Research Brief

RAND NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION

A Guide to Nation-Building

Despite a wealth of prior and recent experience in nation-building, the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq was marked by unforeseen challenges and hastily improvised responses. One reason is that U.S. policymakers had not systematically tried to draw lessons from earlier operations. In an effort to help remedy this deficiency, the RAND Corporation has published *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*, which draws together best practices from 16 previously published case studies and eight others that are in preparation.[1]

Key findings

The primary objective of nation-building is to make a violent society peaceful.

- **Security, food, shelter, and basic services should be provided first.**
- **Economic and political objectives can be pursued once these first-order needs are met.**
- **Reform generates resistance, which can be overcome only through the skillful application of personnel and money. Objectives need to be scaled to match resources. Not doing so will lead to mission failure.**

Peace enforcement during active conflict is, on average, 10 times more demanding, in money and personnel, than an operation that begins with agreement among all local combatants to accept international peacekeepers.

Planning Operations

Mission planning needs to involve regional experts, those with prior nation-building experience, and political leaders. It must set objectives, marshal adequate resources, establish an institutional framework for managing the intervention, and draw on all governments and organizations whose contributions will be required.

- *Approach.* Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to nation-building:
  - Co-option: The intervening authorities try to redirect competition among existing institutions for power and wealth from violent to peaceful channels. This is a common approach of UN-led peacekeeping missions.
  - Deconstruction: The intervening authorities dismantle the state apparatus and build a new one. This is the approach taken by many U.S.-led peace enforcement missions.
- *Priorities.* The prime objective of any nation-building operation is not to make an authoritarian government democratic or a poor nation rich, but to make a violent society peaceful. If basic needs for safety, food, and shelter are not being met, money spent on political or economic development is likely to be wasted.
- *The Golden Hour.* The weeks following the arrival of foreign troops tend to be a time of maximum possibility. Resistance is unorganized, spoilers unsure of their future. If the intervening authorities are to take advantage of this opportunity, they need to control enough personnel and material resources to secure and supply at least the capital.

Marshaling Resources to Meet Priorities

The guide takes up the tasks of the nation-building process in order of priority. Because those missions that do falter frequently do so because of a failure to align resources and objectives, the guide offers formulas for the necessary size and cost of each mission component—soldiers, civil administrators, etc. Some of the principal insights are as follows:

- *Security* is provided by soldiers, police, and a judicial and corrections system. Establishing a modicum of security requires a military force that is large enough—as many as 20 soldiers per thousand inhabitants—to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants. Military or international civilian police forces are needed to protect citizens from criminals and violent political groups and to mentor a reformed local civilian police force. Sufficient support and funding must be extended to the police force and the judicial and corrections system.
- *Humanitarian relief* agencies are, for the most part, professionally staffed and well resourced. The challenge is in coordinating with the intervening military organizations, with which most humanitarian agencies are reluc-

[1] The previously published case studies were reported in *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* and *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq*, both by James Dobbins et al.

tant to align themselves, because any such alignment could limit their access to people in need.

- *Governance* is a high priority because local institutions will have to provide education, health care, electricity, telecommunications, water, and sanitation. Funding from the intervening authorities will have to run around 10 percent of the country's preconflict gross domestic product.
- *Economic stabilization* requires a reasonably stable medium of exchange. Early attention should be given to creating or strengthening a central bank and other financial institutions. Donor support will be required to balance government expenditures and revenue.
- *Democratization* should be viewed as a way to redirect the competition for wealth and power from violent into peaceful channels, not as an abstract exercise in social justice. Ideally, elements of civil society should be allowed to develop before national elections are held. However, institutions based on representative government are typically the only form of reconstituted state authority acceptable to most of the population.
- *Infrastructure and development* will depend on the ability of the intervening authorities and the host government to control inflation and finance the government's budget, among other things. Early efforts should focus on the repair, not the improvement, of existing infrastructure. Improvements should be funded via loans, not grants.

Overall Costs

The costs of nation-building depend on the size of the population affected, its urbanization, its income, and its level of conflict. Costs also depend heavily on whether all parties to the conflict collaborate with a peacekeeping force, or whether they must be compelled to do so, in which case the mission becomes one of peace enforcement. The table gives an estimate of annual costs for each type of mission in a relatively small, poor country, such as Haiti or Liberia. The total cost comes to $1.5 billion annually for a peacekeeping mission, and almost $16 billion for peace enforcement. Military and police personnel requirements scale similarly. As demonstrated by the costs, full-scale peace enforcement missions are generally feasible only in relatively small societies about which the intervening governments feel very strongly.

It has been said that no war plan can survive first contact with the enemy. Neither can a nation-building plan survive first contact with the nation to be rebuilt. The true test of any such plan is not in its ability to predict every detail of the operation, but rather in its success in matching ends to means. ■

Illustrative Costs of Nation-Building

Sector	Personnel		Cost (millions of US$)
	Local	Int'l	
Light peacekeeping			
Military		8,000	360
	15,000		50
Police		1,000	170
	11,000		18
Rule of law			18
Humanitarian			170
Governance			260
Economic stabilization			30
Democratization			50
Development and infrastructure			390
Total, light peacekeeping	26,000	9,000	1,520
Heavy peace enforcement (additional requirements)			
Military		57,000	12,640
Police		7,000	1,080
Development and infrastructure			360
Total, heavy peace enforcement	26,000	73,000	15,600

NOTE: Estimated annual costs in a hypothetical country of 5 million people with a per capita gross domestic product of $500. Total costs do not sum due to rounding.

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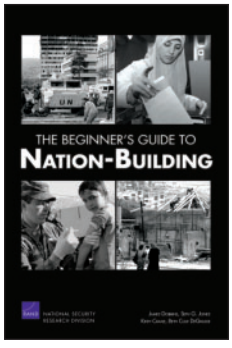

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