Spring 2018

Avoiding Nation-Building: From Nixon To Trump

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Recommended Citation

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ABSTRACT: This article explores how the aversion to nation-building, a consistent theme in post-Vietnam foreign policy doctrine, has shaped military operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond.

A core element in the emerging foreign policy doctrine of President Donald Trump is the desire to use force effectively while also avoiding prolonged nation-building operations. In August 2016, Trump promised to "crush and destroy" the Islamic State as well as "decimate al-Qaeda."[1] But if Trump intended to seize the sword, he would also cast aside the shovel, "the era of nation-building will be ended."[2] In March 2017, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson said America's number one goal in the Middle East was to "defeat ISIS." But he added, "we are not in the business of nation-building or reconstruction."[3] The Trump administration sought to reconcile these goals through a kinetic posture that shifted spending away from the State Department, foreign aid, United Nations peacekeeping efforts, and other programs integral to stabilization missions, and toward big-ticket hardware and symbols of American might, such as aircraft carriers.[4]

The challenge of employing military operations to further US interests and values while averting protracted nation-building has been a fundamental dilemma for policymakers since at least the era of Southern Reconstruction after the Civil War. Nation-building—the use of US troops to strengthen a regime and create order inside another country that is typically experiencing, or at risk of, internal conflict—encompasses a wide range of stabilization and governance activities, from counterterrorism to overseeing elections to training indigenous troops, and includes relatively nonviolent peacekeeping missions, such as those in Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s, together with sustained counterinsurgency operations, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early part of this century.

Resistance to prolonged nation-building partly reflects the striking costs of the counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Moreover, the US military traditionally regards soldiers as warriors rather than as nation-builders, and views stabilization operations as

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1   Donald J. Trump, "Remarks at Youngstown State University" (speech, Youngstown, Ohio, August 15, 2016), www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=119503.

2   Politico Staff, "Full Text: Donald Trump's Speech on Fighting Terrorism," *Politico*, August 15, 2016.

3   Rex W. Tillerson, "Remarks at the Global Coalition against ISIS" (speech, Washington, DC, March 22, 2017), https://bh.usembassy.gov/tillerson-addresses-coalition-68-nations-defeat-isis/.

4   US Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again* (Washington, DC: OMB, 2017).

a distraction from its primary job of fighting conventional interstate wars.[5] The principle of civilian control of the military may also produce skepticism about granting governing authority to US soldiers, even in a foreign country.[6] Nation-building missions are consistently less popular with the public than interstate wars. Indeed, the term *nation-building* is a highly pejorative phrase in the United States. Liberals often associate nation-building with hawkish neoconservatism or imperialism. Meanwhile, conservatives sometimes view nation-building as big government welfare, a diplomatic "Obamacare."[7]

In recent decades, many prominent foreign policy doctrines—the Nixon Doctrine, the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, the Lake doctrine, the Rumsfeld doctrine, and the Obama doctrine—were animated to a large extent by the wish to use force without enduring endless stabilization operations. If this quandary is perennial, it is also intractable. For half a century, America's involvement in nation-building has been pervasive: modern warfare is overwhelmingly characterized by civil wars, and therefore, virtually any US military operation involves a stabilization component. Indeed, the quest for a doctrine to employ force without prolonged nation-building is an illusory endeavor that may actually raise the odds of a quagmire.

Dueling Doctrines

In the late 1960s, Richard Nixon faced a fundamental predicament. As a hawkish Republican, the president sought to wield force to deter and to defeat adversaries around the world. But in the wake of the Vietnam War, with over 25,000 American fatalities and an increasingly restive Congress and public, the United States needed to avoid large-scale counterinsurgency campaigns in areas of secondary strategic interest. In July 1969, the president outlined a solution—the Nixon Doctrine—that placed primary responsibility for internal threats and nation-building on local allies.[8] The Nixon Doctrine became the basis for the Vietnamization policy to withdraw US troops from South Vietnam while simultaneously stepping up training and material assistance for Saigon's military.

During the early 1980s, Secretary of Defense Caspar Willard Weinberger, together with his aide (and later chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) Colin Powell, faced the same fundamental challenge of waging war without prolonged nation-building. In the wake of the traumatic experience in Vietnam, as well as the costly US peacekeeping operation in Lebanon from 1982 to 1984 in which a car bomb struck the Marine barracks and killed 241 Americans, the Weinberger-Powell

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5   Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 36.

6   Nadia Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017).

7   Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War* (New York: Little Brown, 2010); and Bruce Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 1992): 49–73, doi:10.2307/2600916.

8   Richard Nixon, "Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen" (remarks, Top O' the Mar Officer's Club, Guam, July 25, 1969), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2140. This principle was later formalized in a speech on November 3, 1969, and a White House document in 1970 entitled "Peace through Partnership—The Nixon Doctrine."

doctrine provided a solution.[9] This doctrine outlined six principles to assess the wisdom of prospective military operations: (1) vital US or allied interests should be involved, (2) Washington should be committed to winning, (3) clear and achievable objectives must exist, (4) the size of the forces should continually be adjusted according to the goals, (5) there ought to be a reasonable assurance of public and congressional support, and (6) force should be used as a last resort.[10]

These tests would filter out most nation-building missions, where the objectives are typically vague and a victory cannot easily be defined. Furthermore, humanitarian or peacekeeping operations tend not to involve core American interests and are often unpopular with Congress and the public. Instead, only conventional interstate wars, such as the Persian Gulf War (1991), would dependably qualify.

Weinberger believed if the tests were satisfied, the United States should mobilize its full might to win: "When it is necessary for our troops to be committed to combat, we *must* commit them, in sufficient numbers and we *must* support them, as effectively and resolutely as our strength permits."[11] By carefully parsing prospective military operations, the United States could avoid stabilization missions, such as those in Vietnam and Lebanon, and win decisive interstate campaigns.

The Clinton administration signaled greater willingness to use force to protect human rights and to promote democracy. But in the wake of the "Black Hawk Down" firefight in Somalia (1993), which led to the deaths of 18 American soldiers during a humanitarian operation, the administration also sought to limit the risk of lengthy nation-building. The Pentagon stressed, "The primary mission of our Armed Forces is not peace operations; it is to deter and, if necessary, to fight and win conflicts in which our most important interests are threatened."[12] The answer, insisting on a withdrawal plan before any stabilization mission began, can be termed the Lake doctrine, after National Security Advisor Tony Lake. In 1996, Lake described an "exit strategy doctrine," where the United States should only send troops abroad if it knows "how and when we're going to get them out."[13] This doctrine did not apply to interstate wars or deterring external aggression but specifically targeted stabilization missions where "tightly tailored military missions and sharp withdrawal deadlines must be the norm."[14]

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the George W. Bush administration sought to engage in expansive military operations, preemptively and unilaterally if necessary, to defeat terrorists and their state patrons. At the same time, US policymakers were strongly averse

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9   Kenneth J. Campbell, "Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine," *Armed Forces and Society* 24, no. 3 (April 1998): 357–74, doi:10.1177/0095327X9802400302.

10   Caspar Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power" (remarks, National Press Club, Washington, DC, November 28, 1984), http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/weinberger.html.

11   Weinberger, "Uses of Military Power" (emphasis in the original).

12   White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: White House, 1996), 23.

13   Anthony Lake, "Defining Missions, Setting Deadlines: Meeting New Security Challenges in the Post-Cold War World" (speech, George Washington University, Washington, DC, March 6, 1996), https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/lake/html.

14   Lake, "Defining Missions"; and David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 102.

to Clinton-era stabilization missions in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere, which were seen as armed social work. "Let me tell you what else I'm worried about," said Bush in 2000, "I'm worried about an opponent who uses nation-building and the military in the same sentence."[15] In 2003, on the eve of the Iraq War, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld gave a speech entitled "Beyond Nation-Building" that criticized the drawn-out peacekeeping operation in Kosovo for creating a "culture of dependence."[16]

The Rumsfeld doctrine tried to reconcile these goals through a policy of transformation that would provide a new generation of communications systems, smart bombs, and stealth weapons, enabling Washington to strike adversaries with shock and awe before quickly passing the baton to local allies or international troops, thereby avoiding the drudgery of nation-building. Armed with this approach, the United States toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001 using a few hundred Special Forces personnel, backed by airpower and local allies, and then handed security responsibilities to Afghan warlords, tribal militia, and a modest international force. A year later, just 10,000 US soldiers were engaged in a narrow counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan, while 5,000 international troops tried to help the new regime in Kabul stabilize the country.[17] Similarly, in 2003, the United States planned an invasion to overthrow Saddam Hussein, "stand up a government in Iraq and get out as fast as we can."[18]

The Obama administration faced a familiar strategic quandary. On one hand, Barack Obama committed to using force to deter and to defeat adversaries, especially al-Qaeda and its affiliated networks. But guided by the principle of "no more Iraq Wars," the president sought "the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints."[19] The Obama doctrine tried to resolve these aims through limited warfare. Military operations would be limited in *number* (with greater selectivity about intervening abroad), limited in *cost* (by "leading from behind" and sharing the burden with international and local allies), and limited in *scope* (by utilizing raids, cyberwarfare, and drone strikes rather than significant numbers of ground troops).[20]

The Obama doctrine shaped both force planning and military strategy. In 2012 the Pentagon stated, "U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations."[21] Obama

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15   Terry M. Neal, "Bush Backs into Nation Building," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2003; and James Dobbins et al., *After the War: Nation-Building from FDR to George W. Bush* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 91.

16   Donald H. Rumsfeld "Beyond Nation-Building" (speech, Salute to Freedom, Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum, New York, New York, February 14, 2003), www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate /dod/sp20030214-secdef0024.htm.

17   David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 57.

18   Toby Dodge, "Iraq," in *Exit Strategies and State Building*, ed. Richard Caplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 246.

19   Dominic Tierney, *The Obama Doctrine and the Lessons of Iraq* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2012); Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Defense Strategic Review" (speech, Pentagon, Washington, DC, January 5, 2012), http://www.whitehouse.gov /the-press-office/2012/01/05/remarks-president-defense-strategic-review.

20   Ryan Lizza, "The Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy," *New Yorker*, May 2, 2011.

21   US Department of Defense (DoD), *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2012), 6.

followed the Bush administration's exit timetable in Iraq by withdrawing combat forces in late 2011. During the Libya Revolt of 2011, Washington intervened as part of a broad coalition, but primarily employed airpower and rejected any nation-building by American troops. In 2009, Obama backed a surge of troops in Afghanistan, but soon became disillusioned by the slow rate of progress and decided to withdraw almost all US forces from the country by the end of 2014. "The fever in this room has finally broken," Obama told a meeting of the National Security Council in 2015, "We're no longer in nation-building mode."[22]

Of course, the puzzle of how to employ force effectively, without getting bogged down in a nation-building quagmire, was not the only consideration behind these doctrines. The Weinberger-Powell doctrine, for instance, aimed to restore the US military as an institution after Vietnam. Policymakers also sought to avoid all forms of protracted and inconclusive war, including prolonged interstate campaigns, through the large-scale deployment of manpower (Weinberger-Powell) or new technologies (Rumsfeld).

But limiting US exposure to nation-building was a common theme weaving these doctrines together. First, avoiding prolonged warfare typically means avoiding prolonged nation-building. The United States has not experienced a protracted interstate war (relative to initial expectations) since the Korean War, but it has endured drawn-out nation-building campaigns in Vietnam, Lebanon, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Second, the authors of the doctrines explicitly, and repeatedly, rejected lengthy stabilization missions. Indeed, it is hard to find other foreign policy principles that were stated so consistently across the ideological spectrum. Third, each doctrine was triggered by a negative nation-building experience: Vietnam for the Nixon Doctrine, Vietnam and Lebanon for the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, Somalia for the Lake doctrine, the Clinton-era missions for the Rumsfeld doctrine, and Iraq for the Obama doctrine.

In some respects, the doctrines overlap. The Nixon Doctrine, the Rumsfeld doctrine, and the Obama doctrine, for example, favor handing responsibility in stabilization campaigns to local allies. But there are also significant differences. The Nixon Doctrine, the Weinberger-Powell doctrine, and the Obama doctrine are fundamentally entry strategies designed to avert a potential quagmire through the careful selection of military operations, whereas the Lake doctrine seeks to identify an exit strategy and a timetable for withdrawal. Meanwhile, the Lake doctrine foresaw the United States playing a role in peace operations but sought to regulate this involvement tightly, whereas the Weinberger-Powell doctrine and the Rumsfeld doctrine attempted to curtail starkly, or even end, US involvement in peacekeeping efforts.

The Day After

How successful were the doctrines? They contributed to one overarching problem of failing to prepare for nation-building, and they produced a number of particular dilemmas: state collapse, wishful thinking, abandonment, overcommitment, and improvisation. We can

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22   Mark Landler, "The Afghan War and the Evolution of Obama," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017.

illustrate these challenges by considering the three major US wars after 9/11: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

Collectively, the doctrines encouraged the dangerous illusion that nation-building can somehow be avoided and, therefore, significant preparation is unnecessary. Since the Vietnam War, nation-building has been a ubiquitous experience for the US military—Panama in 1989, Iraq I (northern Iraq) in 1991, Somalia in 1992, Haiti in 1994, Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq II (post-Saddam) in 2003, and Iraq III (resisting the Islamic State) in 2014—because the character of global warfare changed from interstate war to civil war.

After World War II, nuclear deterrence, democratization, international institutions, and globalization, diminished the incidence of interstate war, but internal conflict did not end. As a result, about nine of ten wars during the post-Cold War era were civil wars, including prominent contemporary conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia.[23] Civil wars also became the main arena for interstate military competition, in the form of proxy wars, where countries back rival insurgent or government actors. Given this strategic environment, almost any conceivable use of ground forces—humanitarian, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism interventions—will have a significant nation-building component, where troops seek to bolster a friendly regime and restore order.

Despite this experience, foreign policy doctrines encouraged the view that nation-building was a deviation from the US military's true vocation of fighting and winning interstate wars. Rather than institutionalize lessons from prior interventions, American officials tended to view such operations as a mistake never to be repeated. Following the Vietnam War, the Army destroyed its material on counterinsurgency held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and planned for an interstate war against the Soviet Union in Europe.

During the 1990s, the US military focused its professional education on conventional interstate contests such as the Gulf War. Stabilization missions were given the second class status of MOOTW, military operations other than war. Officials looked to pass off governance tasks to specialized units in the special operations community, as well as civilian agencies and international allies—any entity other than the core US military. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates described how sidelining unconventional war "left the service unprepared to deal with the operations that followed: Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and more recently Afghanistan and Iraq—the consequences and costs of which we are still struggling with today."[24]

Each doctrine also created particular risks. First, the Rumsfeld doctrine simultaneously sought to expand the use of force in a global war on terror and to minimize America's involvement in nation-building. Underpinning this policy was the heroic assumption that when US troops march away from the smoking ruins, local and international actors will somehow cooperate to produce a political order compatible

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23   John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know about War?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 263.

24   Robert Gates (speech, Association of the United States Army, Washington, DC, October 10, 2007), http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181.

with American interests—and the *day after* will be preferable to the *day before*. An obvious danger is disintegration: toppling regimes and then withdrawing at maximum speed produces an array of collapsed states.[25]

Indeed, the Rumsfeld doctrine triggered two prolonged quagmires in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2001, the Bush administration was determined to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and equally committed to avoid nation-building. After the Taliban fled south, the White House wanted to stay out of Afghan politics. The lack of international forces curtailed Kabul's ability to provide basic services and led to a predictable Taliban recovery. By 2006, the insurgents controlled much of southern Afghanistan, and the prospect of decisive success had evaporated.

Meanwhile in Iraq, the enticing notion of moving beyond nation-building meant invading with no viable plan for postconflict stabilization, and too few troops to prevent widespread looting or the collapse of Iraqi institutions. As Iraq unraveled during 2003 and 2004, the White House stuck to its "small footprint" preferences by pursuing a "leave-to-win" withdrawal plan based on handing over power to Iraqi exiles, reducing US troop levels (which fell from 148,000 soldiers in May 2003 to 108,000 soldiers in January 2004), and maintaining the existing force in forward operating bases far removed from the Iraqi people. The spiral of violence worsened as local rebellions melded into a broader insurgency.[26]

The Nixon Doctrine's emphasis on handing over responsibility for internal threats to local allies is, in many respects, eminently defensible. Compared to American soldiers, indigenous troops may be more culturally aware, more likely to be seen as legitimate by the local people, and far cheaper to deploy. The problem lies precisely in this policy's seductive appeal. The United States is often faced by two unpalatable choices: take responsibility for nation-building or face mission failure. Training and advising programs offer an attractive third path of leaving without losing. Since the alternatives are too wretched to contemplate, officials may become overconfident about the speed and the ease of boosting local forces.

Creating indigenous security forces, however, is an extremely vulnerable process. To borrow from Tolstoy, all successful training programs are alike; every unsuccessful training program fails in its own way. In other words, effective educational endeavors must check a number of boxes, and botching any single element can doom the entire exercise. Training programs may founder due to sectarian divisions, corruption, or a local regime that is more interested in "coup proofing" its military by promoting political lackeys, rather than creating an effective fighting force that could evolve into a rival power center. Indeed, transferring responsibility to local allies is especially difficult in the toughest national security challenges, which arise precisely because capable allied forces are absent. Furthermore, the centrality of training and advising in US strategy is not matched by an appropriate degree of resourcing. These programs are often neglected in peacetime and may be moved center stage only when the United States is eager to withdraw from war. For

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25   Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

26   Dodge, "Iraq," 249.

one thing, the US military traditionally sees advising as a relatively low-status occupation.

Nixon's policy of Vietnamization transformed South Vietnam's air force into the fourth largest in the world. But poor leadership and high desertion rates eroded Saigon's military effectiveness, and in 1975, a North Vietnamese conventional invasion overran the South in just two months. Training local forces was also seen as the ticket out of Afghanistan and Iraq. "As the Iraqis stand up," said Bush, "we will stand down."[27] And as with Vietnamization three decades before, "Iraqization" and "Afghanization" did not produce the intended results. Instead, there was systematic wishful thinking about the time and resources required to build capable local forces.

In the early years of the Iraq War, David Petraeus oversaw a crash program to train Iraqi troops and to smooth America's departure. As the violence worsened, recruits often defected to the insurgency or moonlighted as death squads. Petraeus compared the training mission to constructing an aircraft in flight while under fire. During 2014, after a decade of investment, the Islamic State routed Iraqi security forces in northern Iraq and captured hundreds of millions of dollars of US-supplied equipment. Meanwhile, Washington was slow to invest the necessary training resources in Afghanistan. By 2006, the Afghan National Army had fewer than 20,000 deployable troops, and a target size of only 70,000 men, which can be contrasted with the Obama administration's later and more credible plan for a combined Afghan army and police force totaling 352,000.

Would it have been wise to invade Afghanistan and Iraq with a predetermined departure date? The answer is no, which gets at the problem with the Lake doctrine. Demanding a timeline for withdrawal at the start of a nation-building mission may prevent a flexible response to conditions, turn American soldiers into lame ducks who keep checking their watches, and encourage enemies to bide their time until the scheduled departure. Missions can end up resembling what Gideon Rose called "moon landings," where the United States transports troops to a distant location, and then aims to bring them home safely, without regard for what is left behind.[28] Although there was not a predetermined exit date in the Afghanistan and Iraq operations, the original invasion plan called for US troop levels in Iraq to be reduced to just 30,000 by September 2003, which was wildly unrealistic and fortunately revised.

In many respects, the Iraq War validated the Weinberger-Powell doctrine because a fair application of the tests would have filtered out the operation itself, which was not fought in pursuit of vital interests and was far from a last resort, as well as the invasion plan, which lacked clear objectives or appropriate force levels. Weinberger-Powell's virtual exclusion of stabilization operations is dangerous, however, in a strategic environment where war means *civil* war and American interests and values require some nation-building. Furthermore, the doctrine's commitment to victory could also invite a quagmire. According to Weinberger, after

27   John D. Banusiewicz, "'As Iraqis Stand Up, We Will Stand Down,' Bush Tells Nation," *American Forces Press Service*, June 28, 2005.

28   Gideon Rose, "The Exit Strategy Delusion," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January/February 1998): 56–67.

deploying US troops, "we must support those forces to the *fullest* extent of our national will for as long as it takes to win."[29] But if a campaign deteriorates, Washington may need to reassess the original goals and possibly pursue a substitute for victory. Both Afghanistan and Iraq became unwinnable in the sense that a decisive victory could not be achieved at a tolerable price. In such cases, to have fought "for as long as it takes to win" would have involved grave sacrifice in pursuit of uncertain ends.

The Obama doctrine was designed to avoid an Iraqi-style scenario of prolonged nation-building by a large number of US forces. But the limited-war model might encourage a short-term and improvisational view of war that neglects the political endgame. During military operations, the White House may be reluctant to think too many steps ahead because creating a credible plan for postconflict stabilization could draw the United States into an unwanted nation-building commitment. In other words, a doctrine based on fighting a limited number of wars, in a limited manner, may also produce a limited horizon.

In Libya during 2011, the Obama doctrine encouraged a short-term mindset focused on toppling Muammar Gadhafi's regime, rather than planning seriously for the aftermath. Here, avoiding Iraqi-style nation-building led to Iraqi-style disorder. Libya collapsed into chaos and rival militias feuded for power. In 2014, Obama explicitly recognized that the desire to avert nation-building had triggered a fiasco: "We [and] our European partners underestimated the need to come in full force if you're going to do this . . . there has to be a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn't have any civic traditions."[30] Later, he described "failing to plan for the day after" in Libya as the "worst mistake" of his presidency.[31]

Recent successful cases of US nation-building often deviated from these foreign policy doctrines. In 1995, following the Dayton Accords, the United States contributed troops to a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four years later, after an air campaign against Serbia, US forces joined a similar international mission in Kosovo. From a doctrinal perspective, the operations were deeply problematic. Rumsfeld explicitly rejected peacekeeping in the Balkans as an inappropriate use of the American military. The missions in Bosnia and Kosovo also failed the Weinberger-Powell tests because US interests were not vital, the objectives were vague, and the American public was fairly skeptical. In addition, the Lake doctrine's requirement for a sharp withdrawal deadline was not satisfied. The original proposal for US forces to depart Bosnia after one year was abandoned, and American troops left the country in 2005. Nevertheless, by any reasonable standard, these missions succeeded. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo remain socially divided, US forces helped to stabilize the Balkans, prevent the renewal of civil war, and facilitate the return of Kosovar Albanian refugees—all with zero American fatalities.

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29   Weinberger, "Uses of Military Power."

30   Thomas L. Friedman, "Obama on the World: President Obama Talks to Thomas L. Friedman about Iraq, Putin and Israel," *New York Times*, August 8, 2014.

31   "Exclusive: President Barack Obama on 'Fox News Sunday'," Fox News, April 10, 2016, http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2016/04/10/exclusive-president-barack-obama-on-fox-news-sunday.html.

The surge strategy in Iraq was a stark rejection of the Rumsfeld doctrine. In late 2006, Rumsfeld resigned as secretary of defense and was replaced by Gates. In 2007, Bush deployed over 20,000 extra US troops to Iraq, and appointed a new commander, Petraeus, who adopted a set of tactics known as population-centric counterinsurgency, where troops lived and patrolled closer to the people, provincial reconstruction teams were embedded in combat units, alliances were developed with Sunni tribes to fight al-Qaeda, and firepower was employed selectively but effectively against irreconcilables. Whereas Rumsfeld had yearned to move beyond nation-building, Petraeus oversaw the publication of the 2006 *Counterinsurgency* manual, which declared "Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation builders as well as warriors."[32] The result in Iraq was not a victory: the costs of war had risen too steeply and the country remained extremely fragile. But Iraq was pulled back from the cliff edge, and violence fell sharply after the summer of 2007.

Conclusions and Implications

Richard Nixon, Caspar Weinberger, Colin Powell, Tony Lake, Donald Rumsfeld, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump have little in common in terms of their political ideology. But they all wrestled with the same fundamental puzzle: how to wage war without endless nation-building. The emerging Trump doctrine is not simply an idiosyncratic reflection of Trump's political beliefs and the challenges of the post-Iraq War era. It is also the latest attempt to solve an endemic strategic problem.

Since the 1960s, American officials have proposed a range of solutions: (1) hand over responsibility to allies, (2) establish tests to filter out nation-building missions, (3) create a predetermined exit strategy, (4) pursue military transformation, (5) engage in limited warfare, and in the emerging Trump doctrine, (6) adopt a kinetic posture.

None of the doctrines cracked the riddle, however, and nation-building remained a core part of the US military experience. Indeed, the belief that a template for clean war exists encouraged strategic failure in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. The doctrines ignore a difficult truth: *in a world where 90 percent of wars are civil wars, using force means nation-building.* Officials should accept the inherent relationship between military operations and stabilization endeavors and seek to manage the associated risks. The goal is to develop the American military into an institution that is exceptionally skilled at nation-building and then utilize this capability with great discretion.

The first step is to reject the notion that nation-building is a secondary endeavor compared to conventional interstate war. Instead, Washington should enhance its stabilization capabilities, for example, through improved cultural and language training programs, investment in engineers and special operations forces, and institutional learning from past counterinsurgency operations. Here, there are hopeful signs. The Army's decision to regionally align its brigades should improve soldiers' awareness of local culture and languages. But there are also worrying indications of a backlash against nation-building, similar to

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32   Headquarters, US Department of the Army (HQDA), foreword to *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual 3-24 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2006).

the post-Vietnam era—for example, the decision in 2014 to close the Army Irregular Warfare Center.[33]

Certain aspects of each doctrine provide useful strategic guidance. As Nixon proposed, where possible, the United States ought to let allied troops take the lead in combatting internal threats. According to the US counterinsurgency manual, "The host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well."[34] The degree of investment in training programs, as well as the status and career incentives accorded to American educators, should reflect the centrality of this task in military strategy. In wartime, training operations should begin early, rather than be hastily enacted when the United States is already looking to exit. And there are numerous specific lessons that Washington can learn from the last two decades of warfare, such as the importance of creating communally mixed forces where all ethnic groups are represented.

Many of the Weinberger-Powell tests are highly valuable in judging the wisdom of military operations, especially the focus on assessing interests, identifying clear objectives, and fighting as a last resort. Two major wars of the last half century—Vietnam and Iraq—should never have been fought and could have been filtered out with an appropriate application of Weinberger-Powell. The importance of identifying achievable goals is particularly critical because the United States often goes to war with a moralistic view of the mission as good versus evil, which encourages idealistic objectives of creating a beacon of freedom.

A more appropriate aim in an impoverished and divided society, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, is ugly stability, where an insurgency is managed rather than entirely suppressed and concessions are made to draw rebels into a peace process. The Weinberger-Powell all-or-nothing approach should be loosened, however, to allow for missions like peacekeeping in the Balkans, which offer significant benefits at low risk, and to qualify the notion of winning at all costs, particularly if a mission deteriorates. We might also pose additional questions of prospective operations, such as considering the potential for unanticipated consequences and identifying traps that could derail the use of force.

The Obama doctrine rightly emphasized the value of multilateralism when nation-building. Acting in concert with multiple states who have different rules of engagement generates numerous problems, evident, for example, in Afghanistan. But the balance sheet of multilateralism is strongly favorable because allies can share the burden in blood and treasure, provide intelligence and bases, and crucially, enhance the global legitimacy of the operation, thereby reducing the flow of external aid to rebels, which is vital to an insurgency's success.

Limiting US military operations, however, cannot mean simply improvising things day-to-day. What happens after Kabul, Baghdad, or Tripoli—or Mosul or Raqqa—falls? Who rules and in what ways? What kind of governance will deliver a better peace? Here, the Lake doctrine has value by focusing attention on the exit strategy. But rather than fixate on a deadline for US withdrawal, it is wiser to identify an endgame.

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33   For a broader discussion, see Isaiah Wilson III and Scott Smitson, "Solving America's Gray-Zone Puzzle," *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2016–17): 55–67.

34   HQDA, FM 3-24, 1-27.

In other words, officials should carefully identify the characteristics of enduring political success while retaining a flexible time frame.

The deterioration of security in both Afghanistan and Iraq may be a damning indictment of the Rumsfeld light-footprint model. Indeed, there is little point in overthrowing a tyrant if the result is chaos. But transformation technologies, including communication systems and smart weaponry, have an essential role in nation-building operations, for example, by facilitating precise air strikes that limit collateral damage. American airpower can be a strategic game changer in civil wars, routing the Taliban in 2001 and pushing back the Islamic State after 2014. The key is to recognize the limits of technology. The US military can hit almost anything with pinpoint accuracy, but what if soldiers cannot see the enemy?

By accepting that fighting means nation-building and by combining elements of the different foreign policy doctrines, the United States can maneuver more successfully through an age of civil wars.