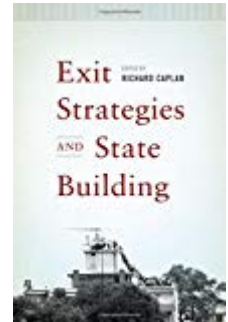


Richard Caplan, ed.. *Exit Strategies and State Building*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xii + 337 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-976012-1.



Reviewed by Mary Elizabeth Walters

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

With the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, “exit strategy” and “state building” became buzz words in both public discourse on the two interventions as well as in academic literature across a wide range of fields. Although the two decades since the end of the Cold War have witnessed a flurry of post-conflict state-building operations, Richard Caplan argues that exit strategy policies have been ad hoc and scholarship on these strategies scarce. Caplan and the contributors to *Exit Strategies and State Building* seek to provide a reconceptualization of how practitioners and academics approach state building and exit strategies in post-conflict contexts, particularly those relating to peacekeeping operations. Through a combination of theoretical essays and historical case studies, *Exit Strategies and State Building* aims to provide a theoretical and practical framework of how exit strategies function. Caplan’s volume reflects the diversity of the field, with contributions from political scientists, international lawyers, historians, human rights activists, security studies analysts, and U.S. govern-

ment officials. As a result, the volume, like the literature as a whole, balances academic inquiry with the search for policy prescriptions that can be implemented.

Exit Strategies and State Building has a much longer chronological scope than does much of the literature on post-conflict state building, which tends to focus on post-1990 operations. Contributors instead examine continuity and change among a wide range of post-conflict state building and exit strategies in the twentieth century, including colonial exits, Allied military occupations following the conclusion of World War II, and the more frequently examined operations during the 1990s and 2000s. The volume is divided into five sections. The first four are grouped into categories of experience and focus on “practices associated with exit”: colonial administrations, complex peace support operations, international territorial administrations, and transformative military occupations. Three chapters comprise each section, one theoretical perspective accompanied by two case studies. The book’s final section is a collec-

tion of thematic chapters that address normative approaches to exit, an exit's impact on local and developing United Nations (UN) peace-building architecture, and an examination of policy implications. Each chapter is built on its own theoretical and methodological framework rooted in the individual author's disciplinary background. Taken as a whole, the essays present how reconceptualizations of the nature of exit strategies and success can be applied across a range of exit types, time periods, and geographic areas. Through each of the brief case studies, the authors seek to apply their reconceptualization of exit strategies and state building to further understanding of historical events and to plan for future post-conflict exit strategies.

Two key themes unify the diversity of essays written by sixteen contributors. The first theme centers on the need for academic approaches to exit, as well as the practice of exit, to be historicized and for the pendulum to be pushed away from formulaic approaches. The authors argue that an exit strategy is not a singular event, but a "process of transition" rooted in the specific historical and cultural contexts of each case and is dependent on the original entrance strategy. As a historically contingent process, exit strategies resist standardized models of implementation or definitions of success. The volume's second theme builds directly and logically from this argument. Just as the process of exit is dependent on both the entrance strategy and historical particulars, so is the meaning of success. *Exit Strategies and State Building* repeatedly emphasizes that in post-conflict state building, the success of an exit strategy holds different meanings in different contexts. Most important, a successful exit strategy is not coterminous with a successful operation. The authors argue that a mission may fail but also have a successful exit, so long as it succeeds in preserving what gains were made and in minimizing any losses.

While not all of the contributions are equal, they are generally supported with thorough utilization of the available secondary literature and existing theories on peacekeeping and state building. Most of the authors also made great use of primary materials, such as military and organizational doctrinal documents, official UN reports, newspaper accounts, and interviews with participants. As is often the case with anthologies, *Exit Strategies and State Building* contains a few weaker chapters. The most notable is historian John Darwin's essay on colonial exit strategies, in which he comes to the conclusion that India and Pakistan experienced a "smooth trajectory" from British colonial rule. Despite this, *Exit Strategies and State Building* presents a convincing and thought-provoking argument for both academics and practitioners to reconceptualize post-conflict exit strategies as long-term processes that are historically contingent.

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