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**David A. Lake. *The Statebuilder's Dilemma: On the Limits of Foreign Intervention*.** Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5017-0030-9 (hardcover, \$89.95); 978-1-5017-0446-8 (paperback, \$24.95).

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## Contents

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Introduction by Francis J. Gavin, The Johns Hopkins University .....	2
Review by David Chandler, University of Westminster.....	4
Review by Bridget L. Coggins, University of California, Santa Barbara .....	8
Review by Stephen D. Krasner, Department of Political Science, Stanford University.....	12
Author's Response by David A. Lake, University of California, San Diego .....	16

## Introduction by Francis J. Gavin, The Johns Hopkins University

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It is hard to recapture the confidence, indeed the hubris, which emerged in certain policy circles in 2002 and early 2003, after the United States successfully brought down the Taliban government in Afghanistan and was primed to overrun Iraq. It was not simply neoconservative officials from the George W. Bush administration possessed by delusional visions. As a young (ish) assistant professor in Austin, Texas in the winter of 2003, I vividly recall two prominent DC visitors—both hawkish Democrats—predicting that the inevitable toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Bagdad would be the first steps in a great American project to reconfigure the states of the greater Middle East. This would be accomplished not simply or even primarily by overwhelming military power, but instead by powerful historical forces that made the new universalistic, liberal political and economic order nearly inevitable. Global tyranny and authoritarianism would be put on the run. What seemed unhinged then—the idea that the United States could rebuild states in its own image—seems, fourteen years later, like the beginnings of a deeper tragedy whose effects we feel sharply today.

The American state-building project is the target of David Lake’s insightful book, *The Statebuilder’s Dilemma: On the limits of foreign intervention*. As all three reviewers note in largely positive assessments, Lake highlights a crucial dilemma for the potential state-builder. The more the state-builder is willing to invest blood and treasure into transforming another country’s regime, the less likely it is to be willing to work with politicians within the state whose interests diverge from those of the United States. And those politicians lose credibility with their domestic audiences if they rely too much of the external power, threatening their own legitimacy and the long-term stability of their government.

To be fair, powerful ethical and national security interests often pull the United States into such efforts, and while caution is warranted, the historical record may not be as bleak as Lake suggests. Stephen Krasner, an esteemed scholar with important policy experience, points out that the external state-builder can often work with key elites to produce what he terms “good enough” governance. Working with good leaders, even the occasional authoritarian, an external actor can help produce improved governance and economic growth that produces stability and ultimately legitimacy to the regime. The gap between the interests of a state builder like the United States and a country’s elites may not be as wide as with the general public, a fact that helps explain why state building in postwar West Germany and Japan were successful.

Despite these caveats, the reviewers agree Lake has written an important book, even if, as David Chandler suggests, his viewpoint already reflects conventional wisdom. As Bridget Coggins concludes, Lake offers an “elegant, intuitive theory about why external statebuilding, whether by the U.S. or others, so often goes awry. More than that though, he presents a compelling case as to why—even assuming the best intentions—America should be exceedingly cautious about these ambitious interventions.”

### Participants:

**David A. Lake** is the Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences and Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego. He has published widely in international relations theory and international political economy. Besides the book reviewed here, his most recent monograph is *Hierarchy in International Relations* (2009). He is currently at work on *U.S. Power and World Order: The Origins and Future of the Pax Americana*. Lake is presently President of the American Political Science Association.

## H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 9-15

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**David Chandler** is Professor of International Relations, University of Westminster, he is the founding editor of the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* and author of *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Postliberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010) and *Empire in Denial: The Politics of Statebuilding* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), editor of *Statebuilding and Intervention: Policies, Practices and Paradigms* (London: Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Timothy Sisk) of the *Routledge Handbook of International Statebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2013)

**Bridget L. Coggins** is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara and Co-Director of the Orfalea Center's Global Security Hub. Her research concentrates on the intersection of domestic politics and international security, presently focusing on state failure and rebel diplomacy in civil war. Coggins's first book is *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 2014), and her work appears in journals including *International Organization*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Journal of Global Security Studies*. Coggins has held positions at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, the Center for International Peace and Security Studies, the Council of Foreign Relations (International Affairs Fellow, Seoul), and taught previously at Dartmouth College. She is currently a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations (2013-2018) and a U.S.-Korea NextGen Scholar.

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### Review by David Chandler, University of Westminster

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*The Power of Uncritical Critique: Lake's Pragmatic Apologia for Statebuilding*

Like Hegel's metaphor of the Owl of Minerva spreading its wings to fly at dusk, David Lake's deconstruction of international statebuilding comes just as the party is already over. Post-conflict statebuilding is no longer on the international agenda, and with the power of hindsight there is very little disagreement on the limits of international intervention. Even the United Nations (the concept's leading sponsor) has moved to distance itself from 'statebuilding' and towards stressing post-conflict peace in the terminology of sustainability and local legitimacy rather than as a product of externally-led transformation conforming to preconceived goals and attained through externally managed social and political engineering:

"Peacebuilding is not State-building... Countries emerging from conflict are not blank pages and their people are not "projects." They are the main agents of peace. However, the international approach is often based on generic models that ignore national realities... Efforts to sustain peace must build upon [local] institutions and the resilience and reconciliation processes of local communities, and not undermine them... When countries set out their priorities and they enjoy strong national support, they must be respected. Too often they are not." <sup>1</sup>

Today, there is an emergent consensus over what has gone wrong with statebuilding over the last twenty years. In both policy-making and in academia there has been a reappraisal of the statebuilding paradigm; one which has sought to rationalise and to a certain extent excuse and legitimate the policy errors which led to a situation where, today, a key area of U.S. concern—the Middle East—seems to be beyond U.S. control and influence as a direct product of U.S.-led interventionist practice in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. It appears that the lesson being learned is the lesson of pragmatism, that peace cannot be exported as a set of policies, institutions, and practices. That to do so, in the words of Lake, is 'criminally stupid' (ix) or 'astounding in its audacity' (197). Lake's monograph, *The Statebuilder's Dilemma: On the Limits of Foreign Intervention*, is a clear and representative example of the current acceptance of pragmatist approaches and nicely highlights its uncritical and apologetic logic.

Pragmatism could be understood as a 'realist' response to the liberal idealism of international statebuilding. According to Lake, the problematic is simple—statebuilding only came into existence as a liberal project with the end of the Cold War in 1990. Prior to then, the U.S. and the Soviets were keen to support loyal regimes and there was no conception of statebuilding as the external promotion of liberal institutional frameworks: "Liberal statebuilding, beginning with the end of the Cold War, elevated the goal of building legitimate states and premised strategy on the belief that democracy and free markets would be sufficient to legitimate a government in the eyes of its people." (6) It is worth quoting Lake's formulation of the problem:

"The liberal model of statebuilding so widely applied in the post-Cold War period was not selected because it was a tried and true method. Rather, it was an ideology that fit an emerging academic paradigm on the positive role of limited political institutions that, in turn, reflected the euphoria of the 'end of history'

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People, Report of the high-level independent panel on United Nations peace operations* (New York: United Nations, 2015), 48.

moment. Contrary to the prevailing wisdom, however, legitimacy is not inherent in institutions in general nor only in institutions with representative qualities. Institutions are not ‘strong’ or accepted by society simply because they are institutions. This puts the proverbial cart before the horse... This is the mistake of nearly all statebuilders in recent decades, and of all institutionalist scholars, who have placed inordinate faith in the legitimating power of democratic institutions...

The arrogance behind this particular theory of politics, however, grew out of our own time. Given the world in 1991, as history was just ending, how could democracy, free markets, and limited but effective states not be ‘good things’—and why should all good things not go together? In the end, the model said more about the statebuilders than about statebuilding” (198).

Here, we can see a simple inversion of liberal state-building understandings: exporting institutions and legal frameworks makes no sense and ignores the social basis of governing legitimacy—establishing hybrid orders where the state has no *de facto* purchase on society or further destabilising society by offering enrichment opportunities to elites.

While the description of the limits is not unique, where Lake excels is in the apologetic reworking of the policies of intervention; setting up the liberal state-building framework as an accident of the historical moment and liberal overconfidence in the 1990s. It is a policy blip that was always destined to fail—based as it was more on our naïve idealism than any understanding of the world. In the terminology of popular French sociologist Bruno Latour, it now appears that really “We Were Never Liberal Statebuilders.”<sup>2</sup> Statebuilding, it seems, was just an unfortunate and accidental mistake. This is an apologetic or self-serving interpretation of the end of the state-building paradigm, as will be considered below.

### The Pragmatic Apologia

Pragmatism, as a critique of statebuilding, problematizes the idea of institution-building both from the ‘top-down’ and from the ‘bottom-up.’ Pragmatic positions are critical both of the idea that international experts can develop institutional solutions that could just be exported or imposed by external actors (prevalent in the late 1990s) and also of the idea that deeper social, economic or political external ‘engineering’ might enable liberal institutional frameworks to work without frictions (the civil society building approach, prevalent in the 2000s). Both these ‘liberal’ framings assumed that external actors could shape social and political processes and outcomes on the basis that power worked in a linear or cause-and-effect manner (i.e. that certain policy interventions would lead to certain desirable results or outcomes). Pragmatist positions tended to resist the idea that there were pre-set or pre-packaged ‘off-the-peg’ solutions to universal or generalizable ‘problems;’ instead, problems should be grasped in their concrete and relational context. From a pragmatic perspective, Western interests in creating liberal democracies or ideological desires to spread liberal values therefore needed to be tempered by a much greater appreciation of ‘realism.’

This ‘realist turn’ inverts the international state-building paradigm, starting from the problem rather than from the Western or international provision of ‘solutions’ or external goals. This inversion is powerfully expressed through the view that there is a paradox or contradiction (or, for Lake, a ‘dilemma’) at the heart of

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<sup>2</sup> See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

the state-building programme. The more there is an attempt to shape outcomes based on external interests or values the less likely it is to succeed: "...the greater the interests of the statebuilder in the target country, the less likely statebuilding is to succeed in building a legitimate state that can survive on its own into the indefinite future" (2). The pragmatic paradox is interesting in that it is not just a critique of the limits and difficulties of exporting liberal institutions, it also suggests that to do so is inherently problematic, making the situation worse. Lake argues that: "current practice reveals great faith in externally led social engineering" (1):

"The existing literature emphasizes getting national political institutions 'right.' This emphasis recurs both at the deep level of politics, where observers and practitioners identify predatory institutions as the root evil, and at the surface, where analysts debate the proper strategy and tactics of statebuilding. This concentration on institutions implicitly accepts and is premised on a particular theory of state legitimation, one grounded in liberalism. Institutions are, no doubt, important. But in this focus the underlying social cleavages that undermine institutions and ultimately bring down states are ignored" (11).

In this, now consensual, critique, Lake echoes the current perspective of the UN, cited at the opening of this review, against the idea that external preferences or blueprints could be exported or imposed. The UN describes this externally-led or 'top-down' approach as a 'template' culture or the "the so-called 'Christmas tree mandate' dilemma, where template language for many tasks routinely appeared in mission mandates."<sup>3</sup> The pragmatic paradox is that the more 'enthusiastic' reformers were to transform other societies the more they risk unintentional consequences, which can be counterproductive. The pragmatic lesson is that 'less can sometimes be more:' that peace cannot, in fact, be built by the good intentions of external do-gooders but needs to be understood in more 'local' and 'organic' ways. This shift towards the 'pragmatic' or the 'organic' is also prefigured in more critical policy and academic work which suggests that statebuilding is a complex organic process of self-organising adaptation and resilience. For example, Cedric de Coning, a European policy analyst, concludes that:

"...when international peace interventions try to engineer specific outcomes, they produce the opposite effect of that which sustaining peace aims to achieve; they generate on-going instability, dependence and fragility, because such interventions undermine self-organisation and thus resilience. A complexity-informed approach to self-sustainable peace suggests that peacebuilders limit their efforts to safeguarding, stimulating, facilitating and creating the space for societies to develop resilient capacities for self-organisation."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the pragmatic alternative seeks to move away from external or universal goals and looks for more 'organic' metrics that can serve as a guide instead, such as local 'legitimacy,' starting with the existing social and political order rather than 'universal' views of desirable liberal institutional frameworks. It is important to focus on how the actually existing society works, rather than Western ideals. Pragmatism works with what there is rather than imposing liberal goals and aspirations. As Lake states:

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Cedric de Coning, "From peacebuilding to sustaining peace: Implications of complexity for resilience and sustainability," *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 4:3: (2016): 166-181, 179.

“My approach differs from the prevailing institutionalist view... institutionalists are fundamentally liberals, in the classic sense of this term, who believe the legitimacy of the state follows from democracy and free markets.... [T]his liberal model of statebuilding is itself deeply flawed and has repeatedly failed to provide the legitimacy necessary for successful statebuilding... legitimacy follows from social order, not the other way around as in the prevailing model.” (17)

This pragmatist framing thus neatly inverts the ‘top-down’ and ‘liberal’ paradigm of international statebuilding. In what is now the established consensus on the death of the state-building moment, it is suggested that intervention guided by liberal universalist understandings can only make conflict situations worse. Thus disillusionment with international intervention has been given coherence and even a positive spin by pragmatic and ‘organic’ approaches, which have strongly reinforced the self-satisfying understanding that ‘they’ are not ready for liberalism. Thus even radical critiques of Western hubris and liberal certitude have been played out against the backdrop of ‘their’ unsuitability for modern liberal frameworks of governance.

The error of Western policymakers then becomes merely that of naivety and over confidence in ‘their’ capacities and abilities to be like ‘us.’ This definitely softens the ‘critical’ blow and enables pragmatic approaches to salve Western policy consciences. Today it appears that the real ‘crime’ of international statebuilders was that of caring too much. As Lake puts it: “The limits of external statebuilding are reached precisely when the statebuilder cares the most about the future policies of the failed state.” (16) ‘Caring too much’ implies that statebuilders wanted to go too far and too quickly, in essence, attempting to short cut the ‘organic’ process of building sustainable peace. The message of ‘caring’ a little less is sure to ruffle few feathers in the policy-making capitals of the world order.



Review by Bridget L. Coggins, University of California, Santa Barbara

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Militarized statebuilding is one of the United States' most perplexing foreign-policy challenges. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have dragged on far longer and at a much greater cost than expected. Further, the experiences there have yielded few lessons that, if implemented, would reliably create better governance or provide greater external security benefits than the current regimes in Kabul and Baghdad. This underwhelming track record has unfortunately not dampened the enthusiasm among some for initiating new state-building efforts in Libya, Syria, or Yemen. The specter of foreign anarchy looms large as the public imagines various threats—transnational terrorism foremost among them - that might emerge and spread far beyond failed states' borders. Additionally, given the immense human suffering, it is hard not to be moved to do something, anything, that might lead to more stable, legitimate authority. As a result, the U.S. seems willing to contemplate future statebuilding even though history suggests it lacks the expertise, capacity, and will to do so effectively.

In *The Statebuilder's Dilemma*, David Lake offers an elegant, intuitive theory about why external statebuilding, whether by the U.S. or others, so often goes awry. More than that though, he presents a compelling case as to why—even assuming the best intentions—America should be exceedingly cautious about these ambitious interventions. Where other scholars or policy-makers see fault in prior statebuilders' approaches to securing legitimacy and security<sup>1</sup>, or in the flawed execution of their preferred plans<sup>2</sup>, Lake instead proposes that the failure of these projects is nearly unavoidable. This is an important, timely book.

The argument in brief: state failure presents international security problems whose most promising solutions seem to lie in the creation (or re-creation) of a more stable and rightful regime. However, an indefinite commitment is required to establish the two essential characteristics of strong states, a monopoly of force and legitimate authority. Only those states with strong interests in the outcome of the failed state's resurrection are willing to intervene and engage in statebuilding. Yet those very interests make them unwilling to cede authority to leaders holding policy preferences too distant from their own (6). In failed states, the distance between the public's ideal point and that of the statebuilder is likely to be substantial (72). This leads statebuilders to interfere in the domestic politics of leader selection, opting for someone who is loyal to the statebuilder and undermining popular domestic legitimacy in the process (79-81). The tradeoff between leader loyalty and domestic legitimacy, inherent to the enterprise, explains why over and over again, even given a variety of institutions and approaches, statebuilding's failure is over determined (16). Disinterested states would be more likely to remain uninvolved, generating greater popular legitimacy for the state's nascent

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building peace after civil conflict*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States," *International Security* 28:4 (2004): 5-43; Stephen D. Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty: New institutions for collapsed and failing states," *International Security* 29:2 (2004): 85-120; David C. Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The politics of state-building*. (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Paul D. Miller, *Armed State Building: Confronting State Failure*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> On implementation of the "Washington consensus" see Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). For other timing and implementation problems see Dawn Brancati and Jack Snyder, "Rushing to the Polls: The causes of premature postconflict elections," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55:3 (2011): 469-492; Barnett R. Rubin, "Peace building and state-building in Afghanistan: Constructing sovereignty for whose security?" *Third World Quarterly* 27:1 (2006): 175-185. Miller (2013) argues strongly against a "master sequence" solution to state-building's implementation.



## H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 9-15

institutions and politicians. But disinterested states will not invest the requisite blood and treasure to secure a monopoly of force, ameliorate the domestic security dilemma, and midwife new political institutions. Disinterested states do not statebuild.

Lake illustrates the conundrum by tracing the histories of regime failure and attempted statebuilding in Iraq and Somalia. Though both were failures insofar as statebuilding is concerned, each also contains missed opportunities that, rather than undermining Lake's argument, shows the near inescapability of the dilemma. The cases highlight critical junctures where the United States (Iraq) and Ethiopia (Somalia) could have surrendered authority to a leader or government with greater popular legitimacy, but instead meddled, ensuring that a regime closer to their own preferences would prevail. Missed opportunities and micro-successes occurred when outsiders played a more limited role, a policy closer to what the book ultimately recommends for future, would-be statebuilders if only they can restrain their aspirations (198). The first success is Iraqi Kurdistan, which has fared far better than the rest of Iraq since the early 1990s. Though Iraqi Kurdistan is dependent on the U.S., its lack of formal sovereignty has "insulated the [Kurdish Regional Government] from the pressures of the statebuilder's dilemma" (142). Next, in Somalia, the U.S.-led "Unified Task Force (UNITAF)" humanitarian mission, with a very limited mandate, was successful in establishing effective control, but the U.S. was not invested enough in Somalia's future to stay once violence, and the costs to the U.S., began to mount. Disinterest ruled out statebuilding. Also found in the Somalia case is Somaliland, a region in the northwest of Somalia, occupying former British Somaliland, that has been relatively successful at monopolizing violence and securing legitimate authority because outsiders have been so thoroughly disengaged, allowing indigenous forms of governance to arise (178).

The book closes on a pessimistic note, echoing the arguments of Charles Tilly and Jeffrey Herbst, that the international community's best course of action toward failed states is inaction; to allow the violent, indigenous process of statebuilding to proceed from a distance. Historically, it is the only course that has a proven track record of building effective, legitimate states. This is, however, quickly dismissed as an unrealistic prescription given the compelling existential threats that prompt intervention in failed states (200-201). Instead, three potential compromises are offered to mitigate certain aspects of the dilemma. First, rather than recreating strong states, outsiders could adopt Stephen Krasner's "good enough governance" standard, somewhat limiting their aspirations to domestic legitimacy (201). Second, statebuilding's costs and benefits would be more diffuse if it were pursued multilaterally, limiting any one state's stake in the outcome. Third, the international community could incentivize failed states' creation of legitimate institutions with the lure of 'club goods' such as membership in the European Union and Common Market. Still, none of these strategies is without substantial drawbacks of its own. The dilemma is inescapable.

Lake's primary theoretical argument is well-crafted and persuasive. So I will focus my comments on the cases and on the broader implications. Specifically, where do the book's evidence and conclusions lead us theoretically and policy-wise?

As presented, and by convention, statebuilding takes place at the national level and that is where it fails. Still, it is difficult not to notice that the two successful micro-cases (Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland) also involve separatist, or secessionist regions. In both, nationalist identities forged under empires, and with significant histories of autonomy, generated strong pushes for statebuilding that were given the opportunity to thrive during their central governments' collapse. This should temper optimism that the recommended *laissez-faire* approach would work so effectively in regions or states with different characteristics. Emblematically, the local politics in Somaliland's neighboring Puntland region—also without much Ethiopian intervention though

## H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 9-15

somewhat more diverse—generated more external insecurity, not less, with its decade of benign international indifference.

That the two successes are nested within national-level state-building failures though, raises provocative questions about the durability of failed states' borders. The object of statebuilding is assumed to perfectly coincide with the borders of the collapsed state. Not discussed, but often on the table, is whether and how the statebuilders' efforts might be affected by their willingness to consider alternative governance projects - be they partitions, city states, or international trusts. If stability and responsible sovereignty are the prize for statebuilders, surely there is no requirement that they be achieved within the boundaries of the existing state. Theoretically, do we arrive at a different place if, for example, Iraqi Kurdistan or Somaliland alone receives the external benefits of membership that its secessionists so desire? It seems that the statebuilders' ideal points and popular opinions within these regions are relatively close in comparison to the countries' wider publics. I have my own ideas about why this does not happen in practice, but it is worth asking why statebuilders' devotion to the arcane borders of the collapsed state is so unwavering, and if it is perhaps self-defeating? In both Iraq and Somalia, alternative, more successful state-building projects were not embraced externally. Was this why the micro-successes were so successful? Or has their neglect kept them weak and prevented their greater success as independent states?

Next, Lake rightly observes that the threats attendant to state failure motivate many contemporary state-building efforts. Most often in the U.S. case, the security interests compelling states to intervene are not traditional threats. They are threats perpetrated by non-state actors believed to flourish where there is no government surveillance, deterrence, or enforcement capacity. While these threats inspire a great deal of fear within the population, which suffers disproportionately from them when they occur, they do not typically constitute an existential threat to other states. By any reasonable measure, these threats are small and chronic rather than large and acute.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have too uncritically accepted policy-makers' portrayal of these fears as justifying military intervention.

Even if we do accept that these threats might be 'existential,' it is not clear that statebuilding will resolve the problem. The belief in the failure threat linkage rests on shaky empirical grounds.<sup>4</sup> If state failure does not routinely produce non-traditional threats, then statebuilding may not prevent or eliminate them either. If internal anarchy is relatively unthreatening to outsiders, then it is the fear within strong states that must be tackled, and not the dilemma that arises once statebuilding is offered as a cure. To alleviate the dilemma, get rid of the initial impulse to statebuild in response to state failure.

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Zegart, "Stop Drinking the Weak Sauce," *Foreign Policy*, 23 February 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/23/nuclear-cyber-cold-war-weak-states-strategy/>; John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, "The Terrorism Delusion: America's overwrought response to September 11," *International Security* 37:1 (2012), 81-110; James D. Fearon, "Instability In the Middle East," *Defining Ideas*, 7 May 2015), <http://www.hoover.org/research/instability-middle-east>.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart Patrick, *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).; Bridget L. Coggins, "Does State Failure Cause Terrorism?: An Empirical Analysis (1999-2008)." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59:3 (2015): 455-483.; Justin George, "State Failure and Transnational Terrorism: An Empirical Analysis." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2016), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002716660587>.

Ethiopia's fear of Ogaden irredentism, which would be territorially devastating if successful, is more classically existential. Though that conflict endured for decades prior to statebuilding, the revolutionary expansionist rhetoric of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and Al-Shabaab (and later Al-Shabaab alone), were/are a serious concern. So for Ethiopia, the security interest in Somalia was not related to its failure. Rather, it was that the UIC was on its way to monopolizing force and imposing an authority that it did not prefer. With the assistance of the United States, Ethiopia was attempting to roll back indigenous state-building success in Somalia that was inconsistent with its interests. Ethiopia's intention vis-à-vis Somalia was not to leave behind an effective, legitimate Somali state. Lake notes that Ethiopia was criticized on these grounds, but does not pursue this line of argument (186). Like those critics, I believe that it suits Ethiopia just fine to have a terribly weak state with a pliable regime for a neighbor. There is little to substantiate a dilemma in Addis Ababa, even if the wider international community, and specifically its U.S. ally, might hope otherwise.<sup>5</sup> If this is right, then I wonder whether Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia, should it be sustained indefinitely, could arrive at results closer to those in Central America? In that region, U.S. state-building efforts "ignored" the tradeoff inherent to statebuilding, valuing only loyalty and yielding failure or mixed results in the short-term, but over the long-term, as U.S. and regional preferences converged, it found much greater success (81-84). If this is a potential path, then the question becomes whether the international community can meaningfully affect Ethiopian and Somalian preferences, ultimately making an Ethiopian-supported regime more legitimate and durable.

Everyone interested in American foreign policy and the international politics of armed intervention should read *The Statebuilder's Dilemma*. I might have liked a slightly more critical take on the essential nature of the dilemma, rather than working within the dilemma's constraints as perceived and articulated by state leaders. My own impulse is to acknowledge that the problem is socially constructed and, therefore, a trap of the United States' and international community's own making. The dilemma might be more practically tackled by questioning the threats and goals inspiring contemporary statebuilding, rather than by attempting to work within it. But this is a minor quibble. The argument generates substantial grist for the intellectual and political mill. Moreover, it is a cautionary tale for those who remain unwilling to believe that the militarized statebuilding of the United States, if pursued in Libya, Syria or Yemen, could do more harm than good.

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<sup>5</sup> Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: 'They Created a Desert and Called it Peace(building),' " *Review of African Political Economy* 36:120 (2009): 223-233.

**Review by Stephen D. Krasner, Department of Political Science, Stanford University**

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It has not been a good decade and a half for American foreign policy. The results of the two major initiatives undertaken by the United States after the 9/11 attacks, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, have been disappointing, even tragic. Understanding these failures is a major reason that David Lake has written *The Statebuilder's Dilemma: On the Limited of Foreign Interventions*. Lake's basic argument is that external statebuilders confront a dilemma that they cannot resolve. Countries that are prepared to commit resources to state-building efforts will demand loyal leaders in target countries; but leaders in target countries that are loyal to external actors will almost always lack domestic legitimacy. In most cases it is impossible to achieve loyalty and legitimacy at the same time because the preferences of individuals in polities that have been shattered by violence will be inconsistent with those of external state-builders. This is especially the case, Lake argues, because the dominant model for statebuilding has been a liberal model which calls for free and fair elections and an open market economy. Free and fair elections and open markets will almost inevitably threaten the existing social order, which, after years of internecine violence, will be based on ascriptive identities such as clans, tribes, ethnicities, and religious affiliations.

The most straightforward conclusion from this analysis is that external statebuilding is hopeless unless external state builders and domestic populations have almost identical preferences. Lake does not quite bring himself to this conclusion, but rather suggests in his concluding chapter that the best policy for external actors "is to create incentives for societies in ungoverned spaces to build their own states" (208). Nevertheless, the conclusion that policymakers in the United States or western Europe would have to draw from *The Statebuilders Dilemma* is that there really is not much that they can do. Completing this circle would mean arguing that state failure is really not worth bothering about. Lake, however, never takes this final step. He does not explicitly argue that the possible consequences of state failure, including transnational terrorism, refugee flows, pandemic diseases, and transnational criminality, can be ignored. While some academics might be persuaded by the logic of Lake's analysis, policymakers, who believe that they must or should do something, or that their domestic constituents will demand that they do something, will find not find Lake's book to be useful. This is not an ideal place for even an academic discussion to land.

Lake's basic analytic conclusion hinges on a critical assumption, which he does not justify. That assumption is that the statebuilder's dilemma is driven by the gap between the preferences of populations, which will typically be riven by internal divisions after years of civil strife, and the preferences of external statebuilders. External statebuilders demand loyalty. They will channel support to loyal leaders but these leaders will lose legitimacy either because they deliver resources to their own supporters and alienate other groups or because they accept the liberal preferences of external statebuilders which will be antithetical to preferences that are near the center of the political spectrum. The external statebuilder cannot get loyalty and legitimacy at the same time, but demands for loyalty will inevitably come from any external actor willing to commit the resources needed for statebuilding; at the same time these same demands guarantee that targeted beneficiaries of external aid will be illegitimate. Without legitimacy, which Lake identifies with domestic support, no government can endure.

Lake's assumption that the statebuilder's dilemma is driven by the difference between the preferences of external statebuilders and domestic populations is inconsistent with most of the recent academic work on state

## H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 9-15

development.<sup>1</sup> The classic development theory, modernization theory, is very much a kind of bottom up approach that is consistent with Lake's analysis. Most recent work on state development, on the path to prosperity and consolidated democracy, has, however, focused on an alternative model reflected in the work of Acemoglu and Robinson and North, Wallis, and Weingast.<sup>2</sup> In this alternative perspective, best labeled rational choice institutionalism, key decisions are taken by political elites rather than the population as a whole. The key to jumping to an open access or inclusive order is the creation of self-enforcing institutions that limit the arbitrary power that could otherwise be exercised by power-wielding elites. The key to success for external statebuilders in this model is to close the gap between their preferences and those of local elites, rather than to close the gap between their preferences and those of local populations.

Lake recognizes that the United States has had some successes, even in implementing ambitious liberal state-building projects. The two notable triumphs are Germany and Japan. He argues that in both of these countries, each shattered by war, the preferences of the populations and those of the United States were not far apart. This eliminated the statebuilder's dilemma. The United States could get both loyalty and legitimacy at the same time. This assumption, however, that it was caused by the narrowing of the preference gap between the United States and the German and Japanese populations is highly problematic. This is clearest in the case of Japan. The United States, or more accurately, the occupying authorities including Douglas MacArthur (the effective American proconsul in Japan and formally the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) cultivated the Japanese political elite, not the Japanese population. One of the most famous pictures of the occupation shows General MacArthur standing next to the Emperor Hirohito. MacArthur stands on Hirohito's right in an open collar shirt, arms akimbo. The Emperor is dressed in a formal morning coat, tie, and striped trousers. The message is unmistakable. The Americans have recognized the Emperor, who could have just as easily been tried as a war criminal, and the Emperor has endorsed the Americans. The American occupation in Japan worked not because the Japanese population had suddenly abandoned the military and imperial elite, although in Japan as well as in Germany the population recognized that military aggression had brought deep suffering to the population, but rather because the United States had coopted the traditional elite in Japan. A similar process took place in Germany where the Americans identified a political leader, Konrad Adenauer (the first postwar Chancellor of West Germany), who was at least acceptable to the population and not tarnished by complicity with the Nazis.

A focus on the preferences of national elites rather than the preferences of populations opens policy opportunities that are obscured by Lake's view that legitimacy must be provided by the population, which has relatively fixed ideas about what kinds of policies might or might not be acceptable. Political elites almost always want to stay in power. Lake is completely correct in asserting that in the liberal state-building model, efforts to put countries directly on the path to consolidated democracy will almost certainly fail. They will almost certainly fail because the hallmark of democracy is free and fair elections but free and fair elections will almost always, as Lake points out, be a threat to at least some members of the power-wielding elite. This is at

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Books, 2012) which focuses on incentive differences between national leaders and their populations.

<sup>2</sup> See Douglass C. North, John J. Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) as well as Acemoglu and Robinson cited above.

## H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 9-15

least one reason why Paul Collier has found that there is a positive correlation between levels of violence and elections when per capita incomes are below \$2700.00.<sup>3</sup>

External state builders might, however, be able to provide elites in target states with the ability to stay in power. The Soviet satellite states of eastern Europe, a set of cases that Lake does not examine, were successful until the collapse of the Soviet Union, or more accurately the refusal of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to use military power to keep these regimes in place. Before Gorbachev, however, the leaders of the Soviet Union had amply demonstrated in East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia that they were willing to use force. The Communist leaders of eastern Europe remained in power not because they enjoyed legitimacy or support from their own populations (this was probably not the case in the early years of Soviet domination and very surely not the case by the late 1980s) but because external state building worked. Communist leaders stayed in power because they had the backing of a formidable military provided by their powerful neighbor. Lake is very critical of American interventions in Central America and the Caribbean in the first part of the twentieth century, arguing that even though autocratic leaders backed by the United States were able to stay in power, sometimes for decades, the outcome was widespread anti-Americanism just as in central and eastern Europe the outcome has been antipathy toward Russia.

Lake's conclusions are not wrong, but backing autocratic rulers who can provide some degree of security within a state may be the best option that external actors have. Lake argues in his conclusion that the best policy is one that provides incentives for poorly governed states to govern more effectively. He suggests that access to foreign aid and to World Trade Organization membership should be made contingent on performance. He argues that "prospects for integration into a vibrant, economically open and politically secure international order could potentially induce other fragile states to overcome their domestic political divisions" (207). It is, however, entirely unclear what incentives would lead political leaders in poorly governed states to give up power. Incentives such as withholding aid are only likely to work when domestic actors are highly dependent on foreign assistance and where the providers of foreign assistance do not have much of a stake in the target polities.<sup>4</sup> Only then might the threat to withhold assistance be credible. But, as Lake argues throughout his book, if external actors do not have a stake in the outcome they are not likely to commit significant resources in the first place.

Even in societies that have been riven by civil strife individual leaders can make a difference. The most straightforward explanation for why Botswana has done so well over its 50 year history is that its first President, Seretse Khama, was committed to providing collective goods for the population as a whole rather than private goods for his own coterie. Burundi's annual GDP growth was -2.9% annually for the period 1990 to 2000 and 3.7% annually for the period 2000-2014. In contrast, Rwanda's growth rates were -0.2% and 7.7%.<sup>5</sup> Both countries have been torn by ethnic strife with the Rwandan genocide of 1994 being more horrific than anything experienced by Burundi. The most obvious explanation for why Rwanda has done relatively well is the policies followed by its President Paul Kagame. Effective governance requires, as Lake

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> See Desha M. Girod, *Explaining Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank, Table 4.1 World Development Indicators: Growth of output, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/4.1>.

suggests, legitimacy or at least the willingness of the population to accept at least some of the rulings of the state, but legitimacy can be the result of effective governance by political elites; it does not just depend on the attitudes of a population that has been traumatized by violence and ascriptive divisions.

In the 2011 World Development Report,<sup>6</sup> the focus was put on ‘good enough’ inclusion. This remains the most attractive policy prescription that external states builders might follow. Even this prescription requires intimate knowledge of the domestic circumstances of specific countries. Good enough inclusion is what is needed for good enough governance, a concept that Lake sees as being inferior to offering the right incentives, but good enough governance, governance that could provide security, some opportunities for economic growth, some service provision, and perhaps the protection of physical integrity human rights, is the best that can be hoped for in failed and failing states, and is a goal that might be achievable. Good enough governance could in the longer term lead to intrinsic legitimacy; support based on long term performance rather than simply on material exchange. Good enough governance is consistent with the preferences of national and external state-building elites.

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<sup>6</sup> The World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2011), [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/WDRS/Resources/WDR2011\\_Full\\_Text.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/WDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf)



### Author's Response by David A. Lake, University of California, San Diego

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Let me begin by thanking David Chandler, Bridget L. Coggins, and Stephen D. Krasner for their reviews of my recent book, *The Statebuilder's Dilemma*. It is a rare opportunity—and a delight—when three such talented scholars engage one's work so deeply and thoughtfully. I greatly appreciate their contributions. The reviews ably and accurately summarize the main argument of the book, so I will not repeat it here. I would, however, like to respond to and amplify several points.

Krasner and I appear to differ fundamentally in our theories of state failure and, thus, the analyses of statebuilding that follow. Why states fail is fertile soil for further inquiry, though it is too often left untilled in studies of statebuilding. Krasner explicitly endorses the rational choice institutionalist theory of state failure. In this approach, states fail because elites exploit their societies, undermining conditions necessary for growth and development. Drawing upon modernization theory, overtly so in Krasner's case, societies are expected to share certain universal values and converge in their preferred policies as they develop. The problem, accordingly, is not between different publics in different states, but between predatory elites and their own publics. The solution, in turn, is to create strong, representative institutions to limit predation—the 'liberal' strategy taken by much of the international community over the last decades, embraced by President George W. Bush in Iraq, and appropriately criticized by Chandler in his review. Yet, even while starting from this foundation, Krasner accepts that liberal statebuilding has failed. Instead, he suggests that we learn to live with elites that are "good enough," or at least somewhat restrained in their exploitation of society. Ideally, as he suggests at the end of his essay, one might hope for a virtuous leader who eschews predation and leads his country to develop effective political institutions that bind their successors. Despite Krasner's plea on this score, however, hope is not a policy—and virtuous leaders stand out precisely because they are rare.

In my approach, laid out in detail in Chapter 1 of the book, states fail first and foremost because of deep social cleavages, whether these divide by class, religion, lineage, or ethnicity. Led by their own self-seeking leaders, social groups of whatever form aim to limit and perhaps undermine state authority and to sustain their own. States fail, in this view, not because they are weak, but because social groups are 'too strong' and prevent states from consolidating their authority. When states are then unable to provide basic security and services to all groups, or worse, become partisans for one group or another, groups turn inward upon themselves for protection, leading already unconsolidated states to break apart at the seams. Statebuilding, in turn, requires overcoming these social fissures, deepened by bloodshed, and rebuilding (or building for the first time) a monopoly of the *legitimate* use of violence. To put this another way, building a state that is legitimate in the eyes of the people over which it rules, even though it may not have existed before, is the *sine qua non* of statebuilding success. One cannot do this just by assembling some set of institutions designed by Washington or the United Nations. Building legitimacy requires attention to local desires and cultures, political neutrality, and a commitment to maintaining social order and the new state over an extended period of time. Only once a new set of social actors are vested in the new regime can legitimacy arise.

The statebuilder's dilemma, correctly captured by the reviewers, follows from this theory of state failure. Since it is difficult and costly, only states with interests in the future policies of the failed state will be willing to undertake this awesome task of social engineering. In pursuit of their own interests, however, statebuilders will seek to promote leaders in the failed state who share their policy preferences or are at least sympathetic to their interests. In supporting such loyal leaders, statebuilders undermine their legitimacy. I actually agree with Krasner that elites and publics do not necessarily share the same interests; indeed, it is precisely the ability of the statebuilder to elevate a leader who is more sympathetic to its interests than the public's that drives the

dilemma. It does not follow, however, that different publics necessarily share the same interests. Modernization theory has been discredited in its teleological view of development, and especially on its presumption of a convergence of social desires as per capita income grows. In those regions of the world today where states are most fragile and likely to fail, the interests of societies and the United States, the lead statebuilder, are likely to diverge dramatically. As just one instance, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Somalia was rapidly gaining popular support, but it was unacceptable to the United States and Ethiopia, albeit for different reasons—the first because it was Islamic, the second because it was irredentist. With U.S. support, Ethiopia intervened to topple the UIC government and install its own puppet. Rarely will the interests of societies in need of statebuilding and those of the statebuilders coincide. The dilemma will continue to thwart effective statebuilding for the foreseeable future.

Chandler's critique is of liberalism or "liberal" statebuilding, one which I mostly share. But, rather than apologizing for liberal statebuilding, my real point is that statebuilding has never been truly liberal, even in the 1990s and 2000s. Instead, statebuilders are always self-serving actors who intervene in pursuit of their own interests—combatting global terrorism, seeking regional stability, or squashing Somali irredentism—by emplacing leaders and regimes in power who will protect and promote those interests. What was unique about post-Cold War statebuilding was that the United States was free to balance its previously naked geopolitical ambition with a greater concern for the legitimacy of the target regime, thereby throwing the dilemma that has always existed into sharper relief. Liberalism was the guise in which this new concern with legitimacy was clothed, but the point is that ambition—naked or not—always trumps legitimacy through support for loyal leaders.

Although Chandler believes statebuilding has gone out of style—it is dusk and the owl is flying—states will continue to be drawn into this dilemma by their desires to protect their own interests in weak or failed states. This is not because we "care" in the abstract or are driven by humanitarianism, one place where Chandler appears to misread my argument. Rather, the United States might not want to engage in statebuilding—and it might call it something else, as it did in Central American in the early twentieth century when it was more accurately described as imperialism. But, the United States will continue to intervene in fragile states because of our self-defined interests. What has likely waned is *liberal* statebuilding, which has failed repeatedly. But the tradeoff between promoting one's own political interests through loyal leaders and the ability of those leaders to gain legitimacy from their own people remains.

I am, perhaps, trapped by my pragmatism or "realism," as Chandler charges. As Coggins suggests, the only way out of the "box" created by the statebuilder's dilemma is to blow up the box, to reconceive states, or at least their extant borders, and the interests that drive intervention. This is likely true, but harder than either Chandler or Coggins admits.

Allowing states to break up into possibly more homogenous territorial units does not resolve the dilemma. The micro-successes, as Coggins calls the cases of Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland from the book, prospered not because they were smaller or more homogenous units, but because Kurdish preferences were more closely aligned with those of the United States, in the first instance, and no geopolitical interests were at stake in the second. The latter, in particular, flew under the radar screen of the international community, which instead focused on the national government, and Addis Abba, which, as Coggins notes, was only too happy to see a weak government next door. Yet, Somaliland is a sterling example of what can be accomplished when indigenous groups are left on their own to resolve their differences and build institutions to protect their

agreements. These micro-cases do not challenge the dilemma but, in fact, affirm the importance of interests and their alignment in statebuilding.

Coggins explicitly and Chandler implicitly are correct that reconceiving interests might vitiate the dilemma. In extreme form, if states suddenly became altruists, willing to bear substantial costs simply to mitigate violence and human suffering, the dilemma would disappear. States would intervene credibly, promote leaders with policy preferences near the median of the target society, and guarantee the political settlement against all future challenges. The new state could then become legitimate. But there are not many altruists in the world, or at least not enough willing to bear the costs of statebuilding over the decades necessary for success. Or, as in earlier periods, if states were able to eschew any humanitarian goals and focus only on self-interested support for loyal leaders—no matter how ruthless and repressive—the dilemma would also evaporate. As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once famously said about General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo y Molina of the Dominican Republic, “he may be an SOB, but he’s our SOB”—and that’s all that’s necessary.<sup>1</sup> Good enough governance, espoused by Krasner, is the contemporary equivalent. As long as a leader serves the statebuilder’s interest and can maintain a modicum of political control over all of the territory he rules, that’s “good enough,” even if some human rights and political freedoms are sacrificed in the process. Contemporary publics in Western countries, however, are not likely to support such a strategy over the long haul, which undermines the credibility of the statebuilding project and its ultimate impact. While one might wish the United States or other plausible statebuilders would reconceive their interests in ways that mitigate the statebuilder’s dilemma, I do not believe interests are sufficiently malleable to eliminate it entirely. As with hopes for virtuous leaders, wishful thinking is not a policy. Yes, I am likely bound by my realism, but so is much of the real world. Where I agree with Coggins, however, is in the exaggeration of the likely threats from ungoverned spaces. There is an actual threat here, but it has been blown out of proportion by scared publics and politicians who manipulate their fears. The U.S. war in Iraq is a prime example. On this score, a stronger dose of realism—not less—is required.

The problem of state failure and the statebuilder’s dilemma will not go away anytime soon. States will continue to fail. And states will continue to either ignore those failed states in which they lack interests or intervene to promote their own ambitions by emplacing loyal leaders in power, even while undermining their legitimacy. Statebuilders get the policies they want at the expense of foregoing legitimate states that can stand on their own. For this reason, states will continue to fail, statebuilders will continue to intervene, and states will continue to fail. This is, I admit, a highly pessimistic conclusion, especially for leaders of Western democracies who feel pressed by their own voters to “do something” about widespread suffering abroad. The policy lesson is that, despite calls to intervene, we should not expect to build effective, stable states. This appears to be the lesson drawn by former President Barack Obama, embodied in his restraint in Libya and Syria, though whether it has been absorbed by President Donald J. Trump is another question. We can, will, and perhaps should continue to engage to protect realistically defined interests, but the state building will have to be done by the affected citizens themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham F. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 24.