

# The State of the Art on the Art of State Building



*Michael Wesley*

From Sierra Leone to Solomon Islands, developed powers have undertaken a range of state-building interventions in the early years of this century. Two influences appear to shape the emerging state of the art on state building: conceptions about the nature of the state in the developed world; and the postcolonial sensitivities and practicalities that attend the project of intervention. After examining the imperatives driving interventions in fragile states, I explore the remarkable consistency among approaches to state building applied by different states and coalitions in different contexts. I then examine the imperatives driving this convergence of approaches and conclude with some observations tracing the difficulties of contemporary interventions to the current dominant approach to state building. **KEYWORDS:** state building, intervention, fragile states, development, transnational security, sovereignty.

**T**he past decade has seen the states and international agencies hesitantly assume an increasingly hands-on role in trying to stabilize states beset by or prone to internal conflict. The imperative of dealing with “weak,” “failing,” or “fragile” states, and the reluctance with which most interventions are undertaken, has led commentators to coin a range of terms, from “Empire-lite”<sup>1</sup> to “neotrusteeship” and “postmodern imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> Yet these terms suggest a coherence of policy approach that belies the ad hoc pattern of interventions; despite several attempts to quantify state dysfunction and to rank fragile states,<sup>3</sup> there is little evidence that the project of state building is being approached in a systematic manner, that those states at most risk of collapse are being prioritized.<sup>4</sup> But while there is no apparent logic to *where* interventions occur, there is an emerging pattern to *how* state building is being undertaken by Western states and Western-dominated development agencies.<sup>5</sup> I contend that there are two influences shaping the emerging state of the art on state building: conceptions about the nature of the state in the minds of policymakers in the developed world; and the postcolonial sensitivities and practicalities that attend the project of state-building interventions.

My argument proceeds in four parts. After examining the imperatives driving interventions in fragile states, I explore the remarkable consistency among approaches to state building applied by different states and coalitions in different contexts. I then examine the imperatives driving this convergence

of approaches and conclude with some observations tracing the difficulties of contemporary interventions to the current dominant approach to state building.

### **The Rise of International Concern with Fragile States**

The stampede to decolonization between 1945 and 1975 was underpinned by several dominant norms. One was that, as imperial administrations packed up and left, the state form would take their place, leaving imperial demarcations unchallenged. Another was what Robert Jackson called the doctrine of “negative sovereignty”: that these new states were given international assurance of their status as sovereign states irrespective of their capacity to govern their people and territory as a viable state unit.<sup>6</sup> Granted sovereign status and at least in theory freed from the pressures of predatory power politics, it was expected that, in time, the internal attributes of state function and control—Jackson’s “positive sovereignty”—would develop within new states. “Modernization theory” gave voice to this teleology: the widespread expectation that, given the requisite resources and advice, economic development and political maturity would come to postcolonial states along the same trajectories as had developed in Western Europe and North America. Negative sovereignty, postcolonial sensitivities, Cold War geopolitics, and modernization theory expectations combined to produce a disinclination in developed states to take too close an interest in the internal affairs of developing states—confining themselves to regime change when client states’ foreign policy alignment started to waver.<sup>7</sup>

But by the 1980s, this tolerant agnosticism had begun to wane amid growing convictions that the inadequacies or pathologies within postcolonial states had an impact beyond the borders of the states concerned, and that there were perhaps unacceptable costs associated with waiting for new states to develop of their own accord. Humanitarian tragedies, rooted in smoldering conflicts and the venality of indigenous elites, became significant causes among Western publics. As the performance gap between successful and unsuccessful former colonies grew, the conviction began to spread among academics and officials that the problems of the worst-performing states were not transitional but structural. The developed world and development agencies moved through stages of concern about the economic management, quality of democracy, protection of human rights, and standards of governance in developing states.<sup>8</sup> Over time, as it has grown increasingly concerned about the internal workings of developing states, the developed world has become more insistent and interventionary in its responses: from advice, to aid conditionality, to direct physical intervention.

The end of the Cold War offered the opportunity to address a range of conflicts within developing countries. The instrument of choice was the

United Nations, which oversaw cease-fires and brokered peace agreements in Namibia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia, and Western Sahara. UN missions enacted increasingly complex mandates, from supervising the disarmament and demobilization of combatants to overseeing elections, conducting postconflict reconstruction, and supporting the development of state institutions. Despite the ambition of their mandates, the early post-Cold War interventions remained true to the original intention of UN peacekeeping missions: that it was the task of the intervention to “hold the ring” while an indigenous peace agreement emerged, or to help implement a peace agreement that had been already hammered out among the belligerents.<sup>9</sup> Even the ill-fated interventions in Somalia and Bosnia were conceived in line with this model as attempts to ameliorate humanitarian crises and provide a measure of stability while the belligerents were encouraged to come to a peace agreement.

Four developments combined to increase the urgency of responses to violence-prone developing states. One was sheer impatience with the obduracy of belligerents in the Balkans and a frustration that the international community could be kept waiting while humanitarian atrocities continued. The NATO air campaigns against Serbia in September 1995 and March 1999 saw the West’s policy of “holding the ring” while a peace agreement emerged shift toward imposing a cease-fire and coercing the belligerents toward a peace agreement. Concurrently, a new advocacy of muscular cosmopolitanism developed within academic communities and international organizations. Scholars argued strongly that humanitarian crises imposed exceptions to injunctions to nonintervention and sovereignty,<sup>10</sup> while a series of UN reports, from *Agenda for Peace* to the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, advanced the argument that sovereignty is conditional on the discharge of certain responsibilities by the state and that the international community has a “responsibility to protect” those suffering from humanitarian abuses.<sup>11</sup>

The second development was a growing awareness and discussion of what many in the development community began to call the “aid paradox”: that wealth, productivity, and levels of poverty had worsened in a large number of developing states despite many years of development aid. Spearheaded by the World Bank and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), development officials began a series of studies and discussions intended to increase the effectiveness of aid. As these considerations progressed, they increasingly focused on the internal governance of developing states, and a growing consensus emerged, culminating in the World Bank’s landmark 1997 *World Development Report*.<sup>12</sup> But initial policy responses, which attempted to improve governance through aid conditionality, had a net negative effect. Over time, the linking of aid to governance reforms had the

effect of starving the poorest states of development aid. Britain's Department for International Development estimates that "even taking account of their poor performance, fragile states have received 43% less aid than would have been appropriate given the extent of poverty within them."<sup>13</sup> Encouraging governance reforms through conditions and incentives was clearly making things worse for the poorest states.

The third development was the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998. A run on the Thai baht in July 1997 became a regional financial contagion that brought many of Asia's most dynamic economies to their knees and threatened to tip the global economy into a bout of chronic deflation. The Asian crisis caused a broad perceptual shift in thinking about globalization, alerting academics and policymakers to the fact that advancing economic and communications integration offered not only prosperity but vulnerability as well. Many of the diagnoses of the crisis argued that it was weak and corrupt governance within the affected states that had driven the contagion. The renewed focus on governance was accompanied by the implication that poor governance was not just a local concern, when an increasingly integrated global economy could see the results of local turbulence cascading through world markets. These economic concerns soon extended to the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, unchecked migration, and growing concern with climate change.<sup>14</sup>

The fourth development, the September 11 attacks, reinforced the underlying perception that poorly governed states constituted weaknesses in the fabric of international society, and that the developed world had a considerable self-interest in helping strengthen their governance capacities. Al-Qaida's decision to base itself in Afghanistan gave birth to the failed state as a vogue term; according to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), "the events of September 11, 2001 profoundly demonstrated the global reach of state failure."<sup>15</sup> The "failed" or "fragile" state shifted security thinking from focusing on concentrations of state power to worrying about zones of state powerlessness, where transnational threats can incubate and transit while exploiting the interdependence of a globalized world to attack developed societies. It simply reinforced thinking that fragile states could no longer be dealt with at arm's length with aid and advice: there was a new imperative for developed states to address the most dangerous sites of state weakness.

### **The Imperatives of State Building**

The rise of concern with governance and fragile states has seen the traditional term *nation building* replaced by *state building*. The concept of nation building harks back to the beginnings of the decolonization process, to the belief that new governments would build not only infrastructure, economies,

and political institutions, but also an emotional attachment to the new state among the often disparate ethnic groupings of former colonies. Nation building denotes a big, complex, and interlinked project, a shaping of economy, polity, and society into a condition of positive sovereignty. The concept of state building is much more narrowly defined. It focuses closely on the institutions of the state—primarily the bureaucracy—with a view to increasing their integrity and efficiency and shaping them in ways that will have positive effects on the economy, society, and politics. State building sends a strong signal that the project is strictly limited in scope and technical in nature. It advertises the intent that the intervention will either leave local political processes and elites intact or replace them quickly through a transparent electoral process. State building denotes both a willingness of the international community to impose peace and oversee some form of conflict resolution, and a desire to disengage as quickly as possible from political and social processes and focus on the technocratic task of reforming state institutions.

The concept of state building carries within it assumptions of what a completed state looks like, that in the end “all states are constituted and function in the same way.”<sup>16</sup> A survey of developed countries’ position papers on fragile states reveals a remarkable similarity among their conceptions of state function and priorities for addressing state failure.<sup>17</sup> With minor variations in emphasis, state-building frameworks concentrate on what are argued to be the key themes of state function: security and the rule of law; transparent and efficient bureaucratic institutions; the provision of essential services to the population; the operation of democratic processes and norms; and the fostering of the conditions for market-led development. These frameworks mirror what interventions seek to achieve in practice. The operations in Kosovo, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Liberia, and Solomon Islands have been given mandates to successively prioritize those functions they see as most crucial to state functionality, and to use progress on the more basic functions as benchmarks for concentrating more heavily on the next phase.<sup>18</sup> This tiered approach has three broad phases: the first concentrates on security, order, and the provision of humanitarian assistance; the second focuses on building effective, efficient, and transparent systems of public administration; and the third concentrates on strengthening the rule of law, promoting democratic processes and norms, and fostering the conditions for free-market-driven growth. In parallel with the development of a common “recipe” for state building, various international agencies and NGOs have developed a range of measures designed to help measure progress on the various aspects of state building.<sup>19</sup>

Four broad influences have driven this convergence of approaches to state building. One is what Michael Ignatieff discerns as a form of imperial narcissism at the heart of the state-building enterprise, a “desire to imprint our values, civilisation and achievements on the souls, bodies and institutions

of other people,”<sup>20</sup> and a belief that making fragile states more like developed, Western states will improve the lot of their people. Understandings of properly functioning states are drawn from self-understandings and commitments held by policymakers in the developed world. There is evidence of the strong influence of Max Weber’s conception of the elements of the state, as well as dominant understandings about the process of the emergence of the modern state through the stages of the consolidation of force and the imposition of order; the transition from coercive to administrative capacity; and, finally, the evolution of a collective civic identity and broad understandings of political legitimacy and civil rights centered on the state.<sup>21</sup> State building rests on the beliefs that the state as a political form can be transferred across all cultures and contexts and, crucially, that the long and bloody process of state building experienced in Europe and North America can be both truncated and sanitized by those who hold the blueprints of the final product. The philosophy of state building is that external actors will initially supply what are taken to be the crucial attributes of the state—coercion, capacity, legitimacy, and capital—with the intention of transferring these attributes of “stateness” to an indigenous sovereign center of political accountability over time.<sup>22</sup>

A second factor relates to time. Ignatieff argues that “effective imperial power requires controlling the subject people’s sense of time.”<sup>23</sup> The distinctive form of modern state building emerges from the need to manipulate the sense of time of key stakeholders in different, and often contradictory, ways. On the one hand, there are audiences who require assurances that the intervention has clear time limits. Publics in both intervening and intervened-in states are sensitive to open-ended commitments and overtones of neocolonialism, respectively. Governments contemplating weak states are faced with what James Fearon and David Laitin see as a classic collective action problem:

Given the dangers posed by collapsed states and rogue regimes in a world with WMD, open economies, and easy international travel, all would benefit from political order and responsible (if possible, democratic) governments in the periphery. But the costs to provide effective support for political order and democracy after a state collapses often exceed the expected benefits for any one power.<sup>24</sup>

The Brahimi Commission on United Nations peacekeeping found that the willingness of states to endorse interventions is rarely matched by a commitment to a comprehensive project.<sup>25</sup> To gain the support of governments for state building, officials usually must reassure them that the interventions they support are limited in scope and have clear exit strategies linked to progress against measurable performance indicators. Another reason for signaling the finite nature of the intervention is to discourage the particular form

of moral hazard associated with state building: that the greater efficiency of service provision achieved by the intervention will be a disincentive to the local population in developing its own capacities for service delivery.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, state-building missions must send signals that they are determined to stay for as long as it takes to get the job done. Leading officials in state-building missions report that their ability to build local “constituencies for reform” depends on their ability to reassure the population that the intervention is not a Band-Aid response but is committed to the long-term improvement of governance.<sup>27</sup> It is also necessary to create the illusion of permanence among those in the political elite who oppose the intervention, who would be encouraged by a clear exit date simply to sit out the intervention, unreformed, and resume old modes of operation after its departure.

A third consideration is an aversion to appearances of neocolonialism. A narrow focus on the technocratic tasks of reforming bureaucratic institutions has the benefit of avoiding, as much as is possible by an intervention, resonances of neocolonialism. The state-building mission, by demonstrating that it wishes to operate alongside an indigenous, representative government—either left intact by the intervention or rapidly constituted through a representative process sponsored by the intervention—sends a clear signal that it is there to render technical advice, not to meddle in the politics of the society. As I argue in the following section, remaining apolitical is easier in theory than in the messy reality of a state-building context. Many officials involved in state building also believe that the task of imparting efficient bureaucratic practices and redesigning institutions is much more achievable than trying to reform the processes of political representation and power in many societies. And in the context of presenting home governments and local political elites with clear exit strategies, it is regarded as being much easier to develop performance indicators measuring the progress of bureaucratic reforms than of political reforms.

One final mechanism of convergence comes from within the modalities of state-building interventions. The steady rate of state-building interventions since 1999 has generated a cadre of international planning and operational personnel who move from one intervention to the next, applying familiar diagnoses of the problems of state failure and similar frameworks of response to often dissimilar situations.<sup>28</sup> There is also an active, conscious process of transmission of the lessons of state building between states and international organizations, as the various fragile state centers set up within the OECD and national governments<sup>29</sup> have developed regular processes of information and research exchange. This convergence of understandings and frameworks has become increasingly important as more state-building interventions are undertaken by nonconventional coalitions of agencies and states, often without the central policy coordination capacities of traditional UN missions. While the UN has led missions such as those in East Timor

and the Democratic Republic of Congo, regional organizations such as the African Union and the European Union have led missions to Burundi and Sudan, and Macedonia, respectively; “coalitions of the willing” have been formed to undertake pacification and state building in Solomon Islands and Haiti; and individual countries such as Australia, France, and the United Kingdom have intervened in Papua New Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and Sierra Leone, respectively.<sup>30</sup> Another emerging practice is for regional powers to lead “hybrid operations,” which combine elements of the United Nations, regional alliances such as NATO, and other willing states; the missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo are examples.<sup>31</sup> These are an attempt to combine “critical mass” in the form of highly effective military contributions with the legitimacy supplied by international organizations and a range of smaller, more neutral states.

### **Approaches to State Building**

The understandings about the state held by those who plan and execute state-building missions are also shaped by their own experiences as officials who have participated in the two decades of reforms that most Western states have undergone. These reforms have seen the institutions and practices of the Keynesian welfare state pared back toward a model of what has been termed the “regulatory state.”<sup>32</sup> The regulatory state withdraws government from the economy and many areas of service provision, shifting the role of the state from that of generating social and economic outcomes to that of establishing, through regulation, the appropriate conditions for social, political, and economic forces to generate desirable outcomes. Increasingly, “government departments (or nominated agencies or self-regulatory bodies) now regulate the provision of services (setting down standards, monitoring for compliance and enforcing) through the instruments of statutory regulation and contract.”<sup>33</sup> In this conception, the state becomes an independent variable, shaping desirable outcomes indirectly through establishing parameters of acceptable conduct and manipulating incentives. The state is conceived as separate from the distinct spheres of the economy, politics, and society, each of which, in Friedrich Hayek’s terms, are seen to be constituted as “spontaneous orders,” with an inner, autonomous dynamism.<sup>34</sup> The philosophy of the regulatory state is that government’s role is to foster the inherent dynamism within the economic, political, and social spheres in positive directions, not to attempt to replace those forces or compete with them in creating desired outcomes.

The imperatives of constructing the regulatory state are even more pressing in an age of globalization. The danger of cascading turbulence, be it economic contagion or the spread of violent jihad, increases the imperative to bring the standards of regulation to uniform, high standards across all



jurisdictions. Well-regulated states will prosper in the age of globalization,<sup>35</sup> while the “disconnected” will fall further behind;<sup>36</sup> meanwhile, malevolent transnational actors will flow naturally to the low points of regulation.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, both by experience and by what they see as the imperatives of international security, state-building interventions are inclined to construct regulatory states within their “patients.” Getting the regulatory state “right” is seen as the key to achieving all other objectives, and this informs the patterns and sequencing of objectives in state-building interventions.

Security is given absolute priority, reflecting a Weberian understanding of the essence of stateness as the monopoly of the means of legitimate violence and a Hobbesian belief that a pervasive state of insecurity makes all other human activity impossible. The imperative of intervening states and organizations is to protect their own personnel first and foremost, especially in situations where sections of the population may have an incentive to attack foreign personnel. Violence is also the most visible manifestation of state failure: making rapid progress in quelling instability and disarming militants is important for mission morale and the domestic legitimacy of the exercise in the intervening states. In the Balkans and elsewhere, the security mandate has carried implicitly the requirement to keep the state together against the will of secessionist groups, asserting not just peace but peaceful multiculturalism against antagonists with an interest in violent ethnic separation.

Humanitarian relief is also a pressing concern, reflecting both a belief that a basic state function is the welfare of its citizens as well as a concern to end human suffering. Missions are also keen to deliver a rapid “peace dividend” to a pacified society, in the form of obvious benefits accruing to the whole population from the cessation of hostilities, to forestall public disillusion and discontent that can complicate the mission’s operating environment and even see a return to disorder.<sup>38</sup> There is a realization, however, that humanitarian assistance is a short-term solution: one scholar has observed that Bosnians have received more assistance per capita than Europe under the Marshall Plan, but this has still not resulted in a stable or effective state that would be able to oversee its welfare on a sustainable basis.<sup>39</sup> This often leads to an impatience to move on to the second state-building phase of the intervention, leading at times to a diversion of resources and attention from the tasks of humanitarian relief.

The second priority is to build effective and transparent systems of public administration. Francis Fukuyama attributes this to a belief that it is state strength, “the ability to enact statutes and to frame and execute policies; to administer public business with relative efficiency; to control graft, corruption and bribery; to maintain high levels of transparency and accountability in governmental institutions; and most importantly, to enforce laws,” that is crucial to effective state functioning.<sup>40</sup> This phase often sees officials from international agencies and developing countries placed both in line positions

within the recipient state's bureaucracy and in advisory roles, with the intention that this will lead not only to the imparting of basic administrative skills and culture, but also to enduring institutional links. In other situations, such as the missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor, administrative functions are discharged by the mission itself, and locals are trained and recruited to take over administrative functions. Significant emphasis is given to inculcating public servants with bureaucratic culture and knowledge of administrative regulations and role delimitations. Training is provided in merit selection procedures; effective leadership skills; the tracking, monitoring, and storage of documents and records; and communications within the public service and between the public service and political leaders. There is a strong focus on institutional design, or redesign, reflecting the belief that institutions shape outcomes. Bolstering the strength, efficiency, and integrity of the bureaucracy is seen to be the best way to stabilize the state against volatility within politics, society, and the economy and to foster long-term stability and reform in those spheres. Combating corruption is also a priority. Action against corruption is thought to have a supply-side component—"improving investigation and enforcement capacities (such as audit), strengthening key government systems (such as procurement) and building a professional bureaucracy"—and a demand-side component—"supporting community organisations and the media that create demand for transparent and accountable government processes, decision making and delivery of basic services."<sup>41</sup>

The third priority is strengthening the rule of law, promoting democratic processes and norms, and fostering the conditions for free-market-driven growth. Following the OECD Development Assistance Committee Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States, this has both a supply-side and a demand-side component: "State-building rests on three pillars: the capacity of state structures to perform core functions; their legitimacy and accountability; and ability to provide an enabling environment for strong economic performance to generate incomes, employment and domestic revenues. Demand for good governance from civil society is a vital component of a healthy state."<sup>42</sup> On the supply side, the promotion of democratic processes and norms is driven by a focus on designing and writing constitutions and setting up safe, transparent, and efficient electoral processes. On the demand side, civic education programs are intended to develop a broad "constituency for reform," informed about what elected representatives are supposed to deliver and empowered to demand their rights as citizens. A parallel pre-occupation is to build local "ownership" of reform, ensuring that people and groups acquire a stake in building and reforming state capacities. The difficulty here is that this process can become highly political.<sup>43</sup>

Another strong preference is for designing appropriate regulatory frameworks for private sector-led economic growth. According to the OECD

Development Assistance Committee Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States, a key pillar of state functionality is an “ability to provide an enabling environment for strong economic performance to generate incomes, employment and domestic revenues.”<sup>44</sup> In Fukuyama’s schema, this involves restricting state scope with the intention of removing state impediments to free-market growth.<sup>45</sup> This, as well as programs designed to improve government financial oversight and audit procedures, and treasury, inland revenue, customs, payroll, and debt management processes, are intended to build market confidence and stimulate inflows of foreign investment to the local economy.

Imbuing the whole menu of state-building actions is a liberal-materialist understanding of human motivation and the role of the state. State legitimacy, the attachment of the majority of citizens to the state, is seen as flowing ultimately from the state’s effectiveness, “the capability of the government to work with society to assure the provision of order and public goods and services.”<sup>46</sup> Through its reformed governance institutions, the state will acquire “performance” legitimacy over time, particularly among a population that has developed numerous “constituencies for reform,” with clear ideas of what they are entitled to expect from government. The state as the ensurer of basic service provision is paired with a population focused on rights and welfare to create a dynamic of reform that will build a strong state.

### **Consequences and Implications**

Despite the clarity of the state-building blueprint and the investment of billions of dollars over years in state building, there is little evidence that the new, hands-on state-building project is any more effective than the old, arm’s-length approaches to nation building. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the state-building missions face rising insurgent violence. In East Timor and Solomon Islands, until recently considered “poster children” for successful state building, unresolved tensions led to serious rioting in early 2006. Bosnia and Kosovo appear no closer to self-administration than they did in 1999, and the state of the Democratic Republic of Congo appears as fragile as it was before the original intervention. The problems encountered by the state-building project offer an important lens on the adequacy of Western conceptions of the state and the challenges of state consolidation in the post-colonial and postcommunist world.

A common theme that emerges from the track records of state-building operations is that they remain vulnerable to ongoing turbulence in the political sphere, despite intervention efforts to build stable systems of public administration and constituencies for reform. From Iraq and Afghanistan to Kosovo and Bosnia, intervention forces are trapped by the realization that if they withdraw, unreconciled hatreds in the political sphere, unresolved

resentments in the economic sphere, and unreformed traditions in the social sphere will tear apart the imposed order and state frameworks. The intention of remaining aloof from politics while concentrating on technocratic reforms has proved unrealistic.<sup>47</sup> Even seemingly technocratic tasks confront international administrators with essentially political decisions: the nature and basis of elections; which pressure groups to consult; the reintegration or de facto separation of ethnic communities; school curricula; degrees of public ownership of enterprises; the status of women; and so on.<sup>48</sup> However technocratic their intention, state-building missions inevitably find themselves factored into local rivalries. As agents of reform, interventions cannot fail to incur the opposition of those in the political elite that were benefiting from the previous system.

The crucial failure in the state-building blueprint would appear to lie in its very conception of the state as an independent variable, ideally divorced from politics, economics, and society. The “failing state” label tends to delegitimize local politics as venal and disruptive, as the problem to be addressed.<sup>49</sup> As a consequence, the process of state building relies heavily on the expectations of international agencies and officials rather than on working with indigenous understandings and expectations of political authority.<sup>50</sup> To be sustainable, agreement on the nature of the state must arise from existing social forces and understandings, from “real interests and clashes of interest which lead to the establishment of mechanisms and organisational rules and procedures capable of resolving and diffusing disagreements.”<sup>51</sup> Rather than treating local politics as the source of political institutions, international advisers rely on their own political understandings and commitments and their belief in the power of institutions to shape political behavior, rather than vice versa.<sup>52</sup>

Implicit in Western understandings of the functioning state and the failed state are beliefs that there are legitimate cleavages within society—such as those that separate people on the basis of socioeconomic status and interest—and illegitimate cleavages, such as those based on ethnic or religious identity. Competition between groups based on ethnic or religious identifiers tends to be seen as destabilizing factionalism to be suppressed by the law-and-order elements of the intervention rather than as natural expressions of society to be integrated into understandings of the state and processes of government.

It also appears that the process of building the state’s “performance legitimacy” as a provider of basic services has been less successful than was hoped. State-building interventions have varied widely in both the scope of state functions and attributes addressed, and the level of authority assumed by intervening agencies over these functions—from the extensive in scope and authority (Kosovo, East Timor) to the highly limited (Papua New Guinea, Haiti). None have been able to escape broad popular perceptions

that the very necessity of intervention corrodes the legitimacy of the indigenous state. Among Solomon Islanders, for instance, there is strong support for the intervention's ability to improve the condition of ordinary people, as well as a widespread belief that it is only the mission's presence that is keeping the largely unreformed state and security institutions in check. It appears highly unrealistic to expect local institutions of state to compete for performance legitimacy with large, well-funded interventions—even if the interventions themselves have no intention of entering such a competition.

Whether a state can come to be seen as legitimate solely or even predominantly on the basis of its effectiveness in providing basic services to its population also needs to be questioned. The bitterness of struggles over state control and definition are hardly likely to arise over an institution that is primarily a provider of services. Rather, legitimate states are seen by their societies as expressions of, in Eric Voegelin's terms, either an existential, or a transcendent, or an immanent truth.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the process of state building can never be simply a technocratic exercise of providing institutional design and imparting sound bureaucratic techniques. It is mistaken to conceive of the state as separate from the political, economic, and social spheres; a legitimate, stable state can only emerge from the dominant understandings, compromises, and categories arising from within these spheres of human activity. Imposing a conception of state arising from the understandings and compromises of other societies promises to leave behind little more than an anemic, imposed structure that is vulnerable to both disruption from the inside and exploitation from the outside. This does not bode well for the success of contemporary state-building missions.

The design of effective responses to fragile states demands a rethinking of the dominant preconceptions about the state held by most officials in development agencies and Western states, and a fundamental rethinking of the nature of the state and the processes that attend its emergence and consolidation. The first step needs to be an acknowledgment that a broad variation in the state form already exists and will continue to emerge in the coming decades. A bottom-up understanding of state formation—accepting that stable and effective states must emerge from within the traditions, compromises, and conflicts particular to the political, economic, and social spheres of each society—needs to replace a top-down belief that a single blueprint for effective state design can be exported and imposed at will. There are already signs that this realization is spreading among officials involved with state-building missions, who argue that much more needs to be understood about “context” when designing state-building interventions. The crisis of contemporary state-building missions may swing the pendulum back toward holding the ring—alleviating suffering and violence while an indigenous solution to conflict emerges—that characterized early post-Cold War interventions. Or the pendulum may swing in novel directions, combining a

reshaping of state institutions with deeper involvement in the shaping of local political processes. Such approaches will undoubtedly be prolonged and frustrating and provoke all of the impatience of developed democracies, but the record shows that they have a greater success rate than current approaches to state building. 🌐

## Notes

Michael Wesley is professor of international relations and director of the Griffith Asia Institute at Griffith University, Australia. He is editor of the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. His most recent books are *Energy Security in Asia* and *The Howard Paradox: Australian Diplomacy in Asia 1996–2006*. The author wishes to thank the officials with whom he spoke in the preparation of this article, as well as Victoria Wheeler, Sue Graves, Martin Griffiths, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions.

1. Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003).

2. James D. Fearon and David Laitin, "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States," *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004).

3. Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); "The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy* 149 (July–August 2005).

4. The World Bank's work on low-income states under stress has begun to develop an impressive database; see <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/STRATEGIES/EXTLICUS/0,,menuPK:511784~pagePK:64171540~piPK:64171528~theSitePK:511778,00.html>; see also the University of Maryland's Polity Project, available at [www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/data](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/data).

5. Japanese, Chinese, and Russian approaches to development aid rarely engage with development aid forums or institutions; these states appear to have much less concern with the conditions of governance in the states to which they give aid.

6. Robert H Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

7. The exception being France, which considered itself bound by continuing responsibilities to its former colonies, especially in West Africa, and continued a pattern of interventions there.

8. Michael Wesley, "Towards a Realist Ethics of Intervention," *Ethics and International Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2005).

9. Michael Wesley, *Casualties of the New World Order: The Causes of Failure of UN Missions to Civil Wars* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

10. See, for example, Nicholas J Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Matthew Perault, "Moving Beyond Kosovo: Envisioning a Coherent Theory of Humanitarian Intervention," *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 16 (Spring 2005); Clifford Orwin, "Humanitarian Military Intervention: Wars for the End of History?" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2006).

11. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*, Report of the Secretary-General (New York: United Nations, 1992); *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Develop-

ment Research Centre for ICSS, 2001); Ramesh Thakur, "Intervention, Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: Experiences from ICSS," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 3 (2002); Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Security, Solidarity and Sovereignty: The Grand Themes of UN Reform," *American Journal of International Law* 99, no. 3 (July 2005).

12. World Bank, *World Development Report 1997* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997).

13. United Kingdom Department for International Development, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively with Fragile States*, DFID, January 2005, p. 5.

14. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

15. US Agency for International Development (USAID), *Fragile States Strategy* (Washington, DC: USAID, January 2005), p. 1.

16. Morten Boas and Kathleen M. Jennings, "Insecurity and Development: The Rhetoric of the 'Failed State,'" *European Journal of Development Research* 17, no. 3 (September 2005).

17. Documents I have reviewed include those from the United States (USAID, *Fragile States Strategy*); the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Department for International Development, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively with Fragile States*); Canada (Canadian International Development Agency, *On the Road to Recovery: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Fragility: Guidelines for Effective Development Cooperation in Fragile States*, November 2005); and Australia (Ian Anderson, *Fragile States: What Is International Experience Telling Us?* AusAID, June 2005).

18. See, for example, the mandates contained in UN Security Council Resolutions 1244 (1999) on Kosovo; 1272 (1999) on East Timor; 1279 (1999) and 1565 (2004) on Democratic Republic of Congo; 1386 (2001) on Afghanistan; and 1497 (2003) on Liberia. On the Solomon Islands intervention, see *Policy Statement on the Offer by the Government of Australia of Strengthened Assistance to Solomon Islands, 2003* (Honiara: Solomon Islands Government, 2003).

19. For measuring progress on governance in general, see, for example, [www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/data.html](http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/data.html); for security and law and order, see [www.undp.org/governance/cd/documents/717.pdf](http://www.undp.org/governance/cd/documents/717.pdf), and [www4.worldbank.org/legal/legalr/access.html](http://www4.worldbank.org/legal/legalr/access.html); for provision of services and infrastructure, see <http://devdata.worldbank.org/query/default.htm>, [http://unstats.un.org/unsd.mi/mi\\_goals.asp](http://unstats.un.org/unsd.mi/mi_goals.asp), and [www.adb.org/Statistics/default.asp](http://www.adb.org/Statistics/default.asp); for a positive environment for market-led development, see [www.doingbusiness.org](http://www.doingbusiness.org), [www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi), and [www.heritage.org/research/features/index/downloads.cfm#scores](http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index/downloads.cfm#scores); for poverty relief, see [www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/CPR1%20FINAL/CPRfinCHI1stats.pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/CPR1%20FINAL/CPRfinCHI1stats.pdf).

20. Ignatieff, *Empire Lite*, p. 42.

21. Toby Dodge, "Iraq: The Contradictions of Exogenous State-Building in Historical Perspective," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2006).

22. Barnett R. Rubin, "Peace Building and State Building in Afghanistan: Constructing Sovereignty for Whose Security?" *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2006).

23. Ignatieff, *Empire Lite*, p. 121.

24. Fearon and Laitin, "Neocolonialism and the Problem of Weak States," p. 13.

25. United Nations, *Report of the Panel on Peace Operations* (New York: United Nations, 21 August 2000).

26. Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, "Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI Intervention in the Solomon Islands," *Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 2 (2005).

27. See, for example, Nick Warner, "Operation Helpem Fren: Rebuilding the

Nation of Solomon Islands,” speech presented at the National Security Conference, 23 March 2004, Canberra.

28. For example, Simon Chesterman, “East Timor in Transition: Self-Determination, State-Building and the United Nations,” *International Peacekeeping* 9, no.1 (Spring 2002): 62.

29. The OECD has set up a Fragile States secretariat within the Development Assistance Committee; the United States has appointed a special coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization; and Britain’s Department for International Development and Australia’s Agency for International Development have each set up Fragile States units.

30. See Jane Boulden, ed., *Dealing with Conflict in Africa: The United Nations and Regional Organisations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004); Michael Pugh and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidu, eds., *The United Nations and Regional Security: Europe and Beyond* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

31. Fearon and Laitin, “Neocolonialism and the Problem of Weak States,” p. 28.

32. See Cass R. Sunstein, “Paradoxes of the Regulatory State,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 57, no. 2 (Spring 1990); Giandomenico Majone, “The Rise of the Regulatory State in Europe,” *West European Politics* 17, no. 3 (1994); Martin Loughlin and Colin Scott, “The Regulatory State,” in Patrick Dunleavy, Ian Holliday, Andrew Gamble, and Gillian Peele, eds., *Developments in British Politics*, vol. 5 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); Michael Moran, “The Rise of the Regulatory State in Britain,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 54 (2001): 19–34.

33. Colin Scott, “Regulation in the Age of Governance: The Rise of the Post-Regulatory States,” National Europe Centre Paper No. 100, Australian National University, 6 June 2003, p. 4.

34. Friedrich A Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 52.

35. Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest, Australia’s Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, Canberra, April 2003.

36. Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map* (New York: Putnam, 2004).

37. Richard N. Haass, “The Changing Nature of Sovereignty,” lecture to Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, Washington, DC, 14 January 2003.

38. Manuel Ennes Ferreira, “Development and the Peace Dividend Insecurity Paradox in Angola,” *European Journal of Development Research* 17, no. 3 (September 2005).

39. Simon Chesterman, *You, the People: United Nations, Transitional Administration and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

40. Francis Fukuyama, “The Imperative of State-Building,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (April 2004): 22.

41. Australian Agency for International Development, *Annual Report, 2003–2004* (Canberra: AusAID, 2004), p. 6.

42. Development Assistance Committee, “Piloting the Principles for Good Engagement in Fragile States,” DAC Fragile States Concept Note, 17 June 2005.

43. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

44. Development Assistance Committee, “Piloting the Principles for Good Engagement in Fragile States.”

45. Fukuyama, “The Imperative of State-Building.”

46. USAID, *Fragile States Strategy*, p. 3.

47. Robert Jackson, “International Engagement in War-Torn Countries,” *Global Governance* 10, no.1 (January–March 2004): 27.



48. Caplan, "International Authority and State Building," p. 54.

49. Mark Duffield, "Social Reconstruction: The Reuniting of Aid and Politics," *Development* 48, no. 3 (2005).

50. For example, Tanja Hohe, "The Clash of Paradigms: International Administration and Local Political Legitimacy in East Timor," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 3 (December 2002); Chesterman, *You, the People*.

51. Chandler, "Peace Without Politics?" p. 309.

52. See David Chandler, *Constructing Global Civil Society: Morality and Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004).

53. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 49, 54, 59.

## To access international literature as diverse as the study of sociology, start here.

**CSA Sociological Abstracts** offers a world of relevant, comprehensive, and timely bibliographical coverage. Thousands of easily-searchable abstracts enhance discovery of full-text articles in thousands of key journals from 35 countries, books, and conference papers plus citations of dissertations and other media. This continuously-growing collection includes thousands of records that are updated monthly, with backfiles to 1952—plus scholar profiles, browsable indexes, and a thesaurus through the CSA Illumina® interface.

So whatever your quest, start here with CSA Sociological Abstracts.



### **The CSA Sociological Abstracts Discovery Prize.**

Tell us how CSA Sociological Abstracts has advanced teaching and learning at your institution, and you may win the CSA Sociological Abstracts Discovery Prize.

Visit: [info.csa.com/sociologicaldiscovery](http://info.csa.com/sociologicaldiscovery)

### **CSA Sociological Abstracts**

For a free trial, contact [pqsales@il.proquest.com](mailto:pqsales@il.proquest.com) or log onto [www.proquest.com/go/add](http://www.proquest.com/go/add) today.

**ProQuest®**  
Start here.