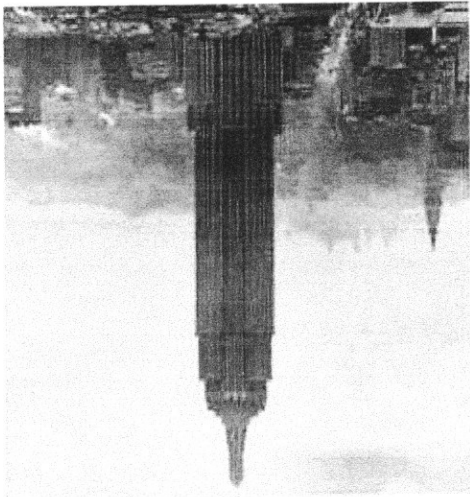


What types of lessons has the international community learned from past operations that can be applied to future state-building operations ?

FROM EMPIRE STATE-BUILDING TO SOLID STATE-BUILDING

1. Empire State-Building.

British troops first invaded what was to become Iraq in November 1914. At the League of Nations San Remo conference in April 1920 the British Empire committed itself to State-Building in Iraq. It was state-building by imperialistic outsiders ('Empire State-Building'): an external intervention into a foreign territory that attempted to legitimate itself in terms of betterment of the population it claimed to be helping. This exogenous state-building was 'top down': driven by dynamics, personnel and ideologies that had their origins completely outside the society they were operating in.¹



The British attempts to build a state in Iraq in the beginning of the 20th century were a complete fiasco. Throughout the 12 years of the process, the British High Commissioners charged with state-building were painfully aware of the constraints and the limitations that they felt themselves to be working within. Troop numbers were one of the central problems undermining the stability of Iraq. A major revolt in 1920 resulted in the 'complete and necessarily rapid transformation of the façade of the existing administration from British to Arab'.² The airplane was subsequently introduced as *deus ex machine* in the Iraq tragedy. *Hakumat al tayarra* (government by aircraft) became the midwife to the turbulent birth of the Iraq state.³

By the time of its independence in 1932 however, Iraq could neither defend itself against its neighboring states, nor impose order unassisted across its territory. The State the British had tried to

¹ Talentino, *The two faces of nation-building*, p 558.

² Slugett, *Britain in Iraq*, p 42

³ Toby Dodge, *Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective*, p. 193

build in Iraq turned out to be quasi-state, dependent for its survival on a system of international guarantees and protection⁴. In that sense it was the first postcolonial state, a harbinger of what was to become commonplace thereafter.

One year before Iraq's independence, the Empire State Building in New York City was officially opened. On May 1, 1931 United States President Herbert Hoover turned on the building's lights with the push of a button from Washington, D.C.



The building drawings for the Empire State Building were produced in just two weeks, using earlier designs for the Reynolds Building in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a basis. Even though the building was designed 'top down'⁵, the construction itself was done from the ground up and was based on solid foundations. Just 410 days after construction commenced, the building opened. The building's opening coincided with the Great Depression in the United States, and as a result much of its office space went unrented. The building would not become profitable until 1950. To this day, the empire state building remains a construction feat that invokes awe and wonder.

The US invasion of Iraq - shock and awe - in March 2003 marked the second time in Iraq's 85 years history that imperialistic intervention, justified in the name of state-building, has failed to deliver on the promise of creating stable, sustainable and democratic institutions.⁶ Shock and awe, technically known as rapid dominance, is a military doctrine based on the use of power overwhelming, dominant battlefield awareness, dominant maneuvers, and spectacular displays of force to paralyze an adversary's perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight.⁷ After the enemy was paralyzed in shock and awe, the battle for the hearts and minds could start...

The architects of the US Iraqi intervention pointed to the success of America's occupation of postwar Germany and Japan as evidence that occupation can deliver on democratic objectives⁸. After all, the successful construction of the Empire State Building was also based on earlier designs. To use the military occupation of Japan and Germany as standard of comparison for occupation's potential to deliver democracy in cases such as Iraq is problematic: the successful creation of stable democracies in Germany and Japan was facilitated by their endowment with relatively developed economics, ethnic homogeneity, strong state institutions, and historical experience with democracy, as well as context-specific factors such as the experience of devastating defeat, the fear of Communist threat, and the dictatorial freedom of occupation bestowed by contemporary cultural norms.⁹

⁴ Toby Dodge, *Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective*, p. 188

⁵ Geraldine B, *Thirteen Months to Go*, p 32

⁶ Toby Dodge, *Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective*, p. 187

⁷ Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Shock And Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, XXIV.

⁸ Eva Bellin, *The Iraqi intervention and democracy in comparative historical perspective*, p 595

⁹ Eva Bellin, *The Iraqi intervention and democracy in comparative historical perspective*, p 605

2. LESSONS LEARNED

Iraq (and Haiti, East Timor, the Former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Afghanistan) has learned us that Empire State-Building is an extremely complex, expensive and time consuming task. While it took the Empire State Building 'only' 20 years to become profitable, it took the West European model – from within – hundreds of years to become 'ideal'.

This 'ideal' state is legitimized by its ability to deliver public goods to the population contained within its recognized borders, through a differentiated set of centralized governmental institutions.¹⁰ Central to its ability to perform these tasks is the veracity of its claim to 'binding authority' over its citizenship and ultimately 'over all actions taking place in the area of its jurisdiction'.¹¹ The degree to which a state has reached this ideal type can be judged first by its ability of its institutions to impose and then guarantee the rule of law, then to penetrate society, mobilize the population and finally regularly extract resources.¹²

Empire State-Building is not only extremely complex, expensive and time consuming; it has also proven to be controversial because it has overtones of imperialism and colonialism, whereby local populations view the foreign power as an oppressor attempting to impose a foreign system and culture.

Common critiques to exogenous state-building include inadequate strategy and a lack of coordination, staffing weaknesses, insufficient funding and poorly timing. Moreover, it is increasingly recognized that many of the tasks sought to be achieved are extremely complex and there is little clarity on how to best proceed. It also seems that the unintended negative consequences of international aid are more and more evident. These range from distortion of the economy to skewing relationship of accountability by the political elite towards internationals rather than domestic population.¹³ Empire State-Building projects are often presented as ill-fated from the start; vital but from which few results can be expected. Francis Fukuyama argues that state-building efforts to date have done more to destroy institutional capacity than to build it, creating a culture of dependency rather than self-sustaining indigenous institutions.¹⁴

We know by now that state-building by outsiders is extremely complex, expensive, time-consuming, controversial and the historical success ratio is very meager. It seems that ideal states are a result of an internal process that can take hundreds of years to mature. So why even bother to try to accelerate this slow brewing organic state-building process?

One could argue that the 'responsibility to build a state' is the inevitable consequence of the so-called 'responsibility to protect': the question of when, if ever, it is appropriate for states to take coercive – and in particular military – action, against another state for the purpose of protecting people at risk in that other state.¹⁵ Once a state has taken on the responsibility to 'save a failing state',¹⁶ by intervening militarily it also has the obligation to re-build that state. Empire State-Building in this context represents a belief that in the past there had been an inadequate focus on the state that was left behind

¹⁰ Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, p 2

¹¹ Weber, *Economy and Society*, p 56

¹² Midgal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*,

¹³ UN report, *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, p 3

¹⁴ Fukuyama, *State-Building*, pp.53-7

¹⁵ ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, pVII

¹⁶ Helman, Gerald and Ratner, *Saving Failed States*, Foreign Policy, issue 89

after a mission withdrew. Many of those missions were not able to create sustainable peace, with a high proportion of states returning to conflict, or emerging as weak and unstable states.¹⁷

The international community continues to engage in state-building efforts because it has no other choice. Failed or failing states nowadays impose a greater risk for international security than strong states. State building is considered of utmost importance. Order in the international system is predicated on the global application of the state as the primary unit of organization¹⁸. The world needs (strong) states, and (failed) states need the world.

Even though little of the Empire State-Building undertaken so far has been successful, studies of state-building operations have tried to identify 'best practices'. Below is a selection of lessons learned as suggested by some of the authors active in this field.

Δ Toby Dodge argues that the relative success of an Empire State-Building project can be judged by comparison with the Weberian ideal state.¹⁹ State-building therefore involves a three-stage process: first and most importantly, order must be re-imposed. It is only after this has been achieved that the administrative capacity of the government can be rebuild and, finally sustainable economic development put in place.²⁰

Δ Barnett R Rubin: One strategic decision maker would require command and budgetary authority over the entire operation. This will require negotiated delegation of some sovereign functions, not only of the reconstructed country, but also of the donor countries.²¹

Δ David Chandler: The extension of autonomy and self-government may well create more fruitful conditions for the growth of civil society alternatives (as compared to the attempts of creating an 'artificial top down' civil society).²²

Δ Roland Paris: The failure to anticipate and forestall the destabilizing effects of liberalization, proved to be the Achilles' heel of peace-building. The author introduces a new strategy: institutionalizing before liberalization (IBL). Paris' IBL is Wilsonian but in the long run, not rapid and instantly. (1) Is the country ripe for Elections? (delay as long as possible!) (2) enjoy elections with moderation (3) promote good civil society (4) control hate speech (5) adopt conflict reducing economic policies.²³

Δ Thomas Carothers: The international community must let go of the 'transition paradigm' and accept the new reality: democratization is a chaotic process; the transitional democratic grey zone has become a state of normality for many societies and democracy promoters need to focus in on the key political patterns of each country individually. State-builders have to bridge the divide between aid programs directed at democracy-building and those focused on social and economic development.²⁴

Δ Simon Chesterman provocatively states that contemporary transitional administrations might benefit from being more, not less, colonial – even as that relationship is regarded as a temporary if

¹⁷ UN report, *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, p 5

¹⁸ Dodge, *Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective*, p. 189

¹⁹ Dodge, *Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective*, p. 197

²⁰ Fukuyama, *State-building: Governance and World Order...*, p 135

²¹ Barnett R Rubin, *Peace Building and State-Building in Afghanistan...*, p 179

²² David Chandler, *Democratization in Bosnia: the Limits of Civil Society Building Strategies*, p 1

²³ Roland Paris, *At War's End*

²⁴ Carother, *The end of the Transition Paradigm*, pp 5-21

necessary evil. He also refers to accepted wisdom within the UN (in its 'Brahimi Report') that states that successful UN peace operation should ideally consist of three sequential stages: (a) the existence of a political base for peace (b) a suitable mandate for a UN mission should be formulated (c) the mission should be given all the resources necessary. Chesterman is optimistic when he notes that 'the (UN) Council learns by doing'...²⁵

3. CONCLUSION

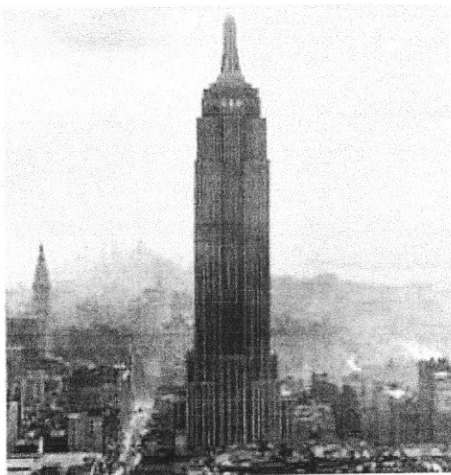
In 2005 David Chandler wrote that 'the focus on state capacities and institutions seems to herald a shift away from the 1990s when new, more interventionist, norms were heralded which challenged the fundamental rights of state sovereignty - those of self-government and non-intervention'

At the time of writing however it seems the international community is leaning towards super-charged Empire State-Building. Supporters of this approach argue that this new form of old Empire State-Building will require the transcendence of accepted rules, including the creation of shared sovereignty in specific areas, the introduction of dictatorial freedom of occupation – *ordnung muss sein!*, in some cases new forms of trusteeship²⁶, concentration of power in one strategic decision maker and above all: lots of money. The 'grassroots bottom up' approach is losing terrain and many scholars agree that successful Empire State-Building – at least initially - requires a surge in despotic power...

The lessons learned from various forms of Empire State-Building projects are negative ones and it seems that the ultimate recipe for state-building remains home-cooking: 'If the elites in a country decide — like they did in Japan in 1868 or as they're doing in China today — that they are going to build a modern society, they have a reasonable chance of bringing it off'.²⁷ It is only on the basis of clarifying the corrosive consequences of Empire State-Building that a new case for self-government and political autonomy ('Solid State-Building'²⁸) can be made.²⁹

Tom Bogaert

New York City - April 28, 2008



²⁵ Chesterman, *You, The people*

²⁶ Krasner, *Sharing Sovereignty – New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States*, p 85

²⁷ Fukuyama, Interviewed in John Hopkins Magazine, vol 56 no 4

²⁸ Solid state (electronics) are circuits that do not contain vacuum tubes

²⁹ Chandler, *How State-Building weakens states* – essay on spiked.com