Keith Mines has participated in most of America's foreign nation-building missions since the 1980s. His first service was in the US Army, where he served as a paratrooper in Granada and taught counterinsurgency in Central America, and then he joined the US Foreign Service in 1991. In this book, he reviews experiences and lessons learned from his long career in expeditionary diplomacy, including missions to Colombia, El Salvador, Somalia, Haiti, Darfur, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

**Rediscovering counterinsurgency after Vietnam**

In the early 1980s, memories of Vietnam made American policy-makers highly averse to nation-building. So in 1984, when Mines was assigned to help develop a counterinsurgency curriculum at a military training center in Honduras, he found himself in the one place where American efforts were still focused on the challenges of nation-building. In a magnificent section entitled "Counterinsurgency Rediscovered," Mines offers a distilled summary of what he learned then from masters of the previous generation, who had experienced counterinsurgency warfare in Vietnam, Cuba, and the Philippines. His mentors, including Lt. Col. Reynaldo Garcia and Col. John Waghelstein, warned against the dangers of relying on large American forces and heavy weapons to solve the political problems of another country. A basic guiding principle was that a nation-building intervention should involve a balanced mix of military and political support for its indigenous hosts, and America's contribution must be strictly limited so that the hosts should never forget that it is their country to win, and it is their responsibility to offer a better deal for people throughout their country.

In reviewing the many missions where he has served, Mines regularly reminds us that the results of any nation-building intervention are likely to be a complex mixture of successes and

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failures. In El Salvador, a clear success in negotiating a political settlement to end the war in 1992 was followed by a profoundly disappointing failure to secure the subsequent peace, allowing criminal violence to grow in a region that has become the source of a serious refugee crises confronting America today. Conversely, although America's intervention in Somalia in 1994 conspicuously failed to forge a political settlement there, we should recognize that it did succeed in averting a real threat of a massive famine in that country.

An insightful perspective on the occupation of Iraq

Among the assignments that Mines has undertaken, one of the most important was his service as governance coordinator for Al Anbar province in 2003 during the occupation of Iraq. There he had primary local responsibility for responding to some of the toughest political challenges of the growing Sunni insurgency. His chapter on Iraq is the longest in the book, and it offers an insightful perspective on this mission.

The book's subtitle ("political consolidation, building security forces, and economic development") summarizes the mission's priorities as Mines assessed them after he arrived in Al Anbar late in the summer of 2003. Job-creating economic development could offer people some real hope for a better life, but economic development was impossible without basic security, and security would ultimately depend on political reconciliation of groups that could act as spoilers. So even if economic development was a goal, political consolidation had to come first.

The formation of a broadly representative provincial council was key to any hopes for political reconciliation. During the early months of the occupation, civil affairs officers had done what they could to recruit various local leaders and sheikhs into a provincial council, and Mines later organized a series of local caucuses to elect council members who could be more properly representative of communities throughout the province. The provincial council served as a regular channel for complaints from people in Al Anbar, but its effectiveness was frustrated by its lack of any ability to exercise authority over a budget.

A group of sheikhs proposed to organize a Civil Defense Force to protect roads and power lines in the province, if the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) would provide regular funding and equipment for tribal security forces. They were offering to do essentially what was done through the Anbar Awakening three years later, but Mines was unable to get the funding that was needed to do this in 2003. Instead, the CPA put resources into national programs for
recruiting and training security forces. But in the absence of any national political consensus, such national security forces would be seen in Al Anbar as outsiders with no local accountability, and so it is not surprising that people turned to insurgent resistance.

In the fall of 2003, the CPA head Paul Bremer began a series of monthly one-day meetings with his provincial governance coordinators. Mines describes one such meeting where there was vigorous debate about Bremer's plans for economic austerity measures, where Mines and other provincial coordinators argued that government-funded jobs programs could play a vital role in winning support for the new regime. In such debates, we can see the importance of bringing local political perspectives into central policy-making discussions. There has been much ex-post criticism of Bremer's early decisions about de-Baathification and disbanding the Iraqi army in May 2003, but what was needed was a debate that included well-informed officials when the decisions were made. Such policies, which would fundamentally affect political realities in every part of the occupied country, should have been formulated in consultation with provincial governance coordinators who were working to earn the trust of local political leaders throughout the country. From this perspective, it seems severely problematic that Mines and other provincial governance coordinators were not even appointed until after these fundamental postwar policies were formulated.

Lessons from the mission to Darfur

The costly frustration of massive American-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan should prompt policy-makers to seek alternative models for how a strictly limited American involvement can effectively support an intervention that is led by countries in the region. The most promising model for such future nation-building missions may be found in Mines's chapter on Darfur.

In 2007, Mines was deployed by the newly created Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations to head a field office in Darfur, where he coordinated American support for peace-keeping forces from the African Union. If American policy-makers could study just one chapter in this book, this is the one that I would recommend for them to see how a strictly limited American involvement can provide valuable support for peace-keeping mission led by countries in the region. But the chapter deserves careful study, to fully draw out the lessons from Mines's involvement in Darfur.
With authorization from a United Nations resolution, the African Union sent a peacekeeping force that was spread across Darfur in a series of outposts. Each outpost had a US-contracted military observer to help with operational planning and intelligence, and so Mines was sent to oversee a team of field agents who were well placed to monitor and respond to events on the ground throughout Darfur.

One fundamental point that is particularly emphasized throughout the chapter on Darfur is the vital importance of local information from the ground out in the field. Even before he got to Darfur, Mines was advised that, whatever uncertainties he might have, after ten days in Darfur he would know more about the situation there than the rest of the US Foreign Service, and so he should be prepared to offer decisive leadership there.

It may be worth quoting Mines's basic observation about the essential value of field presence for building a peaceful national order:

"Making peace requires hard work that goes beyond a declaration or a conference. It includes the gritty detailed tasks on the ground: reassuring, reporting, and shaping the political environment. It often goes against the interests of numerous stakeholders, and on a higher level includes directed force, sanctions and international pressure, and negotiations. But it starts with people on the ground, and the closer they can get to reality, the more effective and well-calibrated the policies will be."¹

Perhaps a simple peace conference could be enough if the conflict was between two highly disciplined organizations with clear coherent leadership. But those conditions are generally not satisfied when the conflict is in a failed or fragile state. When Mines was in Darfur, there were serious problems of banditry by former separatist fighters, and the worst offenses were committed by troops from the one separatist faction that had signed a peace agreement with the government of Sudan. By agreeing to peace, the leader of this faction had lost the ability to send his fighters on profitable raids against government bases, and so he no longer had the resources to pay and control his troops.

Mines observes that the essential first step toward ending the conflict was inducing rebel groups to form a unified organization that could negotiate with the central government to forge a new political order in Sudan. The billions that America spent in supporting the African Union's

¹ Mines, p 152.
might have been more effective if even a fraction of that amount could have been invested in compensation schemes as incentives for local leaders to back a peace deal.

Thus, a second fundamental point that Mines emphasizes in the Darfur chapter is the critical value of flexible finance (or "walking-around money") for supporting positive political development in a distant country. A US officer in the field might readily see how the goals of peace-building could be effectively advanced by allocating money to pay and equip the forces of cooperative local leaders in Al Anbar or Darfur. But in Washington DC, where these local leaders are unknown, such an expense could seem harder to justify than a much larger allocation for training and arming the forces of recognized national allies, even when these national forces are distrusted by people in the conflict zone.

Mines notes that the US military observers formed the backbone of the peace-building force, and they worked in difficult circumstances to stop a genocide, for which they received little public recognition. But there was no regular system for keeping American officers in the field for missions like Darfur, and so as Mines and his colleagues left Darfur, they were not replaced. Thus, the Darfur mission was limited in its effectiveness by basic issues of funding and staffing.

**Toward a doctrine for nation-building**

The terms *nation-building* and *state-building* have often been used almost interchangeably. If there is a difference, it would be that nation-building should include, not only developing the capacity of the government, but also encouraging people to identify with their nation as a whole. I was initially surprised by Mines's expressed preference for *nation-building* as the term to describe his work, since he never seemed to get involved in any kind of public relations drive to foster people's patriotic feelings. However, much of his professional service was devoted to helping to develop a trustworthy working relationship between local leaders and national leaders. Indeed, the true basis for people's patriotic feelings may perhaps be found in their confidence that respected leaders of their communities can have a positive role in the nation. Thus, popular enthusiasm for national unity may depend on a generally accepted distribution of powers and responsibilities between local and national leaders. So perhaps Mines is right to prefer the term *nation-building*, if it can help to remind us of this imperative to develop local foundations for a strong national political system.
Such a reminder is needed. After his service in Iraq, Mines found that the perfect place for thinking about the potential importance of federal decentralization for effective nation-building was at a conference in Canada (of all places), because "US thinkers and policy-makers, with a thin understanding of the complexities and options in federalism, tended to miss many of the opportunities that might have been available in getting the country to the right political end-state."2 This observation seems astonishing when we consider that the United States of America was actually established by a revolution to defend the powers of provincial assemblies, and the need to maintain an appropriately balanced distribution of powers between national and local governments has remained a vital concern in American politics since the Constitution was written. But somehow, when Americans try to support nation-building abroad, there has been a common tendency to assume that foreigners would not have similar concerns about national centralization of power.

So we need a doctrine that lists key points to remember when approaching complex missions like nation-building, and Mines's book includes a valuable Epilogue in which he summarizes lessons that he would include in a doctrine for nation-building. Mines emphasizes that the first priority for nation-builders must be to support the development of a political compact that can bring people together in the nation. This settlement should address the local concerns of people in all parts of the nation, and economic reforms should not be pushed before the political compact is consolidated.

Mines also lists the development of effective security forces as an essential priority, but perhaps there should be more emphasis on the question of to whom these forces will be accountable. Without clear accountability, even newly trained security forces can be as abusive as in any authoritarian regime, as Mines saw in Haiti. But accountability for security forces can be defined only in the context of a political settlement. So again we should recognize the priority of the political compact, but with a broader understanding that it should include decisions about the allocation of control over police and military forces. Where local groups do not fully trust the national authorities, some locally accountable police forces might be needed. Indeed, this point may have sufficiently general applicability to belong in a basic doctrine for nation-builders.

Finally, Mines discusses the need for an agency to provide standby capability for future nation-building missions, with a cadre of trained and experienced political-action officers who

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would be prepared for the challenges helping a failed state to consolidate a new political compact and reconstruct effective government. Compared to what America invests in maintaining large magnificently-equipped military forces which are prepared for conflict anywhere in the world, preparations for the challenges of post-conflict political reconstruction have been negligible.

The critical importance of flexible finance for local agents in a nation-building mission has fundamental implications for how a nation-building agency should be structured. To induce positive political change, its field agents must identify key local leaders and offer them appropriate incentives to cooperate in forging a national political compact. For this purpose, the effectiveness of foreign assistance depends on its local political conditionality, so that local leaders should understand that they and their supporters can benefit from foreign assistance only if they cooperate with a wider program of national political reconstruction. In a typical project for international economic development, results might be measured by the number of poor people who benefit from some assistance program. But when the goal is political development, it is essential to understand which local groups are benefiting and what they and their leaders have done to support national reconciliation, and such local political conditions are hard for anyone outside the country to assess.

So there are fundamental reasons why a nation-building agency may need to operate under different kinds of fiscal controls from other agencies of the US Federal Government. A basic principle for structuring operations in most Federal agencies is that American tax-payers' money should be spent only with regular controls that can assure for meaningful accountability to the American people through their elected political representatives. But in foreign nation-building missions, the ultimate goal is to support the development of a government that is accountable to its people, not to Americans. For American assistance to support this development, the criteria for distributing assistance must depend on conditions that can be understood by the local recipients, but not necessarily by people in America. Thus, when America's political leaders decide that a mission to help rebuild a failed state would be in America's interest, the budgeted resources for the nation-building mission should be managed by a team of field agents and supervisors who, by their selection and training, can be trusted to spend the money appropriately according to local conditions in remote communities of the failed state, where normal controls of the US Federal Government would be difficult to apply.
The possibility of future nation-building missions is not just an abstraction. Even today, the United States is challenged by a continuing flood of refugees from Central America who are desperate to escape from crime and oppression in their home countries. The problem of reducing this migration is a first-order political issue for the current US Administration, but the problem is unlikely to abate until these countries develop legal and political institutions that can protect their citizens. Governance reforms have been resisted by small but powerful local groups that have a stake in the oppressive status quo. Increased economic assistance to these countries will not induce the reforms that are needed, unless the assistance is supervised by field agents who can direct the aid to benefit key local leaders when they support these reforms. So the migrant crisis today should be seen as a nation-building problem, and this reviewer would be more confident of an effective mission to address it if Keith Mines were leading the mission.