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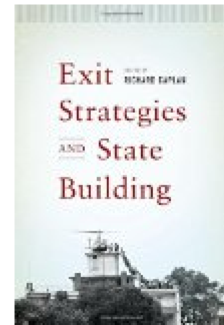

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The Winding Down of Post-Conflict Peace-Building Missions

Richard Caplan's book, *Exit Strategies and State Building*, is an important, though-provoking, and compelling addition to what has become quite a substantial body of literature on international peace-building missions. Scholars turned their attention to these missions as their number rapidly multiplied after the Cold War. The main goal of these operations, whether we are talking about Sierra Leone, Haiti, Cambodia, East Timor, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Iraq, has been to create the societal conditions that will prevent the country from sliding back into violent conflict. Beyond that, the nature of the missions has varied greatly. Early on many of these missions primarily sought to foster economic and political liberalization, in the hope that a market economy and a liberal democracy would help promote stability and long-term peace.[1] But after it became clear that rapid democratization could be destabilizing, both scholars and practitioners started to pay attention to the need for international involvement in state building. By seeking to rebuild the political system, peace builders took a more active role in the design of political institutions and the running of the war-torn country. In the past few decades, therefore, the trend has been towards more complex missions with ambitious goals and longer time frames.

The literature on post-conflict peace building has predominantly focused on the beginnings and middles of these missions, on questions related to democratization and economic recovery, and on reforms of the political sector. The many dilemmas such missions inevitably pose–how to balance the need for foreign involvement with local self-determination; how and when to bring local politicians and groups into the decision-making process; and how big the footprint of the mission should be–is another focal point.[2] The topic of how such missions should be scaled down and eventually come to an end, has received much less attention. One of the reasons for the scant attention to exit strategies may be that the concept seems to reflect, as Gideon Rose argues, an anti-interventionist bias. When politicians and commentators have stressed the need for a clear exit strategy it has usually been in response to public outcries about seemingly never-ending and convoluted foreign entanglements. As Rose points out, the term seems to bias the "discussion in favor of foreign military commitments that can be terminated easily and against those that appear more open-ended."[3] Instead of focusing on exit strategies, Rose therefore advocates attention to transition strategies, and that is what Caplan and his co-authors offer.

Caplan's introductory chapter emphasizes that "exit" must be understood as "a process of transition" (p. 5). It is not only a term for the full withdrawal or completion of the international mission, or for a single occasion, but for the transition from one kind of operation to another, for instance, from a state-building mission to a peace-monitoring operation. An exit strategy, according to Caplan, is "a plan for disengaging and ultimately withdrawing from a state or territory, ideally having attained the goals that inspired international involvement

originally" (p. 5). An exit strategy is closely related to mandate implementation, but the two are not identical. If the goals of an international mission have been accomplished, a successful exit strategy will help secure those achievements. If, on the other hand, the goals were not attained, "a successful exit strategy will entail measures to preserve the partial gains or minimize the losses, including any reputational costs to the state-building actors" (p. 313). Exit strategies are therefore what Caplan calls "path dependent," as "a good exit depends on good entrance and intermediate strategies" (p. 315).

Exit Strategies is a comparative, empirical, and thematic study of exit strategies with respect to four "families of experience": "colonial administrations, complex peace support operations, international territorial administrations, and transformative military occupations" (p. 5). This categorization, outlined in Caplan's introduction, creates some confusion because by most definitions an international administration is a type of peace-support operation. This is acknowledged in Willam J. Durch's chapter on peace-support operations (PSOs), which classifies different PSOs according to the level of "state-building involvement," ranging from large-scale international administrations (or transitional administration) on one end of the spectrum to limited, traditional observer missions on the other (p. 79). Since the book's structure is based on this categorization–there is one section on each of the four types of mission–it too becomes somewhat muddled. That said, the topic of the discussion in each chapter is clear enough, so this is not a major problem.

In addition to the four survey chapters, there are two case study chapters for each type of mission: Senegal and Indonesia are discussed as examples of colonial administrations; Sierra Leone and Haiti are examples of PSOs; Kosovo and East Timor are used as illustrations of international administrations; and Gaza and Iraq are included as examples of military occupations. The thematic section contains a chapter on competing normative visions of exit; a chapter on the political economy of exit; a chapter on the UN peace-building architecture and a chapter on the policy lessons that should be drawn from the chapters in the book.

The case study chapters discuss how the mission in question has scaled down its operation or come to an end, the degree to which exit was the result of a carefully drawn plan or a more muddled and disorganized process, as well as the effect of exit strategies. In his chapter on Senegal, for instance, Tony Chafer argues that while France's exit was a success, in the sense that it was not followed by violent conflict or political instability, it was not the product of a carefully planned and executed strategy. France did not seek to develop an exit strategy until independence was inevitable in 1959. Chafer argues that the explanation for the smoothness of the decolonization process must be sought in the willingness among indigenous elites to cooperate with the existing colonial power, the existence of a shared political culture among French and Senegalese elites, and a high level of trust between colonial and local leaders.

The chapter on Kosovo illustrates a recurring point, namely that a good exit strategy is dependent upon a good entry strategy. When the United Nations Mission in Kovoso (UNMIK) took over the administration of Kosovo in 1999, it was supposed to establish "the development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo" (quoted, p. 159). But Security Council Resolution 1244 did not specify what Kosovo's status would be–that is, whether it would receive independent statehood or continue to be part of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Crampton shows how the uncertainty about Kosovo's final status hampered the mission progress and made the completion of its mandate, and therefore also the formulation of a clear exit strategy, impossible. As long as the final status remained unsettled, not even the "standards before status" policy (p. 165), which specified a set of benchmarks for assessing Kosovo's progress towards a well-functioning democracy, could really help propel Kosovo in the right direction.

The case of Kosovo also serves as an illustration of an important trend with respect to the downscaling and ending of state-building missions. Instead of relying on elections and set timetables, the use of benchmarks has become an increasingly common way for the international community to define the conditions for exit. This trend, as Dominic Zaum points out, flows naturally from the increased state-building ambitions of post-Cold War missions. It also indicates that the international community is less worried about disregarding a country's sovereignty. If it is for the sake of peace, international agencies are quite willing to set aside the previously almost inviolable norm of nonintervention.

The state-building literature often seems to unwittingly teeter between the empirical and normative questions–between what is or has been and what should be or should have been–and this is the case in this book,

too. In the chapter about the policy implications that can be gathered from the book, Caplan argues that "a successful exit strategy is one that, at the very least, leaves behind a consolidated peace–assuming that such a peace has been established." Caplan is here referring to a self-sustaining peace, one that is not only marked by the absence of war, but also "the absence of major threats to public security," such as "political repression and discrimination ... torture, and widespread serious crime." This is no short order, as it requires not only "basic security," but also "effective and legitimate governance institutions and the rule of law" and "conditions for economic and social well-being" (p. 314).

Gideon Rose has said that exit processes are "devilishly complex" and Caplan's book illustrates that point (p. 58). It is not easy to come up with a simple prescription for how the scaling down and end to state-building operations should happen. As William Durch argues, "No definitive formula for a success-based exit is possible" (p. 97). Thus, those looking for a quick and simple discussion of exit with clear lessons for future state-building missions will not find it here. That is not really a criticism of Caplan's book, only the nature of the beast, so to speak. What *Exit Strategies and State Building* instead will give its readers, is a wide-ranging, level-headed, and much-needed study of the many questions that surround the end of state-building missions.

Notes

[1]. For a discussion, see Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[2]. See, for instance, Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[3]. Gideon Rose, "The Exit Strategy Delusion," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (1998): 58.

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