

A silhouette of a soldier in full combat gear, including a helmet and a backpack, is shown from the side. The soldier is standing in a field and is in the process of unspooling or coiling a large amount of barbed wire. The wire is tangled in loops and spirals in the foreground. The background is a bright, hazy sky, possibly at sunrise or sunset, which creates a strong backlighting effect on the soldier and the wire. To the right of the soldier, there is a dark, rectangular structure, possibly a building or a container.

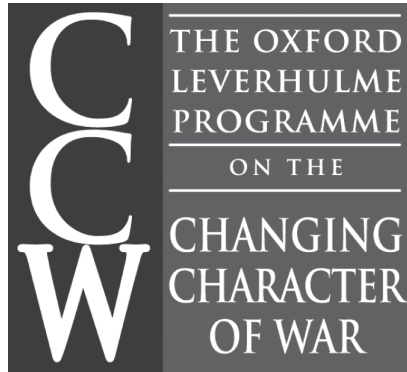
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# At the End of Military Intervention

Historical, Theoretical, and  
Applied Approaches to  
Transition, Handover, and Withdrawal

Edited by  
Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack

## **At the End of Military Intervention**



The Changing Character of War Programme is an interdisciplinary research group at the University of Oxford, and was funded by the Leverhulme Trust between 2003 and 2009.

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# Foreword

Lieutenant General JD Page CB OBE

Commander Force Development & Training, Headquarters Army

In a world of drastic change it is the learners who survive; the 'learned' find themselves fully equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

Eric Hoffer, *Reflections on the Human Conditions*

Militaries of the twenty-first century must be adaptive and learning organizations. In addition to conventional war-fighting, the skills to contest low-intensity conflict and insurgencies, counter threats from terrorism and proliferation, and deliver enterprises in upstream security and capacity must be refined. To be effective, militaries require components, not least in the intelligence sphere, which demonstrate continual enterprise and robust expertise. Successful military operations are, after all, most often defined by who anticipates, learns, and adapts the fastest. This remains contingent upon understandings of the context, including but not limited to adversarial forces, human and geospatial terrain, and conflict enablers and drivers. Therefore it is common-sense to suggest that operational outcomes are enhanced through the possession of the kinds of disciplinary, temporal and geographic understandings which the research community can endow. Of course, whilst it is ideal for militaries to possess expertise internally, it is pragmatic to 'reach out' to credible sources in order to explore and address identified gaps in knowledge. Knowledge may be an object but learning is practice, requiring the capacity and attitude to recognize and incorporate insight.

Principally, this volume results from the ongoing collaboration between the Land Forces Intelligence Fusion Centre (LIFC) and the Changing Character of War Programme (CCW) at the University of Oxford. So fruitful has this relationship proven itself to be, that it is worth providing some institutional background. The LIFC is a relatively nascent, albeit now established, component of the British Army. In the main it is dedicated to the provision of tactical and operational intelligence support to the Field Army. It was established in 2010, in response to operational requirements linked to the campaign in Afghanistan. The unit provides, through an immersive environment, what military doctrine casts as 'Understand'. Acting as something akin to a 'clearing

house' of intelligence, one of the important ways in which understanding is amassed and then disseminated to those being deployed on operations, is through academic outreach. This outreach activity has taken a number of guises, in particular fellowships for senior and junior staff, educational packages delivered in the UK and Germany, and conference events. One key and ongoing academic relationship—didactic and research—has been forged with the CCW Programme. Housed at Pembroke College with core staff and a vibrant cadre of visiting fellows, this is an interdisciplinary and policy-relevant academic programme, which focuses on the research of war and armed conflict.

This was the context and rationale behind the 'Understanding Transition and Transitioning at the Land Tactical Level' Workshop held at Merton College, Oxford, 17–19 December 2012. The Workshop was a collaborative event, co-delivered by the LIFC and Oxford's CCW Programme. The occasion, attended by over one hundred academic, crown, and military delegates, aimed to enhance understanding of the operational environment, inform concepts, doctrine and policy, and prepare transition planners and implementers for current and future roles. The frank and honest discussions to be heard throughout the three days, equally in the sessions and in the sidelines, demonstrated perhaps how useful the Workshop was as a model for critical outreach. Certainly, the feedback from the event rated highly the open, transparent nature of the engagement as well as the willingness of participants to explore innovative, counter-narrative trains of thought.

Inevitably and rightly, the role of the UK military as a component of ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in the transition of security in Helmand, Afghanistan, was a prime focus. Indeed, this gave the Workshop immediate value: lessons, risks, and concepts identified at the event were pushed into the Operational Theatre and promulgated amongst personnel of Task Force Helmand (TFH) and the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (HPRT). There was also, however, an obvious relevance beyond current operations. As no intervention is intended to endure indefinitely and no operation takes place in a vacuum, future interventions will face analogous parameters of tactical exit and power transfer.

During the course of the Workshop a number of testing themes recurred: importance of the correct models of intervention/entry and governance; problems of insufficient or dwindling equipment and manpower; deteriorating loyalty and the fate of loyalists; local agencies opposing the agenda of the withdrawing forces; breakdown of civil government and authority; loss of intelligence for security forces and deteriorating morale amongst transitional forces. Thus history records clearly how transitions embody risks and compromises. Operational management must account for these dimensions but must also recognize that they do not encompass the full picture. It is more

difficult to recognize achievement than limitation. In the real world, amidst an absence of 'control' conditions and for that matter the veracities of media and political agendas, focus tends to be diverted from 'strengths' to 'weaknesses'. This can ensure, in a productive sense, that planners and implementers learn lessons and recover delivery. Yet it is crucial to recognize that considerable accomplishments also characterize transitions and these must be considered and learnt from too. Thus development of indigenous capacity, calibre of the security forces, context of handover, advancements in infrastructure, governance, education, and rule of law, and progress in the economic sector, might all be proposed as relevant measures of satisfaction.

How the concert of these factors, positive and negative, relates to local circumstance together with their tactical and operational impacts must be priority considerations for all commanders tasked to deliver transition, now and in the future. It is for these reasons that this volume, offering greater clarity on many of the relevant themes and written by leading scholars and practitioners, is especially welcome. I commend it to all those engaged in Transition.

Finally, I am heartened by the ongoing associations between LIFC and CCW and it is more than appropriate that this edited monograph is being published in the 'Changing Character of War' Series with Oxford University Press. I am grateful for CCW's support to the Army.





# Acknowledgements

The origins of the present collection are found in the organization of the 'Understanding Transition and Transitioning at the Land Tactical Level' workshop held at Merton College, Oxford in winter 2012. The Land Forces Intelligence Fusion Centre (LIFC) deserves acknowledgement for initiating and funding this event. Whilst the LIFC and the Changing Character of War Programme (CCW) co-delivered the workshop, a number of other institutions also provided crucial support of one kind or another. These included: the Department for International Development (DFID); the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC); Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO); Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (HPRT); Ministry of Defence (MOD); and the Stabilisation Unit (SU). The numerous delegates at that event should be mentioned as their input has continued to offer insight and mould interests. Particular thanks go to those speakers who gave generously of their time and insight but, for a number of reasons, were unable to develop their papers for publication: Dr Tim Bird, Professor Richard Caplan, Dr Toby Dodge, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Brigadier Rupert Jones, Mr Patrick Moody, Major General Andrew Sharpe and Professor Sir Hew Strachan. The event itself ran with exceptional efficiency due to the unfailing efforts of Lieutenant Alex Crisp, Ms Elisa Torrequebrada and a cohort of stoic volunteers from the Oxford University Officer Training Corps.

Media Operations at Army HQ gave approval for use of the cover image and Figures I.1, I.2, and I.3 used in the editors' introduction. We are also grateful to the Ministry of Defence for reproductive permissions linked to Mark Beautelement's contribution and Figures 15.3 and 15.4.

Putting together a volume of this size is no small undertaking. Indeed, this collection would not have been possible without several very important supporters of the project. From the outset Lieutenant General 'Jacko' Page, Colonel Nicolas Baker, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Perrey, Mrs Nicola Budd, Major Rosalind Diamond, Mrs Catriona Laing, Dr Peter Rundell, and Mrs Jo Baldwin played significant respective parts in shepherding and facilitating. The publishers and copy-editors provided exemplary advice and assistance. Nicole Hartwell helped enormously with the production effort. We must also thank the volume's many contributors for all their hard work and commitment. They have been incredibly intelligent and stimulating companions not only throughout this project, but also in a myriad of other ventures.

## Acknowledgements

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Sadly, during the final stages of editing this collection, we received the news that our friend and colleague, James Dunsby, had died on a training exercise with the Army Reserves. Recently married, James was a gregarious character of untiring energy and enthusiasm. He served as an Intelligence Analyst at the LIFC, a Reservist with the Yeomanry, and was a former Visiting Fellow of the CCW Programme, where he refined his research into transition logistics. In all these roles and despite his age, he left a huge and positive impact. He will be sorely missed.

This book is dedicated to James, his wife, Bryher, and the people of post-transition Afghanistan.

TC and RJ  
Oxford, November 2014

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# Introduction

## Principles, Themes, and Problems in Transitions

*Timothy Clack and Robert Johnson*

The focus of much of the scholarship and comment on Western military operations in recent years has been on the decisions, manner, and relative success of interventions, and there has been considerable interest in, and criticism of, the subsequent insurgencies and counter-insurgency measures these created in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Rather less attention has been paid to the practical problems at the end of military intervention, namely, transition, handover, or withdrawal. This is perhaps ironic since there is, amongst civilian organizations, a great deal of experience of working with regional governments and passing responsibility back to local authorities after a crisis, although coordination of their efforts has often been problematic. Moreover, the defining European experience of the post-1945 period in international affairs, other than the Cold War confrontation, was decolonization of Africa and Asia involving the transfer of powers and responsibilities, training of local elites, the building of institutions, and, at times, conducting fighting withdrawals. The majority of conflicts that Europeans fought from 1945 to 1990 were wars of counter-insurgency and extraction. In fact, the Europeans sought, where possible, to avoid fighting in order to leave behind sovereign states with which they could do business in the future. They were not always successful in that regard. Nevertheless, some former colonial powers, like Britain and France, were able to establish better relationships and long-term cooperation with many other countries in Africa and the Near East. For Britain, the Commonwealth emerged as an assemblage of freely associated states linked by history and shared interests.



The United States and its Coalition allies sought to establish a similar benign, democratic dispensation in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s. The initial hope was to set up new representative institutions amongst local political elites, subject to democratic principles, but without the enormous commitment of nation-building. The circumstances of these interventions are well documented but the development of insurgencies in both countries jeopardized the chances of peaceful processes of stabilization. Nevertheless, it was the incomplete and unsatisfactory nature of the stabilization efforts, and protracted violence, that, ironically, accelerated transition. Handovers had, of course, been envisioned from the outset, but withdrawal proved more problematic when stability was precarious, democratization still embryonic, and, despite new local security forces, the drivers of the fighting had merely been suppressed.

Transition is a term that conceals a multitude of activities and objectives. It implies rather more than 'withdrawal' in that it points towards the establishment or reconstitution of local authority, responsibility, and ownership. It is a transfer of power rather than the abandonment of it. For military personnel, transition is the progressive transfer of security functions and responsibilities so as to ensure a sustainable level of stability for a nation, and one which no longer depends on a substantial international operational contribution.<sup>1</sup> In the United Kingdom, security transitions at the operational and tactical level are governed by four principles: a political focus, legitimacy, capacity building, and sustainability.<sup>2</sup> Taken together they suggest that there are two objectives, that is, to create a political settlement and to build capability. British doctrine emphasizes the need for military personnel to ensure that plans and operations serve a political settlement and that legitimacy must be built amongst the local population. In building capacity and capability, practitioners are reminded that their efforts must enable local security forces to recruit, train, equip, manage, and sustain themselves. Sustainability requires much more than providing a training team or a liaison officer, as it implies that there must be development of processes and resources, and integration with local political objectives and the constitutional apparatus. To gauge the appropriate level of support, the doctrinal advice is to retain flexibility, to identify and understand the motivations of the key actors, and make balanced judgements over the degree to which local or international advice is prioritized. The conclusion highlights the practical difficulty of working with embryonic local institutions: while trying to avoid 'impositions' by outsiders, all too often the experience is one of partisan local agendas being asserted over one group or another.

<sup>1</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 6/10 *Security Transitions* (2010).

<sup>2</sup> JDP 6/10, pp. ix, 1–6 and 1–7.

There are considerable risks inherent in transition. Local actors may feel that transition occurs before processes are fully embedded or their staffs are confident or even competent in their role. Nevertheless, local leaders are often impatient for change. One of the most critical risks is where these contradictory aspirations produce situations where local security provision fails. Such an occurrence at the point where efforts are underway to integrate former combatants can threaten to unravel the entire process. Moreover, there appears to be a pattern where states which have endured a conflict in the recent past are more likely to experience a return to violence: in general terms, the longer the post-conflict period, the greater are the chances of an enduring peace. Nevertheless, there are risks of perpetual human rights abuses and violent conflicts of interests during and after transition.

Whilst acknowledging the historical and contextual specificity of each case in time and space, there are four unifying subordinate themes that span different periods and places and which support the definition offered here. First, transition is a dynamic process requiring flexibility and agility from its participants. It is not necessarily a linear activity where neat timelines can predict its outcomes. Second, it is a process that entails a gradual loss of the control by the intervening power. It is therefore, as noted above, a period of considerable risk. Third, its significance and its complexity have been overlooked compared with entry or the operations that occur in support of erecting some new authority. The inherent difficulties of transition mean that it requires considerable effort to get the formula right, unless the policy is one of scuttle. The fourth observation is that, if transition is contested, the implication is that the intervening power has not entirely succeeded. Yet, this assumption, which is often made, needs to be tested against the ability of the intervening power to create legitimation amongst its co-opted allies and former enemies. It is possible that, in spite of some residual violence, warlords can become courtiers. Indeed, it may be reasonable to assume that, after the withdrawal of the intervening power, the new local authority will attempt to assert itself, and whatever residual levels of violence occur, its failure is by no means automatic.

In states or regions affected by civil war, peace-building efforts can be considerably more effective with the presence of international negotiators, trainers, aid agencies, and military forces. Many experienced field operatives, drawn from these organizations, speak candidly about the fundamental importance of physical security as the first step in building stability. A functioning government, judiciary, police, and, where necessary, gendarmerie or military forces, are essential. Critical services providing water, food, energy, and transport are vital, as are the infrastructural components required for economic activity and recovery. Reconstruction is considerably easier if the fighting has ceased. Observations of Sri Lanka and Angola, where government

forces achieved decisive victories over rebel groups, meant recovery was more rapid even if government systems were 'illiberal'.<sup>3</sup> States where Western forces intervened and achieved equally decisive results, such as Sierra Leone and Mali, also accelerated transition and reconstruction. Where an outright military success was not achieved, there were significant challenges for stabilization.

One of the most striking characteristics of military personnel is their willingness to endure all manner of hardships, physical, mental, and emotional, and to risk their lives in the pursuit of a mission. It is this mission-focus, euphemistically called a 'can do' mentality, which enables collective bodies to go forward into danger, to take casualties and yet still achieve a specific objective. It is, in short, an essential element for combat operations. Nevertheless, in those missions where the destruction of an enemy force in combat is not the priority, such as the stabilization of fragile states, an entirely new set of skills and characteristics are required. While tactical imperatives do not diminish, their relative importance to strategic outcomes can be reduced. As one counter-insurgency specialist put it, 'sometimes it is better to do nothing'.<sup>4</sup> In fact the more certain advice would be to pause and reflect, to assess the situation from the point of view of local people, and to weigh up a vast array of non-military considerations about the local economy, parochial politics, and the cultural parameters of a given society. There is a tendency for armies to pursue the 'achievement of the mission' as if it were merely a tactical objective, such as the control of a region, or the possession of an urban space, thus ignoring the indisputable fact that all armies are extensions of the political will of their governments, reflect the societies from which they themselves are drawn, and that their actions are judged by a variety of social groups including, today, the global media. The character of the Western approach to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 was a tendency, at least initially, to 'tacticize' the mission of stabilization and to concentrate on combat against an ill-defined enemy. The establishment of security, while managing a tactical transition, became one of the most difficult phases in these campaigns, but it was essential if military forces were to fulfil the political task they had been set. The ability to gather and fuse information, to develop insight and understanding of the local people and their socio-economic environment, was a significant feature of these wars.

Civilian critics of the military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan concentrated primarily on the legitimacy of the intervention and particularly the objectives,

<sup>3</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'Illiberal peacebuilding in Angola', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 49, no. 2 (2011): pp. 287–314.

<sup>4</sup> John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM3-24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1–152, p. 49. See also David Kilcullen, 'The Twenty-Eight Articles', in *Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst, 2010), pp. 22–49.

and methods, of American foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> At the tactical level, a rather different set of complaints developed. Those NGOs engaged in development and aid projects were alarmed when military personnel seemed to trespass on their territory. There was dismay that methods regarded as obsolete and culturally insensitive were readily practised by well-intentioned but inexperienced military officers. Aid organizations with considerable experience of long-term humanitarian intervention and responsible exits were highly critical of the 'quick fix' culture of Western militaries and appalled by their instrumentalist attitude to bringing succour to local populations, specifically making aid and relief dependent on supporting a Western-approved indigenous government, merely as part of a policy of 'winning hearts and minds'.

More broadly, critics were concerned that a military-led approach generated violence and civilians were being caught in the cross fire. They pointed out that military formations either ignored or were not designed to implement legal and governance systems on which stabilization depended. When advisors and specialists deployed, the security situation often dictated when and where, and at what tempo, change could be affected, leading to exasperation on both sides. Military personnel argued that their civilian counterparts were too hide-bound by risk-averse peacetime regulations rendering them ineffective, while civilians were frustrated by what they regarded as military high-handedness and error. Despite warm assurances about the integrated character of a 'comprehensive approach' where the military and civilian agencies all worked towards a common goal, the reality was that cooperation depended on individuals, their tolerance, team-working skills, and their personality.

When a military interventionist force has to hand over control to a host nation government, what happens at the 'grass roots' of these strategic recalibrations? The tactical and operational dimensions of making a transition are informed by the framework of an exit *strategy*, and Richard Caplan's excellent edited volume on this subject has been the starting point of our own work.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the Western interventions in Afghanistan and in Iraq in 2001 and 2003, it is fascinating to recall how much optimism prevailed and how widespread the assumption was that military operations would be concluded swiftly with transition made almost immediately to an indigenous government. Caplan notes that references to state-building were more frequent from the 1990s but, in 2001 and 2003, the United States had specifically set

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005); Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

out to avoid becoming embroiled in any long-term commitments of 'nation-building' and certainly not in any counter-insurgency operations. Before the invasion of Iraq, the US government, which was deprived of crucial local intelligence, had consulted expatriate Iraqis to ascertain whether the Western invasion would be greeted as liberation or not. There was considerable faith in the idea that the Iraqi armed forces would defect to the protection of the West and that army officers might even stage a coup against President Saddam Hussein. These 'allies' and partners would be the personnel who would assume power and ensure a smooth transition, allowing the United States to withdraw. In Afghanistan, the initial plan was simply to pursue the forces of Al Qaeda, enlist local militias in that mission and to eschew any prospect of occupation, which was seen as the folly of the Soviet Union. Niall Ferguson noted that the United States was engaged in a form of 'Empire Lite', reminiscent of British gunboat diplomacy of the nineteenth century but without the willingness or 'strategic patience' to commit to the construction of states or to build any lasting legacy.<sup>7</sup> To the critics of the United States, it seems the Americans were using their military power in an aggressive and rather absent-minded manner.

The West's preference for international intervention has a long historical precedent, and, rather uncomfortably, draws its antecedents from the colonial era. In turn, the Western experience of transition has derived from the period of decolonization after 1945. New impetus was given to intervention and transition by the Cold War as the Superpowers and their allies attempted to maximize their security. As failing or unstable states in the developing world had the potential to escalate conflict between the Superpowers, considerable effort was made to stabilize and consolidate them. The major powers set out either to localize and suppress civil conflicts, support proxies, or make direct interventions (including, for example, Hungary and Suez 1956; Vietnam 1961; Czechoslovakia 1968; Afghanistan 1979; Angola 1974; and Grenada 1983). The end of the Cold War produced a brief unipolar hegemony for the United States but also a period of considerable uncertainty about the future.<sup>8</sup>

The shocking terrorist attack on the United States in September 2001, launched from the failed state of Afghanistan, illustrated how difficult it was to monitor new, more clandestine threats. The attack compelled the CIA to establish an 'ungoverned areas project' and to examine capacity-building efforts that might prevent the establishment of safe havens for international

<sup>7</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise', in *The Cold War and After: Prospects for Peace*, edited by Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 242–90; Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment', *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): pp. 7–41.

terrorist groups like Al Qaeda.<sup>9</sup> The final report of that project, published in 2008, called for an assessment of the interaction of geography, politics, civil society, resources, and other factors that caused states to be ungoverned, misgoverned, under-governed, contested, and exploited.<sup>10</sup> It concluded that there must be a unified, coordinated, and cooperative effort by all agencies and the use of defence, diplomacy, development, and law enforcement to build capacity in vulnerable states. It is interesting that neither the report, nor the discourse about enhancing American security, acknowledged the turbulence caused by Western economic penetration, its progressive liberal ideology, or by its overwhelming military power.<sup>11</sup> The problem, to use a post-modernist expression, was always 'the Other'. Nevertheless, there was considerable and renewed interest in stabilization and how it could be achieved. This at least had the potential to acknowledge the pressing need for research prior to intervention, the matching of the most appropriate form of intervention to local requirements and the chance to consult local authorities. The concern though was that the West was interested in stability at the expense of transformation, at a time when the pace of change in the Global South, demographically, economically, educationally, and culturally, was at its greatest tempo.

The Western military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq encountered the problem of highly diverse and divided societies suddenly thrown into turmoil by the removal of the existing tyrannical national authority. The immediate release of previously suppressed forces encouraged factions to assert themselves, often violently. In Iraq, Western analysts struggled to understand the 'insurgent ecosystem' amidst the score-settling of sectarian death squads, the terrorism of former regime loyalists, the opportunism of patriotic volunteers, a murderous campaign against traditionalist elders by the internationalist brigades of Al Qaeda, and sponsored violence from neighbouring states. Transition to a new, democratic Iraqi government based on an agreed constitution took far longer than originally imagined. In Afghanistan, there was even more work to do. After decades of civil war, government institutions had to be built from scratch while the levels of illiteracy, lack of experience, and clan or warlord parochialism meant training a new cadre of national authorities would be a very long-term project indeed. Again, initially the hope in the West was to hand over to locals who would determine these matters for themselves, but lawlessness by interim security forces, excessive corruption (itself fuelled by a huge injection of Western funds) and

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Lamb, *Ungoverned Areas and Threats from Safe Havens: Final report of the Ungoverned Areas Project* (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Department of Defense, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Lamb, *Ungoverned Areas and Threats*, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> For more detail on this problem, see James Putzel and Jonathan Di John, *Meeting the Challenge of Crisis States* (Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, 2012).

the regeneration of insurgency meant an early Western withdraw was an impossibility. Critics of the Western campaign in Afghanistan failed to acknowledge that it was not through preference that the militaries remained in place, but the fact that an immediate withdrawal would have returned the country to anarchy and civil war. Having embarked on a project of giving Afghanistan workable governance, a viable economy, and security for its people, there was a moral imperative to remain committed at least until the processes and institutions in place were 'good enough'.

Transition is a problematic term in theory and even more difficult to implement in practice. If, in essence, it is about the transfer of power, then it is important to acknowledge that powerful states cannot alone determine the outcome of transition. At the 'tactical' level, power is transitory and contested, and always subject to the dynamics of interaction and friction. Local people, while apparently weak, have agency and can accelerate the withdrawal of more powerful forces by their actions. Perceptions of where power is located will influence strongly the allegiances of all actors in the process. The military desire to control, to plan, and to intervene has often been upset by the failure to grasp the dynamic effect of the collision of wills and perceptions, and by a failure to listen or adapt to local needs or political imperatives. All international intervention in a sovereign territorial space, particularly a military intervention, creates a dynamic effect in local populations, and withdrawal or transition, will also, in turn, create a new dynamic. Some local groups choose to collaborate with the new dispensation, and others will invariably resist. The decision will be based on a myriad of factors and perceptions, from pure opportunism to principled belief. It is easy to assume that national resistance to foreign occupation was the overwhelming characteristic of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it is striking that, in both cases, more sided with the international forces to create security, functioning governance, and to generate a working economy than to fight for some nebulous patriotic or ideological cause.

Richard Caplan pointed out in his work on *Exit Strategies* that, despite more than 70 United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations since 1948, it has often been unclear when international interventionist forces should exit: what are the benchmarks? How does one know whether their achievements are 'sustainable'? Western practitioners and policy-makers referred to the contrasts of conditions-based withdrawal and handover, as opposed to the setting of timelines 'where', as one soldier put it, 'the *only* "condition" is time'.<sup>12</sup> The tendency to prioritize international agendas over local needs has been much criticized, on the grounds that it subverts sustainability. In fact, historical

<sup>12</sup> Interview with the authors [name withheld], Kabul, March 2010.

examples suggest that international agendas have invariably been prioritized, and that timetables for withdrawal have galvanized local elites to end petty disputes and concentrate on the pragmatic business of allocating or sharing power. In 2009 President Obama set out the plan for the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in part to placate an angry and impatient American electorate, but it was also designed to drive all parties in the war, including his own armed forces, towards a specific resolution of the conflict that had developed there. Caplan notes that, for the UN, operations are always planned with the exit in mind, but progress towards peace does not always follow a set of defined 'conditions': there are instead many constraints and the struggle is to obtain consensus in order to define 'success'. Exit strategy is often a *process* of transition, from peacekeeping to peace building operations, hand-overs to national institutions, or the withdrawal of various components of international involvement. Even after transition, there may be considerable international engagement and continuity in processes.

If peace, democratization, a viable economy, and stability are the ultimate objectives of a Western intervention, this might be characterized as a 'positive peace'. On-going instability and injustice are, by contrast, regarded as the characteristics of a 'negative peace'. But, as Paul Collier notes, Western institution-building may not address the root causes of instability that led to the intervention in the first place.<sup>13</sup> Despite the aspirations of Western and UN actors, some dictatorships are better at preserving peace while democratization can create a great deal of instability. In assessing the record of UN interventions that did not sustain peace, it is striking that the objectives of the UN, while laudable, were frequently too broad. Poverty, for example, is assumed to be a universal cause of instability and conflict which, some insist, must be tackled by intervention, but it is not the cause of civil war in every region of the world. Even relative disparity in wealth and power, long assumed to be a driver of bitter social unrest, can be sustained without civil war. Instead, the focus needs to be on the specific fault lines of each conflict. Acknowledging the budgetary and political limits of intervention by the UN, Caplan also criticizes the lack of agreed benchmarks or of a common approach. At times, it appears that the UN's insistence on the observation of human rights and its own legal standards hinders its efforts at stabilization as they contradict local needs for peace and stability. The priority is to stop the fighting first rather than conflate this with the requirements of a subsequent sustainable peace, which might take many years, even decades to fulfil. Moreover, in a somewhat counter-intuitive sense, transitions and exits require a period of increased

<sup>13</sup> Paul Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: Oxford University Press, 2003).



effort, specifically as *appropriate* training and resources, rather than merely a steady reduction.

There are few shortcuts in transition. In building capacity, it is easy to assume that, since providing security is the priority of military forces and law enforcement units, security is the basis of capacity building. Yet any state will require a functioning criminal justice system through which police forces can pass suspects, including a trained judiciary, prosecution and defence personnel, penal code, incarceration facilities, courts, and rehabilitation programmes. Furthermore, transition cannot be limited solely to the staging of democratic elections, for there needs to be systematic follow on measures, the maturing of checks and balances, an acceptance of the idea of 'opposition' within a broader notion of 'consensus', the full development of civil society, and preferably the involvement or tolerance, where possible, of regional powers. While crucial for democratization, elections are the achievement of democracy, implying an acceptance of representation and power-sharing, rather than being the sole driver of the process. Moreover, scholars now suggest that, since democracy is culturally variable, it must necessarily differ in form amongst the people. They posit that tolerance of 'alternative democracies' are the solution.<sup>14</sup>

Transition is in part the process of 'exit', specifically the disengagement and ultimate withdrawal of external actors from a state or territory, but it is also a transformation involving the transfer of power, authority, and legitimacy, and perhaps significant changes in the power relationships of those left behind. Transition is a transformative change in politics and security but one which also implies socio-economic alterations too. Historical case studies suggest the manner of intervention, particularly the nature of the entry and initial efforts in consolidation, will have a significant impact on the success of the transition. Evidently, if the political objectives of a military intervention have been accomplished, a successful transition will make a successful consolidation more likely. However, as Richard Caplan observes, if the objectives and missions have not been achieved successful exits will entail measures to preserve the partial gains or minimize losses, including reputational costs to the interventionists and their surrogate actors.<sup>15</sup> From the outset it is worth noting that the failure to achieve a durable political settlement can only produce stability so fragile that it will be unable to sustain itself without the continued support of external actors. This might also be the case in economic terms, a feature historians refer to as 'informal empire' or the creation of 'rentier' states. The result of such state fragility or dependence is often a greater likelihood of economic unrest and civil conflict. Even where the interventionist power is eager to exit, limited

<sup>14</sup> Julia Paley, *Democracy: Anthropological Approaches* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 5–6.

local support for transition or its successor dispensation will similarly imperil stability. Exits can similarly be jeopardized by 'loyalists' attempting to gain advantage as interventionists depart. A particular problem is posed by those who had collaborated or were employed directly by intervention organizations as they seek to protect their gains and interests.

To be sustainable, transition will require a political settlement that, at the very least, offers the best chance of a stable future. It will also require organizational sustainability, where institutions have the ability to deliver, be logistically enduring, and have appropriate accountability mechanisms. Processes need to be sustainable, in that they serve the interests of locals, can be resourced and are fully 'owned' by them. Resources might reasonably include financial and economic sustainability, although in practice this is rarely achieved at all in the short-term. Dependency but with the expectation of local financial responsibility might be anticipated.

The international context is often the most critical variable affecting the timing and outcome of an exit and thus the processes of transition. Favourable geo-politics will have significant impact on the legitimacy and endurance of a transition. In contrast, interference from regional 'spoilers' can jeopardize stability even where transition is successful in the short-term. No stabilization or state-building operation can remain unchanged as the process develops, of course, for that is the nature of 'transition'. It follows that while an exit is envisioned from the outset, the precise character of that exit evolves according to changing circumstances. To some extent transition is 'path dependent', in that it is inextricably linked to entry and the evolving process of the transfer of authority, but it is also subject to the *dynamic interactions* of conflict and shifting power. The way an intervention begins, the objectives set, and agreements forged, will set expectations and conditions for the subsequent transition, and strongly affect the form of its termination, but it will not determine it entirely. Adaptability and flexibility for those involved are critical, with all agencies working towards a common 'end state' rather than merely an 'end date'. If end dates for intervention are deemed unavoidable then the strategy will usually have to shift towards stability over the longer term. In these cases, the military components of transition will be subordinated to economic and diplomatic elements, although the security situation may not allow it. Indeed, it is an irony that an insurgency, designed to 'liberate' a territorial space, may actually prolong an occupation because of the difficulties of making a viable transition possible. Consequently, even 'end date' scenarios cannot be defined in terms of a single event. Through a variety of obstacles, processes, and events, end states are, in fact, often unavoidably left 'unfinished'.

Transitions are complex operations because it is difficult to deal with every aspect of the process concurrently and symmetrically. 'Exit' is likely to be performed in increments, with different actors, including diplomatic and

political staff, aid agencies, security forces, mentors, intelligence teams, and logisticians, reduced in number and withdrawn at different times.<sup>16</sup> The coordination and management of the transitions between these different operations and actors can be crucial. Ironically, extraction from a difficult transition may entail a temporary increase of effort or at least need to produce a greater effect locally in order to 'break clean' at the tactical level. Nevertheless, there may be military operations in support of a new political dispensation long after the moment of withdrawal, even if there is a lower profile for the personnel involved. The Soviet Union continued to support the successor regime in Kabul after its withdrawal of 1989 with munitions, advisor personnel, and significant funding. Pakistan's interest in the future of Afghanistan also lasted well beyond the date of the Soviet departure as it sponsored a number of Mujahedeen groups. Both the Soviets and Pakistan avoided direct confrontation, but waged a war by proxy. There was concern to calibrate very precisely the means and the ways of the continued involvement in Afghanistan, to reinforce their achievements and prevent adverse developments. While the Soviet economy remained robust, it could continue to supply arms, including aircraft and Scud missiles, and financial support; the Pakistani intelligence services tried to sustain the momentum of a Jihadist war of liberation against the secular, communist authorities in Kabul although it found no solution to the deep factionalism amongst Afghan resistance groups. It was the sudden termination of Soviet support that tilted Afghanistan decisively in Pakistan's favour. This example alone typifies the fact that 'exit' rarely marks the cessation of international involvement, support, and influence.

Planning the transition process, including the character of the exit, is essential. Military personnel pose five key questions in their planning: why is transition taking place? What functions are critical enablers of the security transition? Who are the potential partners and key stakeholders in transition? When should the security transition take place? And how will transition options be developed, negotiated, and implemented?<sup>17</sup> That planning entails the continual re-evaluation of objectives against the ends and some honest assessments of progress. Security and stability are often represented as the priorities in this regard. However, there are no 'hard' metrics or indicators of consolidated stability. The verdict on sustainable security and stabilization can only come after the fact; i.e. after the exit has been enacted.<sup>18</sup> The best measures available to assess progress before the exit are context dependent but tend to link three foundational requirements: establishment and maintenance of basic

<sup>16</sup> Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 312.

<sup>17</sup> JDP 6/10, p. xi.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 312–314.

security; effective and legitimate governance and rule of law; and management of the conditions affording economic and social productivity. Put another way, the ability to make governance and society 'functional', with its commensurate obedience of the law, participation in local and national government, and vibrant economic activity, is the ideal set of conditions for a successful transition. It is crucial to recognize that the acquisition of 'threshold institutional capability' takes place over the long-term. Forms of governance in societies compromised by violence, often underpinned by attitudinal and cultural change, can take generations to transform. It is important to recognize that no particular level of development or normative system is implied here: it will be beyond the capacity of an intervening authority like the UN to 'lift society out of poverty' or to create a highly developed political system such as a fully functioning and mature democracy. Rather, the purpose is to create a working stability and to restore the sovereignty of the people to determine their own future without the tyranny of conflict or an economy so crippled that it does not function at all.

In a post-colonial world, where the sovereignty of self-determined peoples is the norm, it follows that transition plans have to incorporate local needs, beliefs, and sensibilities. Western nations and humanitarian agencies that become involved in international state-building have a tendency to be ideologically liberal in outlook.<sup>19</sup> This liberal agenda may not always be compatible with the position and aspirations of local elites, who have their own agencies, interests, and plans. Lobby groups in the West are eager to ensure that the principles of liberal ideology with regard to the protection of children, the rights of women, and the prevention of discrimination on the basis of race or sexual orientation are upheld, and there is no reason why interventions by liberal powers should not advocate these as their own principles. However, the international standards of the UN and Geneva are far better aspirations because of their universality. Moreover, it is merely pragmatic to desist from imposing Western liberal constitutional arrangements where this jeopardizes the objectives of stability, peace-building, and transition. It is an uncomfortable fact that progressive liberal structures are not always suitable in the aftermath of civil war: at the grass roots, the overwhelming desire is for security for oneself, one's family, and one's home.

Sovereignty and legitimacy must be restored at the earliest opportunity during transition. Invoking a Gramscian idea, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that: 'state legitimacy matters because it provides the basis for rule by consent rather than by coercion'. Their report continues: 'Lack of legitimacy is a major contributor to state fragility

<sup>19</sup> Astri Suhrke, 'Reconstruction as Modernisation: The "Post-Conflict" Project in Afghanistan', *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 7 (2007): p. 1301; see also Astri Suhrke, 'The Dangers of a Tight Embrace: Externally Assisted Statebuilding in Afghanistan', in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*, edited by Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 233.

because it undermines the processes of state-society bargaining that are central to building state capacity.<sup>20</sup> Legitimacy is eroded by foreigners adversely affecting sovereign control, corruption in state systems, abuses by government, and economic or systemic state failure. Legitimacy implies a faith, or a degree of consent, in a particular form of governance. To build legitimacy, for transition, it must be developed by local government; there must be the provision of fundamental services; there must be representation and protection; there needs to be a morally correct government; and it must either be patriotic or at least refer to the local history and culture. Crucially all these elements must take place at the grass roots as well as at the national level. In Afghanistan, where provincial governors held their local police forces to account, engaged the public through weekly *shura* (consultative meetings), made available a 'hotline' for complaints, established a monitoring team and then acted on any misdemeanours, there was greater acceptance of state governance. In Helmand, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Huquq (civil rights group), prisoner review *shuras*, and district justice committees reduced episodes of arbitrary arrest, and restored a degree of faith in the state criminal justice system. Justice was perhaps more important to local people than security in many regions of Afghanistan, but its development at the national level had been rather slow after the intervention of 2001. Nonetheless, many Afghan citizens expressed a desire for justice to remain at a local level, where traditions of restorative justice underpinned by Sharia law were accepted, a not uncommon feature in other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup>

A historical survey indicates that the post-civil war environment is inhospitable to either the transition toward democracy or its survival. Once again, history is contingent and specific to each example, but in general terms former belligerents fear a loss of security, be that physical, political, or economic, and thus marginalization in a democratic system where they do not possess a majority or where certain elites retain power. It has often been the case that the side that wins an election in a post-war state uses its power to dismantle the institutions of democracy in order to preserve control. In revolutionary states, a similar pattern emerges, but majorities of a population may also opt for the restoration of order over the fruits of democracy if they perceive that instability and violence would otherwise be the result. Revolutions may therefore create civil war, but they may also create dictatorships, either by individual elites or by sections of society that prefer stability to civil rights.

<sup>20</sup> OECD-DAC, *The State's Legitimacy in Fragile Situations*, January 2010, <[www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/6/44794487.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/6/44794487.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> In the 1920s, the British accepted local justice in the frontier districts of the North-West Frontier of India. Under the terms of the Frontier Crimes Regulation Act, only the most serious offences were dealt with by the colonial authorities while all minor ones were handled by the communities themselves.

## Purpose and scope of this volume

This book was the result of a three-day academic conference between 17–19 December 2012 at Merton College, Oxford, delivered by the Changing Character of War (CCW) research programme at Oxford University and funded by the British Army, specifically the Land Intelligence Fusion Centre (LIFC). The aim of the conference was to explore the tactical aspects of transition processes, exit, and power transfer by bringing together faculty from history, sociology, international relations, and politics, along with ambassadors, members of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department of International Development (DfID), and British Army personnel, including infantry officers from the sharp end to Lieutenant Generals responsible for future development and training. Uppermost in our minds was the fact that transition planning and operations in Afghanistan were going on at the time of the conference (Figure I.1), and several delegates had flown in specifically to attend the event. It was therefore vital that the conference delivered tangible benefits, not only to enhance our general and theoretical understanding of the issues, but also, as our military colleagues pointed out, ideas and techniques that could be applied immediately. Despite the focus on ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force) and the specific role for Britain,



**Figure I.1.** Mann Recovery/Demolition Vehicles en route to PB 2 (Green Zone), February 2014 (Crown copyright)

namely the transition of power in Helmand Province, effort was taken to ensure wider relevance. The result was a global perspective, which, in fact, enhanced considerably our insights into the best and worst practice that might appear in Afghanistan. Thus, this edited volume is the result of a very specific conference, but it is one that, we hope, is intrinsically of interest to the academic and policy world. Readers will be able to reflect on the past, but also develop new understanding, inform concepts, doctrine, and policy, and apprise transition planners and implementers in the near future.

Given the context, in this introduction we seek to give no more than an overview of the themes and draw out a selection of insights. The chapters that follow will each give a more comprehensive examination of case studies, specific issues, and theoretical approaches. They are arranged in accordance with a number of core themes: of strategy and entry; definition of objective; primacy of the political agenda; flexible planning; and risk management. The volume works outwards from the global and thematic but permits a number of case studies to show specificities. There are also a select number of chapters that make reference to the transition of Afghanistan. As editors we became increasingly aware of gaps and omissions in the volume. It is apparent, for example, that the American withdrawal from Vietnam gets scant treatment in this work; there are numerous other examples, no less significant perhaps, which also do not appear here. Critics will have cause to point to the paucity of theoretical models, or the absence of certain regions of the world as case studies, or thematic lacunae. Our only defence is that in one short, multi-disciplinary volume and one brief conference we were able to do no more than sketch the outline for more detailed, scholarly work.

## History and theory: insight and understanding

Historical studies can add experience that inform our judgements and creates what Clausewitz called *coup d'oeil* ('insight'). Equally, theoretical models can clarify understanding, and enable us to assess and measure progress, to compare various cases and draw judgements. They cannot be applied as templates. Historical examples provide useful guidance but they are specific to their time and place and consequently cannot substitute for the decisions that pertain to specific operations. As Hegel once noted, 'The owl of Minerva only spreads her wings at the gathering of the dusk'; meaning, we are always wise after the event. Theory always follows practice. Suggestions of what is relevant from history or the theories of social science have to be treated with caution. If we take one example, where a 'light footprint' might have been appropriate in one context, the same would leave a force too vulnerable and ill-protected in another. Gerald Templer, the British plenipotentiary for Malaya in the

Emergency of the 1950s, argued that the answer to the insurgency there was not 'pouring more and more men into the jungle'.<sup>22</sup> He advocated the promise of *merdeka* (independence) with the restoration of peace and the cultivation of the relationship with ethnic Malays as the successor government elite. This also appealed to a government at home that lacked the resources for a major military campaign but which wanted favourable continuities in their post-colonial relationship, an area that Karl Hack deals with in his chapter in this volume on the long-term transition of Malaya. By contrast, the American counter-insurgency strategy in Iraq could not have achieved a suppression of violence with insufficient manpower: it was the ability of the United States to augment its effort with vast resources in manpower and money, the effect of 'mass', that ensured other elements of its strategy could prevail. Nonetheless, despite the need for specificities to be acknowledged, there are some general trends from history and theory that can aid understanding.

Borrowing from Richard Caplan's typology of modes of transition and mechanisms of exit, one can speak of six main mechanisms of transition in the period after 1945.<sup>23</sup> The first is the 'cut and run'. This is the obvious response to an intervention which is costly and failing. The process is a simple one of withdrawal, with little or no consideration of the consequences locally. It is often seen as a negative calculation and cast pejoratively, but it is one which characterized the British withdrawal from Palestine in 1948. The failure to get local actors to accept a UN plan, pressures at home, and the desire to wind up a troublesome mandate authority meant that Britain left rapidly in May that year.

The second type is the 'phased withdrawal'. This is an exit in stages, with the pace of withdrawal often being commensurate with the achievement of targets that ensure strategic objectives are fulfilled. For obvious reasons, most interventions would be planned to end this way. Both Soviet and Western transitions from Afghanistan characterize this approach.

The third type is the 'deadlines' approach. The timetable of an exit may be determined in advance. These fixed timetables are often problematic. They encourage 'spoilers' and can make responses to unanticipated obstacles more difficult. Yet timetables sometimes galvanize local elites to join the process of transition, ensuring local security forces and institutions can be tested and 'inoculated' to their role. The importance of time and particular deadlines featured strongly in the British colonial withdrawal from Malaya.

A related type, and fourth, is the 'benchmarking' approach. The framework of pre-established standards of achievement is applied as a mechanism to manage the configuration of the interventionist forces and the character of political relations. The focus is often on outputs, such as the number of trained

<sup>22</sup> Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 224.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 9–11.



personnel, rather than outcomes, such as the establishment of an independent security force. There is significant risk that benchmarks become distorted through political manipulation and subject to the dynamics of the withdrawal process. Various UN missions have attempted to utilize this approach.

A fifth type is dependence on elections. Elections are considered important instruments of peace consolidation as they restore sovereignty to the people, mark a symbolic conclusion to violence as the means to resolve contested power-sharing, and help identify and legitimate political elites that external actors regard as sovereign representatives in international relations. It must be noted that elections cannot in themselves deliver stability and should be considered as just one element, if an important one, of a transitional strategy. Indeed, elections offer no guarantee of peace, particularly if sections of a society feel disenfranchised, subordinate to a majority, or there are obvious and odious irregularities in the electoral system. To go further, the ability to ensure local representation, by whatever system, is preferable to holding elections that do no more than confer legitimacy on an incompetent or unrepresentative regime.

The sixth type of transition involves continued military operations. Such operations may or may not be conducted by the original intervention forces, or there may be a form of more clandestine or distant support through the supply of arms, intelligence assets, or training, but all are used to consolidate gains made, assist the new state authorities to build on their powers, or to complete the suppression of unrest, resistance, or insurgency. British operations in Borneo in support of their allies in Brunei in the 1960s or in Dhofar in support of the Omanis in the 1970s exemplify this type.

While examining the intellectual problem of transition through a typology such as this can be useful, it tells us very little of the detail. Theoretical models cannot reveal what human doubts, hesitations, calculations, and passions governed the decision-making of transition while it actually took place. Retrospective assessments are convenient, sanitized, and manipulated to prove an agenda was correct or incorrect. The headline in *The Chronicle Herald* in Canada in February 2013 was 'Let's face it we didn't win in Afghanistan'.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, while making dramatic headlines, such contemporary assessments are selective. It is rare to find analyses that posit a balanced verdict, showing, for example, that the West had achieved its objectives of apprehending Osama bin Laden as the architect of the '9/11' 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, established a national, constitutional government and a nascent local government apparatus, the embryo of a criminal justice system, a new

<sup>24</sup> 'Let's face it: We didn't win in Afghanistan', *The Chronicle Herald*, 10 February 2013, <<http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/677174-let-s-face-it-we-didn-t-win-in-afghanistan>>; see also Stephen Walt, 'Lessons of two wars: we will lose in Iraq and Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, 16 August 2011, <[http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/16/lessons\\_of\\_two\\_wars\\_we\\_will\\_lose\\_in\\_iraq\\_and\\_afghanistan](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/16/lessons_of_two_wars_we_will_lose_in_iraq_and_afghanistan)>.

transport infrastructure, improved health services (such that life expectancy for Afghan citizens increased and child mortality rates fell steeply), and made inroads into education at primary, secondary, and tertiary level.<sup>25</sup> Negative assessments, which were far more frequent, were valid in identifying continued conflict and instability, layers of corruption, inadequate protection of individuals or minority communities, a weak and dependent economy, and foreign interference. Too few articles in Western media outlets identified the same issues about which Afghan journalists and citizens complained, which begs the question of *who* 'won' or lost, and by what criteria such a simple assessment can be drawn. If the United States had indeed 'lost' the conflict in Afghanistan by 2013 then it is striking that America was far less affected by its 'defeat' than Afghanistan. In almost all respects, America has been unscathed by its protracted struggle with insurgents. To give our assessments greater depth than those of the contemporary media, comparative work can be very helpful, particularly where historical patterns are concerned. To illustrate this, two cases, set in contrasting historical and thematic contexts, specifically transitions at the end of empire and the operations in Iraq, now follows.

### *Transitions at the end of empire*

In trying to describe patterns at the end of European colonial rule in Africa and Asia it is important to recognize that decolonization varied widely: some were peaceful handovers, others were conducted amidst considerable violence. Moreover, some transitions stood the test of new, independent nationhood or confederation, while others descended into anarchy, civil war, sectarianism, or dictatorship. Nonetheless, from this maelstrom of changes, various themes are still discernible. The first is that the end of European imperialism was closely linked to changes in the geo-political circumstances of the time. European empires existed because of a belief that they were beneficial, strategically and morally justifiable, and the associated costs of security and administration were bearable. After 1945, the geo-strategic landscape was transformed as Europe's relative power was eclipsed by the ascendancy of the United States and the Soviet Union. In European politics, democratization and a more intense focus on social improvement meant there was far less appetite for colonial rule, and in the colonies themselves democratic and nationalist movements were becoming more assertive. Moreover, European

<sup>25</sup> From 2001 and 2013 maternal mortality came down from 16 to 14 (per 1,000) and child mortality from 131 to 101 per annum (per 1,000). See 'Afghanistan: Mortality rate', accessed 8 March 2014, <<http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/afghanistan/mortality-rate>>. Moreover, in the same period life expectancy rose from 46.2 years (2001) to 60.5 years (2013). See 'Afghanistan Statistics', *Unicef Website*, accessed 8 March 2014, <[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)>.

economic change, with a relative loss of the share of world trade it had once dominated, made burdensome administration of the colonies unattractive compared with investment in the developed world. In short, transformation in Europe was driving the process of decolonization. Nevertheless, the United States backed the late imperial agendas of France and Britain as better alternatives to Soviet expansion: the strategic imperative was global stability with democratization where viable. There were limits and caveats. It was not prepared to allow Britain and France unilateralism over the Suez crisis in 1956 when these nations attempted to impose a military solution on Egypt. Nevertheless, the Americans prioritized anti-communist policies and regarded their European allies as crucial elements in that ideological struggle.

Despite the clarity of the West's strategic agenda, the hallmark of most European colonial transitions was haste, a paucity of resources, and improvisation. In some cases, there was considerable resistance to European authority, including protracted insurgencies. The history of decolonization therefore provides some interesting observations which John Darwin draws out in his chapter. The first observation is that the idea that a timetable of transition could be controlled proved illusory. Local actors, especially the elites, demanded full independence and power in relatively short periods of time whereas, in general terms, the Europeans had hoped for gradual transitions which would allow them the chance to retain economic and security privileges, develop permanent and perhaps client relationship links with the successor authorities, and protect minorities. Rob Johnson illustrates this outcome, driven also in part by British domestic politics, with his chapter on India and Pakistan in 1947.

The second observation is the prospect of gaining power after the departure of Europeans led to a scramble for positions of authority between a variety of individuals, parties, factions, and groups. This tended to increase divisions in society and politics, and could sharpen and deepen ideological, ethnic, or sectarian consciousness. In this volume, Aaron Edwards examines the attempts to conduct robust operations amidst the shifting sands of British foreign policy at the chaotic end of colonial rule in Aden in 1967. We might deduce that to obtain the compliance from local elites required incentives and consistent good faith. This sometimes posed a moral dilemma about whether liberal principles could be forced on to leaders whose priorities were very different. Colonial officials were often uneasy about involvement in negotiations with those linked to 'direct action' or, far worse, those associated with violence. Home governments were less likely to allow local colonial concerns to change the agenda of decolonization and often drove the initiative, sometimes regardless of opposition by settler populations.

The third observation is that in order to preserve influence after transition, significant resources, particularly financial support and direct aid had to be

invested well beyond the period of colonial control. The United Kingdom's aid programme to India, for example, commencing before independence in 1947, was only terminated in 2013. It is also striking that the Europeans were eager to transfer power to a government of a 'viable' state with appropriate state-level functions, and a friendly elite that could exercise control within its own borders. Where it had doubts about this viability or where minorities were threatened by a more powerful group, Britain attempted to create confederations. Not all of these survived for long, but there were successes including the confederation of Canada (1837) and the union of South Africa (1910). Unity and tradition were particularly valued by the British in transition planning. In this volume, James Worrall shows the relative success of ending counter-insurgency operations and the building of legitimacy in Oman in the 1970s through strong relationships and commitment, effectively reuniting quite distinct communities in the country.

The fourth observation is that the colonial powers were quite prepared to 'cut and run' when their respective national interests were at stake. France faced a serious constitutional crisis over the protracted and unpopular war in Algeria and despite the colony's status as part of metropolitan France, it was jettisoned to preserve the integrity of the metropole. Britain discarded its control of the Gulf States, Palestine, and several African colonies to cut costs and avoid international criticism, even when arrangements for the internal security of these nascent states was far from certain. Saul Kelly's chapter on southern Arabia and the Gulf exposes the contradictions and bad faith of British governments in their withdrawal calculations in the period 1964–71.

The key criticism of imperialism was not only the denial of freedom to colonial peoples, but also the violence inflicted on them. Nevertheless, colonial states were not governed solely by the lash. It was the logic of all states that a single authority required local collaboration and ultimately a monopoly of violence. Consequently, European colonial powers invested significantly in their security apparatus and made much use of local manpower to augment their own military forces. This had two effects: one, these security forces required continued support as part of the transition in order to guard against violent unrest, and, two, it could in some circumstances empower particular elites, especially those in the armed forces who subsequently saw it as their duty to protect the state not only against external enemies but subversive elements, corruption, and unreasonable oligarchies. Such aspirations were not always pre-planned or fulfilled as David Anderson explains in his chapter on the heavy handed ending of British rule in Kenya between 1952 and 1963.

In theory, Britain was particularly concerned to make the transfer of power conditional on the willingness of local leaders to accept the Westminster democratic model and a version of the British legal system, but it was also keen to ensure a lasting, cordial relationship with its newly independent

partners. Nevertheless, preferential treatment of the new elites precluded any continuing responsibility for colonial minorities, including those loyalists on whom the colonial state had relied. It also made it difficult to make any form of representation against repression by post-colonial regimes. The new elites, who needed to create myths of liberation to reinforce their independent national identity, refused to acknowledge any imperial magnanimity and often distanced themselves from the colonial past. In Europe, a lack of interest in the fate of the colonies made it easier to make the psychological shift that followed the loss of 'Great Power' status. While colonial agendas influenced the way the transfer of power was debated and then realized, it proved far more important to satisfy opinion 'at home'. This was just as true of the French experience in Algeria and the British departure from India.

Furthermore, anti-colonial sentiment has proved a powerful political instrument in the post-colonial world. Post-colonial political failings are often reconfigured as historical or contemporary external interferences. Some narratives, of course, are more powerful and enduring than others, especially when based on accepted narratives of past 'oppression'. Even episodes of 'colonial abuse' which occurred more than one hundred years ago are invoked to explain current setbacks or failures, and conspiracy theories are popular tools of explanation for seemingly any event. Such discourse makes even the most benign intervention or transition process less than straightforward.

### *The ending of the campaign in Iraq, 2004–11*

The conventional invasion of Iraq by a multistate 'coalition of the willing' in 2003 was soon overshadowed by the complexity of a widespread insurgency, complicated by criminal elements, foreign subversion, and opportunists. Over the seven years of the campaign, the United States struggled to impose order, establish a new Iraqi government, rebuild its security apparatus, restart its economy, and repair the country's infrastructure. The invasion was controversial and the conflict proved unpopular with Western governments, and the American electorate, which combined to push the administration of President George W. Bush to consider a series of exit strategies. The campaign was still unresolved when President Barack Obama was elected, but his new administration assured the American public that the United States would seek an early withdrawal by handing power over to the Iraqi government.

The United States struggled to find a solution to the insurgency that had developed, but the greatest number of security incidents, which had peaked by 2006, involved sectarian or communal violence rather than actions against the Coalition. Whilst some clearly fought what they regarded as a foreign occupation, volunteers from outside Iraq poured in to sacrifice themselves as suicide bombers or make opportunistic attacks on the Coalition forces, Iraqi

government units, or sectarian rivals. Death squads, vigilante groups, and criminal elements using police uniforms to kidnap middle class Iraqis for ransom all added to the complex 'insurgent eco-system'. Journalists spoke of a civil war engulfing the centre of the country, and the rise of Sunni resistance in the Tikrit-Baghdad 'triangle'. Meanwhile, British operations in southern Iraq provoked the formation of Shia militias, and these enjoyed the backing of Iran. In response to the deteriorating situation, the American approach was to surge in with fresh troops to dominate the capital and central Iraq, while in peripheral regions, such as Al Anbar province and the Kurdish north, arrangements were made with local community leaders to form self-defence militias against outsiders.

Stung by criticism at home, the British government, by contrast, attempted to accelerate the departure of its forces through accommodations with the largest militia, the Jaish al-Mahdi. The British deal failed disastrously. Basra, the second largest city of the country, fell into the hands of the insurgents and it took a combined American and Iraqi Army operation (ironically, one planned by the British Army) to drive the insurgents out.<sup>26</sup> Britain had been humiliated by the government's decision to withdraw its units at the critical moment of the campaign, and a belated return to the city did little to restore confidence in the British approach. Noticeably, British expertise in counter-insurgency techniques, which they had claimed stemmed from long years of experience from Malaya to Northern Ireland, was largely dismissed by American personnel as false or exaggerated.

The manner of entry, where the absence of a specific UN Security Council resolution authorizing the invasion, which was condemned as a breach of international law, had precipitated unfavourable conditions for exit. UN cooperation was limited which meant that finding a diplomatic or political solution through international agreements was unlikely. For the sake of their reputation, the American government regarded it as imperative to leave the country in a stable condition with a functioning democratic government. Yet the military situation was also highly problematic. The toppling of Saddam Hussein and the dismantling of his regime was achieved skilfully and with overwhelming force in a matter of weeks. The decision to dismiss the entire civil service, police, and armed forces as 'regime elements' nevertheless deprived thousands of their livelihood and gave them no option but to resist the occupation. Moreover, whilst the Coalition troops trained in conventional warfare could provide a modicum of security, they were neither trained nor equipped for a protracted insurgency. Worse still, the invasion plan had not envisaged a prolonged occupation or reconstruction. Consequently, there were almost no arrangements made to provide basic services. The realization

<sup>26</sup> Hew Strachan, Jonathan Bailey, and Richard Iron, eds, *Blair's Wars and Britain's Generals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

of the mounting cost, both financial and in terms of casualties, deepened the unpopularity of the war with the American public and put further pressure on Washington to find a rapid solution.

The Iraq case makes clear that the planning for interventions and their termination has a tendency to grossly overestimate the transformatory capacity of armed forces, and revealed the absence of any suitable agency to carry out reconstruction. In the British government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development had quite limited roles which ordinarily depended on working through an existing national government. They had no experience or capacity to deliver the sort of services that were urgently required, including the repair of electricity power stations, food distribution, and local administration.<sup>27</sup> Coalition military forces attempted to fill the gap, but had to learn on the job while trying to contain a deteriorating security environment.

The exit, driven by the domestic political agendas of interventionist nations, proved very costly to the fulfilment of the mission and to the population under occupation. Even the electoral process, on which great hopes for an early resolution to the conflict had been pinned, contributed to corruption and anger amongst Iraqis. Fears of being disenfranchised, a refusal by Sunnis to participate in a system imposed by the Coalition, and the desire for revenge against sectarian rivals damaged the process of democratization. Iraqi parties and certain leading politicians stripped the assets of the ministries under their control and appointed their friends and allies. Unsurprisingly, their victims and their rivals retaliated.

A number of plans for exit from Iraq evolved cumulatively and in response to worsening security conditions.<sup>28</sup> These exit plans were in sequence. The first, envisaged in 2003–04, was the policy of ‘plug and play’. The concept was that the Iraqi Army would be defeated but the other institutions of state would survive. In essence security would continue to be delivered by the Coalition while Iraqi ministries underwent significant reform. This was to ensure a speedy exit of interventionist forces from Iraq. The plan soon disintegrated and was replaced by ‘seven steps to sovereignty’. This policy aimed to develop new state capacities with criteria and timelines, yet it was found to be quite unrealistic. At the core of the plan was de-Ba’athification, particularly the eradication of the old ruling elite from the upper echelons of the technocratic civil service. These men were to be replaced by Washington’s favoured Iraqi exiles. In addition, de-Ba’athification involved the disbandment of the Iraqi Army, which meant the compulsory redundancy of 400,000 trained personnel who, inexplicably, were allowed to keep their weapons. There was to be the

<sup>27</sup> Hilary Synot, *Bad Days in Basra* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Toby Dodge, ‘Iraq’, in Caplan, ed., *Exit Strategies and State Building*, pp. 242–58.

gradual re-building of the political system following the American model which would enable Coalition forces to drawdown in stages. The plan was abandoned when it became clear the ambitious pre-departure benchmarks were never going to be met.

The subsequent plan was the 'November 15 Agreement'. The concept was to limit the commitment of the United States to Iraq, without totally abandoning state reform, by transferring power to a handpicked cohort of Iraqi expatriates and their partners. Essentially, this meant subcontracting the complex task of state building to unproven and deeply unpopular exiles and outsiders. Linked to the agreement were long-term financial commitments which would be subject to rigorous American scrutiny. In the south, the British had proceeded with their own separate plan. Here the emphasis was on 'Provincial Iraqi Control'. The British approach in Basra, in contrast to the national state-building effort in Baghdad, even at the height of their capacity, could at best be described as 'conflict mediation'. Extended negotiations with Jaish al-Mahdi, the primary militia force in the city, ensured a secure withdrawal on the basis of payments and commitments not to return. Subsequent abuses by Jaish al-Mahdi were ignored for reasons of political expediency. Even if the negotiations had produced an interim authority, the failure to make this dependent and conditional on the approval of the administration in Baghdad condemned the project to failure. Coordination across the Coalition was therefore woefully inadequate at the political and strategic level.

The final phase involved 'strategic negotiations and mass'. The concept was to prioritize security by surging forces (171,000 troops in 2007) and deploy them across much larger areas of central Iraq. This new military posture, being much more interventionist in the pursuit of insurgents into their base areas, but also dominating the ground and protecting the civilian populations within designated areas, helped to turn the tide of the conflict. Crucially, cooperating with Sunni groups that wanted to drive out Jihadist extremists and Shia gunmen also changed the situation. Nevertheless, strategic negotiations with the Iraqi government did not succeed. It had become clear, for example, that American expectations about the long-term use of military bases, prisoner detention, immunity from prosecution for American troops and contractors, and unfettered operational freedom, were unacceptable in Baghdad. The United States struggled to secure a satisfactory 'state of forces agreement'. It was these strategic negotiations which resulted in fixed timelines for extraction of American forces, for, without the full cooperation of the new Iraqi government, the American occupation had become unviable. In this volume, Mark Battjes examines the tactical aspects of the Iraq case through the fortunes of the 25th Infantry Division, the last US Army division to leave in 2011, and how American personnel managed new legal constraints, domestic political pressures, restrictive rules of engagement, and slender logistics.



## Implications for Afghanistan's long-term stability

This volume was written at a time when the future of Afghanistan, after Western military intervention, was unknown. As authors, our concern was to assert historical, theoretical, and applied approaches in other contexts to gain some better insight and understanding that could be brought to bear on the issues in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, we recognized from the outset that the situation in Afghanistan was obviously unique. All we could really hope to do was offer reflections, scope analogous tactical and operational circumstances and pose further questions. The first and most logical step was to engage Sir Rodric Braithwaite, Britain's former ambassador to the USSR who has used his background to write a history of the Soviet War in Afghanistan, and he has contributed a chapter on the Soviet withdrawal showing how the gap between official rhetoric and reality created a strategic setback, despite a competent military withdrawal.

It was Basil Liddell Hart who once wrote: 'The objective in war is a better state of peace—even if only from your own point of view. Hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire'.<sup>29</sup> Defining the end state for Afghanistan has been far more difficult than originally thought. Expectations that Afghanistan could be rebuilt and turned into a democracy with a fully functioning economy proved hopelessly over-optimistic. 'Nation-building' became, with a degree of weariness in the expression, 'Afghan good-enough'. The desire to create a modern army that could take over from the ISAF forces by 2014 at times looked to be foundering because of illiteracy, corruption, and the lack of a professional officer corps. 'Green on blue' (later 'insider threat') incidents, where Afghan security forces turned their weapons against members of ISAF, were the result not only of infiltration by insurgents, but also frustration and irritation with foreign methods, or drug abuse. Afghan civilians in the Pashtun south frequently expressed their anger with corrupt government officials, including police officers who sexually assaulted children. ISAF was often regarded as a force that simply enabled the corrupt to get away with their crimes and operations that resulted in civilian casualties were criticized in every quarter. Moreover, Coalition nations that had agreed to take a lead on a particular aspect of nation-building in some cases seemed to make the situation worse. Germany's early efforts to create a new police force were deemed too slow and complex, necessitating the creation of auxiliary police units. These proved so predatory they had to be abandoned and police reform lagged far behind the development of the Afghan National Army until new impetus was given by the American takeover of all security sector reform.

<sup>29</sup> Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 338.

The United Kingdom had offered to take the lead on counter-narcotics, and although there was some success with eradication in the north, the policy generated significant resistance in Helmand when it was introduced there in 2006.<sup>30</sup>

The term 'transition' refers to a long process of change, involving the transfer of authority, space, capability, and responsibility. Whilst an Afghan national government apparatus was created and some progress had been made with local governance, the Afghans had reason to doubt that the West would sustain its commitment when President Obama announced, in 2009, that there would be a timetable for withdrawal and that all combat operations would cease by 2014. For the Americans and for the other Coalition partners, national interests invariably override all other considerations, and exit would threaten the ability to provide security and thus sustain development unless the Afghan government could establish control across the country by its own means. Where perhaps the West's mission was 'to secure, in order to develop', transition required a new and clear definition. ISAF's multinational character complicated the lines of command and control, not least because national agendas took precedence. Simplicity was the solution to restore clarity in ISAF's collective purpose. Each nation had to strive for a dignified, timely, and well organized withdrawal, wherever possible without casualties. Above all, the success of the entire campaign depended ultimately on the resilience of the structures left behind, which included the Afghan security forces, the viability of the Afghan economy, and the preservation of democracy.

It was clear that there were major weaknesses in the Afghan government and its security apparatus, but the Western Coalition had to be pragmatic about who it transferred power to. Efforts had to be made to cultivate local leaders, including insurgents, to encourage their participation in government rather than leaving them 'outside' the dividends of peace. Nevertheless, the explicit facilitation of insurgency or acquiescence in the return of warlordism was unlikely to be tolerated by the international community nor welcomed by Afghans. Historically, and perhaps in a manner distinct from the United States or other European nations, Britain had often co-opted its former enemies and critics into government, including the successor regimes to the colonial administrations. Britain bargained transfers of power or degrees of power sharing through negotiations with, for example, Abdur Rahman Khan in Afghanistan, Mohandas Gandhi and Jawarhawal Nehru in India, Aung San in Burma, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, the National Liberation Front in Aden and South Arabia, and Gerry Adams in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the United States made clear in 2013 that the

<sup>30</sup> Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).