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Some may question the possibility of benevolent state-building interventions which respect democratic national sovereignty.

But to have any hope for planning such interventions, or **for holding their planners to account, we need some understanding** of what should come first in building a successful democratic society.

Successful democratic development depends on a **supply of leaders** with good reputations for managing public resources responsibly. Such leaders may be found in local politics as well as national politics. If an intervention's goal is to establish a sovereign democratic state (not just to install hand-picked leadership dependent on foreigners), it should empower **elected local councils** and a **national assembly**.

Questioning Weber's 1919 definition of a **state** that "*(successfully) claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.*"

In a weak state, people rely on local groups for protection.

Weber's state would have to suppress or commandeer such autonomous groups that have capacity for force.

Better goal for state-building: establish a stable political system that may include autonomous subnational authorities.

North Wallis Weingast (2009): When many groups have autonomous capacity for force, rights to monopolistically exploit certain resources can give oligarchs an interest in keeping the peace.

Does this mean that a state-building intervention can bring peace only by sponsoring a division of national resources among local bosses?

A democratic state-building mission, which has promised to uphold democratic national sovereignty, should meet higher standards!

To maintain unity, a coherent national leadership must have substantial power.

To gain support from local groups, their leaders should also expect some share of power in the state, in local councils.

Low expectations in democracy can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Incumbents at the top don't want to raise expectations.

Powerless candidates' promises to do better are cheap talk.

Candidates have motive and opportunity to make democracy succeed when voters allocate power at two or more levels of government.

Elected officials at lower levels can hope for election to higher office if they demonstrate an ability to serve their constituents better.

A state-building mission should promote a distribution of power that is **balanced between local and national political institutions**, with some democratic accountability at each level.

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A state-building mission that has promised to uphold the recipient's democratic sovereignty should promote a balanced distribution of power between institutions of local and national politics.

To promote such power-sharing, a substantial portion of state-building assistance should be directed by a **team of local coordinators** who work to promote inclusive coalitions for local governance.

When state-building assistance is focused only on central government, the result can be a centralized state that threatens local interests and alienates local leaders in much of the country.

Malkasian (2013), *War Comes to Garmser* (in Helmand, Afghanistan):

A stabilization strategy based on empowering respected local leaders worked until Kabul nullified local power-sharing agreements.

As long as **any local authority could be dismissed by the President** at any time, there would be large regions where nobody would have any real incentive to lead their neighbors in defense of the state.

Libya: a state-building intervention that failed because of too little support for building central capabilities of the national government. Lack of coordinating leadership among foreign interveners allowed them to compete in arming rival factions.

Dec 2011: Transitional government began payments to local militias, which then could maintain forces to dominate their communities.

History might have been different if the new Libyan regime had given the funds for local security forces to elected local councils.

For balanced political development, might distribute security budget **40% to local councils** (police), 60% to national authorities (army).

Foreign assistance for local political development should be directed by a local coordinator, who monitors local politics and allocates assistance to encourage an inclusive coalition for local governance.

A democratic state-building mission should take vital strategic direction from a team of such **local political officers**, who actively engage with contenders for local and national power in the state.

In 2003, CPA took 6 months to organize a team of (18) local political coordinators and begin soliciting weekly reports from them.

Bell (1920): Post-WW1 British occupation of **Iraq** relied on a team of 70 local political officers, and 5 senior officers in the center.

Lugard (1922) summarized the basic principles that 19th-century Britain used to establish political order around the world:

Decentralization, Cooperation, Continuity.

Decentralization: When the goal of foreign assistance is to support political development, all foreign assistance in each district should be directed by one local political officer.

Cooperation: The local political officers promote the formation of an inclusive coalition for local governance, by directing aid to local leaders who cooperate with each other and with national authorities.

Continuity: Local political officers should report to a supervisor with has long-term responsibility for a province. These provincial supervisors should be actively involved in formulating the long-term strategic direction of the whole state-building mission.

Democratic state-building missions should have a **strategy for exit**. After a limited period, the goal of supporting political development must be replaced by respect for national political independence. *In the transition, the portion of foreign assistance that is directed by the local political officers should be reduced gradually to 0.* Independent aid organizations should be encouraged to fill in wherever needs are identified by the national and local authorities.

References:

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