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OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO PEACE
LOCAL FACTORS IN NATION-BUILDING

James Dobbins, Laurel E. Miller, Stephanie Pezard, Christopher S. Chivvis, Julie E. Taylor, Keith Crane, Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, Tewodaj Mengistu

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Summary

In the past decade, RAND has published a series of studies on nation-building. We intend this term to describe operations conducted by external civilian and military authorities that employ armed force alongside other means of influence in the aftermath of conflict to promote enduring peace. Some prefer the term state-building, giving primacy to postconflict activities aimed at constructing state institutions and deemphasizing those activities intended to build a national identity. Others prefer peace-building, which perhaps best captures the overriding purpose of the types of externally driven operations on which we focus. Neither state-building nor peace-building necessarily implies the employment of armed force, whereas all the cases we study include this element. We have stuck with nation-building, the most common label in American parlance, albeit one often applied pejoratively, in order to reach a wider audience and to shed new light on an oft-misunderstood and underappreciated undertaking.

Three prior RAND studies have examined U.S., European, and United Nations (UN) performance in this field. Following that work, RAND produced a practitioner’s manual, titled The Beginner’s Guide.

All of these publications were intended to analyze and improve the policies adopted by the intervening parties. In this volume, we examine some of those same operations with a new focus on the indigenous societies rather than the external parties, in an effort to understand how varying local circumstances affected outcomes.

What literature there is on the impact of local factors on post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction tends to treat either individual cases or individual sources of conflict. There is, however, a more comprehensive body of work on the causes of civil war. These studies necessarily have some application to the causes of its renewal, and thus the obstacles posed to preventing the renewal of conflict, which is the central purpose of nation-building missions.

Among the factors found to contribute to the outbreak of civil war are large populations, low per capita income, lootable natural resources, recent political instability, weak democratic institutions, a small military, rough terrain, hostile or unstable neighbors, and weak government. In assessing the relative importance of these causes, political scientists tend to put an emphasis on issues of governance and societal divisions, whereas economists are prone to stress the availability of resources for rebellion, some going so far as to argue that, wherever insurgency is financially and practically feasible, it will occur. These two perspectives are sometimes referred to as the grievance and the greed schools of civil war causality.

There are also critiques that dismiss the whole concept of nation-building. Some authors argue that local circumstances are so influential and so varied from one instance to another as to render any common approach to such missions infeasible. Others feel the project too difficult and expensive to be worthwhile. Some go so far as to insist that societies are so impervious to external influence as to doom any such effort to failure. These critiques generally rest their conclusions on a very limited number of cases, which is to say those that failed.

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This study looked at the effects of local circumstances on the outcomes of nation-building efforts across the full spectrum of post–Cold War operations of this type. We first examine in some detail the impact of local factors in six different cases chosen for variety of location, size, income level, demography, culture, and institutional development of the societies involved. In each case, we seek to determine how local factors affected efforts of international actors to promote security, democratization, better governance, and economic development and vice versa—that is, how the behavior of the interveners affected these factors. We then expand our analysis, using statistical data, to a larger set of 20 post–Cold War interventions led by the United Nations, the United States, and Europe.

Six Case Studies

Cambodia
Invasions by U.S., South Vietnamese, and North Vietnamese armed forces triggered this country’s two-decade civil war, including genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The society was poor to start with; the government weak; and the population homogenous, historically rather passive, and generally respectful of authority. In 1991, UN peacekeepers arrived with an expansive mandate but only limited time and means to fulfill it. Although a signatory of the peace agreement, the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm. Denied external support, however, it soon faded away. UN forces departed two years after their entry, leaving behind a poorly governed and undemocratic state, but one at peace and with a slowly improving economy.

El Salvador
The 1992 peace accord between the government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, or FMLN) ended 12 years of civil war. That conflict had opened with a military coup d’état and was fueled by social and economic disparities between large landowners and a mostly landless rural population. The opposing sides in the civil war received
external support from the Soviet Union and its allies on the one hand and the United States on the other. With the end of the Cold War, these external parties collaborated in promoting a peace accord and dispatching UN peacekeepers. The United Nations oversaw the demobilization of former combatants, encouraged land reform, and helped reorganize the police and army. El Salvador has since remained at peace, although suffering high levels of criminal violence. Its democracy has been strengthened, its government performance improved marginally, and its economy expanded.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

With the breakup of Yugoslavia, Bosnia fractured along ethnic and religious lines. The main impetus for Bosnia’s breakup came from the efforts of neighboring states, Croatia and Serbia, to carve up the newly independent Bosnia and incorporate its Croat and Serb populations. Eventually, the three contending parties fought to a stalemate, at which point the international community led by the United States was able to broker a settlement that the leaderships in Belgrade and Zagreb persuaded their respective clients in Bosnia to accept. The international community has since proved unable to reverse the ethnic divisions that the war had solidified, but peace has been preserved, democratization significantly advanced, and the economy greatly expanded. Governance was also somewhat strengthened, but not to the point at which the Bosnian state can function without continued international oversight.

**East Timor**

Under international political and economic pressure, Indonesia agreed in 1999 to let go of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, which it had annexed in the mid-1970s. The Indonesian Army, un reconciled to this outcome, then instigated a brief punitive campaign of revenge on the inhabitants. Australian-led troops restored order, and a UN peacekeeping mission governed the territory for three years while preparing it for full independence. Civil conflict broke out soon after

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3 East Timor is also known as Timor-Leste.
the UN troops departed, however, and international forces had to be reintroduced. Despite its tiny size, the country remains divided along linguistic and geographic lines, but peace has since been maintained, indigenous governance (for the first time ever) established, democratization advanced, and the economy strengthened.

**Sierra Leone**
The war in Sierra Leone began with an invasion by dissident elements operating out of neighboring Liberia, supported by one of that country’s also warring factions. The society was very poor, divided along tribal lines, and badly misgoverned. The war was fueled by revenue from the extraction of alluvial diamonds. Several peace accords failed in implementation, but eventually UN troops, with aid from the United Kingdom, succeeded in suppressing violent spoilers and establishing security. Consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone was aided by a similarly successful international effort to end the civil war in Liberia. Sierra Leone has since remained at peace. It has seen only slight improvement in governance but a more significant advance in democratization and a healthy increase in per capita income, though its level of socioeconomic development remains very low.

**Democratic Republic of the Congo**
In the early 1960s, UN peacekeepers had suppressed three separate insurgencies, leaving this very large and very poor country at peace but terribly misgoverned. In 1997, its longtime dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, was overthrown, his government disintegrated, and the country descended into civil war. The Democratic Republic of the Congo’s (DRC’s) population is concentrated around the capital in the far west and several population centers in the east, with very limited transportation links in between. Neighboring Uganda and Rwanda both sent armed forces across that border and otherwise involved themselves in the civil war, the cost of their interventions more than covered by their resultant access to Congolese diamonds, cobalt, gold, and other mineral resources. International pressures were eventually able to secure the termination of this interference. The DRC subsequently enjoyed a very fragile peace, but this was broken in late 2012 as rebel forces,
reportedly backed by Rwanda, surged in the eastern DRC. During the period of relative peace, the country saw no significant improvement in the quality of governance, little advance in democratization, and very little economic growth or socioeconomic improvement.

**The Most-Influential Factors**

In the six cases, many local factors that contributed to one degree or another to conflict defied modification or elimination. In El Salvador, landlessness remained a problem; in Cambodia, nationalism and xenophobia endured; the inequitable distribution of resources persisted in Sierra Leone; ethnic divisions hardened in Bosnia; regional and political identity differences continued to produce civil unrest in East Timor; and institutions continued to be extremely weak in the DRC. Though improvements were achieved to varying degrees in these countries, governments largely remained ineffective deliverers of public services, poor societies remained poor, lootable resources continued to be looted, security institution capabilities were still weak, and in none of the cases was corruption seriously diminished. Nevertheless, the nation-building operations in these six countries succeeded in improving security, increasing democratization, expanding economic activity, and increasing human development, as did most of the 20 post–Cold War operations we analyze statistically.

Although the causes of conflict and the results of nation-building efforts varied somewhat among the six cases, two common factors go far toward explaining what first caused, or at least enabled, the wars and then helped establish and sustained the peace. The first factor was the powerful role played by outside actors in promoting both war and peace; the second was the tenacity of entrenched patronage networks.

**Geopolitics**

Civil war in Cambodia was sparked by U.S., North Vietnamese, and South Vietnamese invasions and then sustained by Vietnamese, Chinese, Soviet, and U.S. support for contending factions. Peace came
largely as a result of détente, not so much between the United States and the Soviet Union as between China and the Soviet Union.

The civil war in El Salvador grew out of extreme economic disparities but soon became enmeshed in the wider regional competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Once this superpower competition ended, the war in El Salvador was quickly brought to an end.

The war in Bosnia was fought along ethnic lines, but these divisions were manipulated by nationalist leaders in the two neighboring states, both of which wished to carve up the new state. Bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and international political pressures finally brought the fighting to a stop, with the leaderships in Zagreb and Belgrade persuading their local proxies to make peace.

Tiny East Timor was always at the mercy of larger powers. It was abandoned by Portugal, misgoverned and brutalized for decades by Indonesia, liberated by Australia, and then governed for several years by the United Nations. International political and economic pressures on the government of Indonesia caused it to abandon its claims to East Timor and subsequently to halt its army’s campaign of retribution.

The civil war in Sierra Leone was sparked by an invasion of dissident elements operating out of neighboring Liberia. The UN peacekeeping operation gained traction only once the former colonial power, the United Kingdom, stepped in to sharply suppress continued insurgent elements. The deployment of UN peacekeepers to neighboring Liberia helped stabilize both societies.

Conflict in the DRC stemmed from the disintegration of the Mobutu regime but was perpetuated by repeated military incursions from neighboring states. Although international troops and economic assistance were certainly important in restoring some degree of security, the decisive factor was the decision of neighboring governments, usually under international pressure, to withdraw their troops and cease their support for contending factions within the DRC. Such fighting as continues in the DRC at this writing seems to be backed by neighboring Rwanda.
Patronage Networks

Regional and country experts tend to view local patronage networks as more or less unique cultural or historical phenomena, emphasizing their ethnic, religious, tribal, clan, or linguistic origins and sources of support. Yet, across very different societies, some quite heterogeneous and some not, these networks, however organized, seem to behave quite similarly.

Whereas the international community has had considerable success in altering the geopolitical sources of conflict in each of the six cases, it had much less success in weakening the hold of patronage networks that blocked institutional development. These patronage networks could be and often were co-opted into power-sharing arrangements that produced peace, economic growth, and even a modicum of democracy, but they could almost never be persuaded to support institutional reforms that would limit their access to power and ability to extract wealth from the society.

In Bosnia, these networks, some formed in the former Yugoslavia, were strengthened, criminalized, and recast along ethnic lines during the civil war. They continued to dominate the political and economic life of the country once peace was reestablished. In Cambodia, patronage networks reemerged after the war initially as a survival strategy in a context of very limited resources and ineffective government institutions.

In Sierra Leone and the DRC, patronage was organized around tribes, in El Salvador around social class, and in East Timor along linguistic and geographic lines. Although these competing factions sometimes collaborated to divide the political and economic pies, they all resisted strengthening of any national institutions they could not capture and exploit.

The ability of a more or less united international community to alter geopolitical realities and co-opt local patronage networks largely explains the progress registered in these six cases toward peace, some democratization, and varying levels of economic growth. The resistance of these networks to strengthening the state, which would curb their own ability to tap its resources, largely explains the lack of similarly significant advances in government effectiveness.
**Measuring Degrees of Difficulty and Levels of Success**

Looking to a larger universe of 20 post–Cold War nation-building operations, we find the outcomes of our six case studies largely mirrored in the additional 14 cases. That is to say, there were, in most cases, improvements in security, some democratization, economic growth, and socioeconomic advances (often from quite low starting points) but much less progress in government effectiveness.

For each of these 20 cases, we first calculate the risk of renewed conflict at the onset of the intervention, and then the progress achieved over the next decade in security, democratization, government effectiveness, economic growth, and human development.

We calculate the risk of renewed conflict at the start of each mission by employing a model developed by Fearon and Laitin (2003) that incorporates the many factors thought by them to contribute to the outbreak of civil war. This model yields a percentage indicating the likelihood of civil war onset within five years, for instance, 39.8 percent in the case of Bosnia. Although the resultant figures probably understate the chance of renewed conflict in countries that just concluded civil wars, which, in many cases, was probably closer to 100 percent in the absence of any peacekeeping deployment, the figures do provide a useful way to rank the 20 cases as regards degrees of anticipatable difficulty, based on local circumstances, in promoting enduring peace at the start of each nation-building mission.

Alongside these levels of difficulty, we list the eventual outcomes in five areas: security (i.e., whether the country is at peace), democratization, government effectiveness, economic growth, and human development. We define *peace* as the absence of international or civil conflict, the threshold usually being more than 1,000 battle deaths per year. We rate as peaceful those societies falling below this threshold. We employ the Freedom Index updated annually by Freedom House to measure progress in democratization. We employ the World Bank government effectiveness indicator to do the same in that field. We employ mostly International Monetary Fund statistics to measure per capita growth in gross domestic product (GDP). We use the UN Development Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure
of progress in socioeconomic development. In order to facilitate cross-
comparisons, we convert each of the above indices to a 1-to-10 scale, 
with 1 being the worst score and 10 the best.

By juxtaposing chances of renewed conflict based on an evalu-
ation of local factors thought to make that likely and the outcomes 
of these 20 nation-building operations, we can begin to draw some 
conclusions regarding the impact of these factors on the five identified 
outcomes: peace, democratization, government effectiveness, economic 
growth, and socioeconomic development.

**Sustaining Peace**

Table S.1 reveals no strong correlation between the calculated risk of 
renewed civil war and success in preventing such a renewal. All four of 
the failures were among the top half of the list in terms of anticipat-
able difficulty but not among the most-difficult cases. A clear correla-
tion can be seen, however, between consent of the warring parties to 
an international intervention and successful establishment of peace. 
All but one of the peacekeeping missions produced peace, and none of 
the peace-enforcement missions has yet done so. That is to say, all but 
one (the DRC) of the interventions that were initiated on the basis of 
a peace agreement and with the consent of the parties to the conflict 
subsequently succeeded in establishing peace, whereas the three that 
lacked such prior consent—Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq—did not.

The table thus indicates that peacekeeping is less difficult than 
peace enforcement, hardly a revelation. It also suggests, however, that, 
aside from consent of the parties, there are no other local conditions 
that preclude at least some degree of success in achieving peace, the 
prime objective of any nation-building operation, except perhaps size. 
Peace was achieved in most of the 20 cases regardless of variation in 
level of difficulty calculated on the basis of varied local conditions.

This observation needs some qualification, however, because the 
two largest societies, the DRC and Sudan, enjoyed the most-precocious 
security, in each case experiencing renewed fighting at several points 
during the peacekeeping operations. As of late 2012, the DRC seems 
plunged into civil war once again, while a divided Sudan could easily 
descend into what would now be a cross-border international conflict.
### Table S.1
Summary of Net Changes in Performance Indicators Following 20 Major Post–Cold War Nation-Building Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty Rankings: Countries Ordered from Highest to Lowest Probability of Renewed Civil War Within 5 Years</th>
<th>In First 10 Years After Intervention</th>
<th>Probability of Civil War Onset Within 5 Years from Start of Intervention (%)</th>
<th>At Peace in 2012</th>
<th>Net Change in Freedom Index (10-point scale)</th>
<th>Net Change in Government Effectiveness (10-point scale)</th>
<th>Net Change in HDI Score (10-point scale)</th>
<th>Cumulative Growth in per Capita GDP (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bosnia</td>
<td>+3.75</td>
<td>+1.95</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>213.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sudan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>+0.3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Kosovo</td>
<td>+3.75&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sierra Leone</td>
<td>+2.25</td>
<td>+0.49</td>
<td>+0.8</td>
<td>72.7</td>
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<td>5. East Timor</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
<td>42.7</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Afghanistan</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>+1.53</td>
<td>+1.7</td>
<td>130.9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. DRC</td>
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<td>−0.25</td>
<td>+0.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Somalia</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>+0.89</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>9. Iraq</td>
<td>+2.25</td>
<td>+0.85</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
<td>84.4&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Mozambique</td>
<td>+2.25</td>
<td>−0.53</td>
<td>+0.5</td>
<td>68.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Haiti</td>
<td>+2.25</td>
<td>+0.06</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
<td>−5.3&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Net Change in HDI Score (10-point scale)</td>
<td>Cumulative Growth in per Capita GDP (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Liberia</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>+3.75</td>
<td>+0.55</td>
<td>+0.3</td>
<td>16.4&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. El Salvador</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>+0.36</td>
<td>+0.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Namibia</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>+0.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Cambodia</td>
<td>4.30</td>
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<td>+0.75</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Eastern Slavonia</td>
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<td>+3</td>
<td>+0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Albania</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
<td>+0.77</td>
<td>+0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Macedonia</td>
<td>2.60</td>
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<td>+1.5</td>
<td>+1.09</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−0.7</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
<td>−7.4&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Solomon Islands</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>+4.5</td>
<td>+2.38</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
<td>20.8&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>+2.15</td>
<td>+0.61</td>
<td>+0.6</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td></td>
<td>+1.875</td>
<td>+0.55</td>
<td>+0.5</td>
<td>48.1</td>
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a For Kosovo and East Timor, we assume a Freedom Index rating of 1 (the lowest) for the condition at the time of intervention because both societies had suffered massive repression in the period immediately prior to the arrival of international forces.

b Based on the most-recent data available (2009).

c Based on the most-recent data available (2010).

d Based on the most-recent data available (2008).

NOTE: See text for explanation of difficulty rankings. NA = not available.
These developments highlight both the limited abilities of weak governments to control extensive territory and widespread populations and the difficulty of deploying adequately sized peacekeeping missions in very populous societies. Size, then, is a serious risk factor for renewed conflict, and one that is especially difficult (or at least especially expensive) to counteract.

Nevertheless, even with these caveats, the record of 16 of the peacekeeping-type interventions in sustaining peace is notable, as is the failure of the three peace-enforcement actions to do the same.

**Promoting Democracy**

With the exceptions of Sudan and Côte d’Ivoire, these 20 societies, even those that remained in conflict, registered advances in democratization over ten years and, in some cases, quite significant progress. On a ten-point scale, these societies experienced an average (mean) improvement of 2.15 points in their Freedom Index scores. Again, these figures indicate no correlation between the degree of anticipatable difficulty and the degree of progress toward democratization. Indeed, Bosnia, the hardest case, registered the second-greatest gain. The highest gain, in contrast, was in the easiest case, Solomon Islands. There was even some improvement in the four societies in which peace has still not been established—the DRC, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq—although, even with some progress, none of these four yet qualifies as a democracy.

The table does indicate a slight inverse correlation between absolute Freedom Index scores and relative degree of anticipatable difficulty in preventing renewed conflict. This reflects the fact that many of the easier cases were more democratic to start with.

**Improving Governance**

Most of these societies showed only modest improvement in government effectiveness; indeed, three societies showed regression in their scores. Again, there is no observable correlation between levels of anticipatable difficulty in forestalling renewed conflict and advances in governance effectiveness.
Achieving Economic Growth
All of these societies except Haiti and Côte d’Ivoire experienced economic growth—in many cases, considerably so. Indeed, the majority of these societies’ economies grew more quickly than those of their income group globally or their region or, in eight cases, both. Our data show a definite but inverse correlation between level of anticipatable difficulty and degree of improvement in terms of per capita national income, with several of the most-difficult cases achieving the highest growth rates. In Bosnia and Kosovo and perhaps other instances, this higher growth can be at least partly explained by the abundant international assistance these societies received. In other words, the level of difficulty was appreciated and a corresponding increase in international aid provided. Nevertheless, aid levels do not fully explain the disparities in economic performance. Negative growth in Haiti can be explained by major hurricanes and a massive earthquake. Côte d’Ivoire was in civil war until 2011.

Advancing Human Development
This index tracks health and education alongside economic indicators. In this sphere, all societies for which data were available achieved progress, even Haiti and Côte d’Ivoire. Interestingly, some of the most-difficult cases achieved the greatest improvement. This includes Afghanistan, which recorded nearly a two-point improvement in its score (on a ten-point scale), although, because it started from such a low base, it did not rise out of the low human development category.

Reasons for Failure
The ability of a more or less united international community to alter geopolitical realities and co-opt local patronage networks largely explains the progress registered in five of our six case studies toward peace, democratization, and economic growth. The resistance of these networks to strengthening the state and curbing their own ability to tap its resources largely explains the more-modest improvement in government effectiveness. These same factors would seem to explain the similar pattern of results in the larger set of 20 societies. Other circumstances usually cited as sources of conflict—poverty, geogra-
phy, size, lack of fully democratic institutions, and ethnic or religious fractionalization—certainly affected absolute levels of achievement in these societies, yet none of these factors except perhaps size would seem to explain most of the disparities in results, and none prevented some degree of success in all categories.

Geopolitics and the strength of patronage networks also help explain the clear failures to achieve enduring peace among these 20 cases. Afghanistan and Iraq were both invaded by the United States; thus, there was neither a peace agreement in place when international forces arrived nor did the presence of foreign forces enjoy the consent of the parties to the preceding conflicts. In both cases, the United States chose to exclude rather than co-opt the dominant patronage networks. Denied their accustomed access to wealth and power, these networks chose to fight back. Equally, and perhaps even more importantly, these disgruntled elements were able to receive substantial external support in order to do so.

The United States enjoyed some degree of regional support for its invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan was very reluctantly acquiescent, but all the other regional states backed the intervention. No sooner was the Taliban routed than Washington rebuffed Iranian offers of continued cooperation, nor was the United States able to discourage renewed Pakistani support for its old clients.

The United States had almost no regional support for its invasion of Iraq. Among that country’s six neighbors, only Kuwait favored the U.S. intervention. Washington’s oft-expressed hope that a democratic Iraq would serve as a model for regime change throughout the Middle East was not a project likely to appeal to neighboring governments. Iran and Syria began supporting Sunni and Shi’a extremists respectively; Turkey staged several small military incursions into the Kurdish north and threatened larger such actions; and Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni states withheld relations with the new Shi’a-dominated government in Baghdad, while individuals within those societies financed Sunni insurgents and the influx of foreign fighters.

Interference from neighbors has been a continuous factor in the DRC’s civil conflict. Such interference was also a factor in Somalia’s conflict, but the main failure, back in 1993, was the decision to scale
back the U.S. military commitment while simultaneously initiating a bottom-up democratization campaign that was bound to antagonize every warlord in the country.

Thus, in three of these cases, the intervening parties sought to exclude the hitherto most-powerful patronage networks in the country from any access to power, influence, or wealth, while, in all four, they failed to secure the support of neighboring states.

Despite the failure to forestall renewed conflict in Afghanistan, there has been remarkable progress there across several of the other indices. That society achieved slightly less than the median improvement in democratization but was the second among all 20 in improved government effectiveness and economic growth and showed the greatest improvement of all in human development. These results, which contrast sharply with the popular image of present-day Afghanistan, cannot be entirely explained by external aid flows because Afghanistan was not among the largest foreign aid recipients on a per capita basis. Neither is it simply that Afghanistan started from a lower base because Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the DRC were all poorer to begin with and grew less rapidly. Dramatic advances in Afghanistan’s school enrollment and life expectancy, declines in infant mortality, and rapid economic growth even in some of the most-conflicted areas of the country do reflect the emphasis of the Afghan government’s counterinsurgency and development strategies in pushing resources and public services out into the hinterland.

**Dissimilar Societies, Similar Instruments**

None of the foregoing analysis is meant to suggest that such factors as geography, culture, and level of development made no difference to the outcomes in these 20 cases. These factors clearly imposed limits to absolute levels of achievement. Yet, to the extent that these circumstances presented impediments to peace, democratization, and economic growth, they were, to some considerable degree, circumvented or overcome. Nation-builders became reasonably adept at altering the behavior of neighboring states, tracing local power structures, and co-
opting feuding patronage networks into more-peaceful, to somewhat more-democratic, and almost always more—economically productive forms of competition. On the other hand, nation-builders had less success in improving government effectiveness.

They achieved these results using a limited set of tools. Although every society is, to some degree, unique, the instruments with which the intervening powers seek to promote peace are few in number and largely similar from one mission to the next, consisting of compulsion (military force), persuasion (diplomacy), and various forms of technical advice and economic assistance. The quantity and quality of such tools do make a difference to the outcomes, as we have emphasized in prior publications, but so does the skill with which they are employed and their responsiveness to the local context, as we try to illustrate in our six case studies here.

Among these tools, diplomacy seems to be the most decisive, when backed by economic and sometimes military assets. Thus, just as geopolitics proved to be the most important factor in either sparking or sustaining conflict in each of our six case studies, so diplomacy proved decisive not just in mediating peace agreements but also, perhaps more importantly, in altering for the better the behavior of external actors that gave rise to or perpetuated the conflicts.

It should not be surprising that it is easier to alter the behavior of governments than to reengineer societies. Neither should it be surprising that an altered geopolitical environment can greatly improve the prospects for peace. It is also important to recognize, however, that even the most-skillful diplomacy and the most-favorable regional environments would not have sufficed to bring enduring peace to these societies had the international community not also been willing to commit military manpower and economic assistance in order to disengage adversaries, demobilize combatants, reintegrate former fighters into civilian life, and create new political and economic avenues through which formerly warring factions could continue to compete for power and wealth via peaceful rather than violent means. Prior RAND studies, in particular *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building*, 
explored the instruments and policies through which the international community effectuated these changes.\footnote{Dobbins, Jones, Crane, and DeGrasse, 2007.}

Where such efforts have been inadequately resourced or unwisely executed, the result has been subpar outcomes, even in favorable geopolitical circumstances. Inadequate attention to reintegration of former combatants, for instance, left a legacy of heightened criminal violence in El Salvador. UN forces in Sierra Leone were outmatched by local insurgents until rescued by UK troops. Foreign forces left East Timor prematurely and had to be returned once conflict resumed. International resources for the DRC were never enough to fully overcome the challenges of size, distance, and difficult terrain.

In sum, operations that have enjoyed local consent and regional support almost always have achieved peace, even when a degree of coercion was employed to secure both. Nearly all these operations have also helped produce freer, more-democratic, and more-prosperous societies. Clearly, local conditions limited absolute outcomes, and, clearly, some of these indigenous obstacles have not been subject to rapid alteration, but neither have most of the oft-cited barriers to nation-building operations blocked significant progress.

**Establishing More-Realistic Expectations**

This monograph suggests benchmarks by which to measure progress in current and future nation-building–type operations. Any mission that results in, for instance, better than a 21.5-percentage-point rise in a country’s Freedom Index over ten years (that is, an improvement greater than 2.15 points on a ten-point scale), more than 55-percent growth in its per capita income, or better than a 6-percentage-point improvement in either its HDI or government effectiveness scores will be doing better than the post–Cold War averages to date.

Other measures of progress may also become available. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index does not extend far enough back to cover the older cases we examined but should be
available to benchmark future operations. Better statistics are gradually being developed to measure violent conflict, and these too should ultimately enable more-precise measurement of progress in promoting security than the binary judgment we have employed in this study.

Establishing more-realistic expectations may, over time, lead to more-balanced appraisals of individual missions and the nation-building enterprise more generally. The prominence in memory of a few spectacular nation-building failures has created the impression among the general Western public, and even among many more-informed audiences, that these missions seldom succeed. In the United States, both Democratic and Republican presidents have routinely insisted that they will not do nation-building because of this negative reputation, even as they repeatedly engage in just such activity. Both firsthand accounts of field operatives and academic appraisals of even relatively successful operations tend to be more critical than otherwise, reflecting exaggerated expectations and resultant frustration on the part of both disappointed practitioners and interested observers at the slow pace and limited nature of the resulting societal changes. Five or ten years on with almost all of these operations, poor populations remain poor and bad governments remain bad. A war-torn West African state is at best transformed into a peaceful West African state, not an applicant for membership in the European Union. (On the other hand, all of the European states covered herein are indeed in the queue for EU membership.)

Yet, as this report illustrates, the great majority of postconflict nation-building operations over the past two decades have resulted in improved security, progress in democratization, significant economic growth, and advances in human development, and most have done so with a modest commitment of international military manpower and economic assistance. In the six cases we examine in detail, many of the factors that contributed to conflict in the past were not significantly modified, but, overall, enough changed that the conflicts did not resume. Among the set of 20 cases, operations that enjoyed local consent and regional support invariably achieved some significant measure of success, even when a degree of coercion was employed to secure both. The result has been more-peaceful, freer, more-prosperous soci-
ties with healthier and better-educated populations, although not, in most cases, significantly more-competent governments. Operations that did not secure local consent and regional support did not achieve peace, although even these efforts so far have produced improvements in most of these other fields, particularly in the case of Afghanistan.