the process of government formation and the organization of elections.

Assuming adequate consensus among Security Council members on the purpose for any intervention, the UN provides the most suitable institutional framework for most nation-building missions. It has a comparatively low cost structure, a comparatively high success rate, and the greatest degree of international legitimacy. Many options are likely to be too expensive, such as coalitions led by the US, EU, or NATO. Or they are likely to be less capable than the UN, such as coalitions led by the African Union, the Organization of American States, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The more expensive options are best suited to missions that require forced entry or more than twenty thousand troops. The less capable options are suited to missions where there is a regional, but not a global, consensus for action or where the US simply does not care enough to foot 25 percent of the bill.

Today, both UN and US nation-building efforts stand at near historic highs. Demand for UN-led operations far exceeds the available supply, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. US armed forces, by far the world’s most powerful, also find themselves badly overstretched by the demands of such missions. A decade ago, nation-building became a term of opprobrium, leading a significant segment of American opinion to reject the whole concept. Ten years later, nation-building appears ever more clearly as a responsibility that neither the UN nor the US can escape.