The Unfulfilled Potential of the Light Footprint Approach for Peace Missions

Nicolas Lemay-Hébert

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Abstract: There is an emerging literature on statebuilding that identifies the significant limits of external interventions when unrelated to the needs and perceptions of the local society targeted by the intervention. Limits of exogenous interventions are highlighted in various locales (Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan or Iraq). Many authors have demonstrated how massive international peacebuilding missions, while deployed at first to create the conditions for a lasting peace, can actually contribute toward the creation of local tensions (economic, socio-politic and cultural). Building from this literature, the paper proceeds to analyze the potential of the light footprint approach, when applied to international peacebuilding missions, especially when coupled with the participatory intervention framework, as outlined by Jarat Chopra and Tanja Hohe. The paper goes beyond the discursive use of the local ownership paradigm to provide new insights into it could be translated effectively into policies on the ground. A specific emphasis will be put on how the light footprint approach in Afghanistan, analyzing the limits of the Afghan experience, but also on how the approach is an interesting attempt to draw lessons from past statebuilding experiences. Hence, this paper aims to contribute to a different understanding of the impacts of peacebuilding missions on local settings, while placing emphasis on new possibilities for international interventions.

INTRODUCTION

After a decade of evolution toward more ‘integrated,’ ‘multi-faceted,’ or simply stated more intrusive peace operations, with the high point being the United Nations administrations of Kosovo and Timor-Leste at the beginning of this century, a critical literature has slowly emerged on the economic and social impacts of these interventions. Scholars have started to analyse the ‘unintended consequences’ of peacebuilding missions, looking at all aspects of interventions, and not only those accounted for traditionally by the peacebuilding actors themselves. Others have developed a critique to the liberal peace framework, questioning the wider normative framework...
of interventions and the values promoted by these interventions.\textsuperscript{3} In this framework, there is generally a place for an alternative to Western-oriented, orthodox or mainstream approaches to statebuilding and peacebuilding. Whether it is called ‘emancipatory approach,’ or ‘indigenous,’ there is a recognition of the need to take into account a different concept of peace, one that is focused on ‘a culturally appropriate form of individual or community life and care,’ underlying the need for a ‘a broader social contract.’\textsuperscript{4}

However, in most accounts, the ‘local ownership’ paradigm is generally discredited from the outset, as nothing but minor modifications to the ‘liberal,’ ‘mainstream’ or ‘orthodox’ peace framework. For Oliver Richmond, an alternative to liberal peace ‘requires an engagement with not just the currently fashionable and controversial issues of local ownership or local participation, but the far deeper “local-local” (…) this emancipatory model is concerned with needs as well as rights (and a blurring of the line between these categories), and a much closer relationship of custodians with local ownership.’\textsuperscript{5} The latest use of the concept by many international actors as a mere legitimizing principle for international policies, gives credence to Richmond’s argument. As Nina Wilén points out, ‘there can be far-reaching consequences if local ownership and capacity-building are left undefined and unoperationalized.’\textsuperscript{6} This article tries to contribute to the debate raised by scholars and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding by providing initial thoughts on how local ownership has been used in other fields, namely development studies and security studies. The articles makes the central argument that local ownership as a principle can be valuable if understood as a tool to facilitate bottom-up state-building processes and to mitigate the most blatant consequences of ‘heavy footprint’ missions.
and the unintended consequences related to them, and not as the next template to create yet other ‘one size fits all’ policies.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN PARTICIPATORY INTERVENTIONS

Local ownership can be defined as a process where the solutions to a particular society’s needs are developed in concert with the people who are going to live with, and uphold, these solutions in the long run. John-Paul Lederach dubs the same process ‘indigenous empowerment’. He suggests the following:

[CONFLICT] transformation must actively envision, include, respect and promote the human and cultural resources within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily ‘see’ the setting and the people in it as the ‘problem’ and the outsider as the ‘answer.’ Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting.

As for the ‘participatory intervention’ framework put forth by Jarat Chopra and Tanja Hohe, it implies ‘granting space for local voices to be expressed and for communities to get directly involved in the evolution of their own cultural or political foundations.’ This means ‘giving time for an indigenous paradigm to coexist with, or to gradually transform during the creation of, modern institutions. Integral to the process is the design of mechanisms for genuine popular participation in administrative bodies at the local level.’ Kofi Annan, in a report on peacekeeping missions, referred directly to the need for ‘participatory governance’. One year after the deployment of the peace missions in Kosovo and in Timor-Leste, he clearly stated that a domestic peace process becomes sustainable ‘when the natural conflicts of society can be resolved peacefully through the exercise of State sovereignty and, generally, participatory governance (italics added).’ The report adds that sustainable peace ‘can only be achieved by the
local population itself; the role of the United Nations is merely to facilitate the process (…). As Robert Orr summarises, ‘while seeking to build up local governance and participation capacity, the international community must observe the cardinal rule of governance: indigenous ownership of the process is key.’ The perception of incapacity or incompetence—what I have dubbed the ‘empty shell’ perspective in another contribution—should not in itself hinder the process. ‘Even when local actors are disorganized and disempowered in the wake of conflict, they must be given a leadership role in the rebuilding process. Likewise, even when international actors must assume certain functions temporarily, they should always train and empower indigenous counterparts.’

Participatory intervention, local ownership and indigenous empowerment do not fit neatly with direct governance by an international administration, which, at the very least, means a substantive normative shift in the conduct of state-building—from a narrow institutional approach of state, state collapse and state-building to an approach taking into account legitimacy aspects. Within this perspective, local actors have to be recognised as true partners in the state-building process rather than mere recipients of foreign aid. If one wants to allow space for local actors in a participatory framework, authority can hardly be monopolised by the international actors. Annika Hansen and Sharon Wiharta also put forward the view that ‘the maximum authority possible—in accordance with local capacity, context and levels of accountability—should lie with local stakeholders at any given time.’ Hence, a certain restrain in the exercise of authority on the part of external actors in the state-building process can be positive and contribute to the increased legitimacy of the mission while allowing the local population ‘to learn from their experience and prevent the administrative equivalent of aid dependency.’ This does not mean that external...
actors should disengage all at once from state-building activities; this only presupposes a distinctively different approach to state-building. In other words, this indicates a state-building process that is less top-down and more bottom-up oriented. Richard Caplan argues for a similar policy, stating ‘in many cases it is possible to devolve responsibility to the local population, insist on transparency and, as a safeguard, maintain control over the public purse.’

Kofi Annan also identified local ownership as a general lesson to be drawn from past experiences, stating that ‘ultimately, no rule of law reform, justice reconstruction, or transitional justice initiative imposed from the outside can hope to be successful or sustainable. The role of the United Nations and the international community should be solidarity, not substitution.’ Kofi Annan restated this view at the opening session of the new Peacebuilding commission:

peacebuilding requires national ownership, and must be homegrown. Outsiders, however well-intentioned, cannot substitute for the knowledge and will of the people of the country concerned. It is the latter who best know their own history, culture and political contexts. It is they who live with the consequences of the decision taken. And it is they who must feel that peacebuilding is their achievement, if it is to have any hope of lasting.

The importance of local ownership was also reinforced by Ban Ki-Moon at the Peacebuilding commission and in his most recent report on peacebuilding submitted at the General Assembly and the Security council, where he stated the following:

[W]hile every post-conflict situation is unique, the United Nations has accumulated a broad range of experience, and we have learned many lessons from supporting dozens of countries emerging from conflict. First and foremost, we know that peacebuilding is a national challenge and responsibility. Only national actors can address their society’s needs and goals in a sustainable way.
The above statements suggest that there are potential alternatives to the hard-line approach adopted by the United Nations in Kosovo and Timor-Leste. It seems to be also the favoured alternative for participants in regional round-tables on the aftermath of the Brahimi report, a project conducted by the International Peace Academy. Participants in Africa, Asia and Latin America round-tables all expressed the need ‘for greater local ownership of the processes of peace-building.’ For them, ‘emphasis should be on building the capacity for local governance rather than on deploying a vast number of international staff of highly uneven quality.’

**LOCAL OWNERSHIP PARADIGM BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND REALITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM LITERATURE**

The local ownership paradigm is a concept that lends itself to certain criticisms, which should not be ignored. Criticisms of the inclusion of the concept in peace missions have been clearly expressed by Simon Chesterman among others. Furthermore, this contribution will not indulge in a thorough refutation of the cultural arguments made by those claiming that ‘some societies are unable to take ownership of their affairs without violence (italics in the text).’ This contribution will take a different approach and will try to see what academics and practitioners working in the field of peacebuilding can learn from the vibrant debate surrounding local ownership in development studies and security sector reform-related issues.

The first major issue related to the use of the local ownership paradigm is as follows: to what extent the ownership process must be legitimately viewed as local to qualify as such? For
Oghogho Edomwonyi, local ownership would mean that “[the] reconstruction effort is locally conceived of and led.” 27 Tony Killick makes a similar assertion:

[G]overnment ownership is at its strongest when the political leadership and its advisers, with broad support among agencies of state and civil society, decide of their own volition that policy changes are desirable, choose what these changes should be and when they should be introduced, and where these changes become built into the parameters of policy and administration, which are generally accepted as desirable.” 28

However, for James Boughton and Alex Mourmouras, it requires the owner ‘to appreciate the benefits of the policies and to accept responsibility for them,” 29 leaving aside those who conceived the policies in the first place. The authors rely on the definition of ownership as ‘a willing assumption of responsibility for an agreed program of policies.” 30

Chopra and Hohe’s concept of participatory intervention can be particularly useful in this discussion about local ownership. As it was defined earlier, participatory intervention implies local actors’ active participation in the process of the conception and implementation of policies. Therefore, this is more than a debate over who drafted a specific policy or programme—this concept reveals to academics and practitioners the importance of creating policies ‘appropriate to the context they are implemented in.” 31 In this framework, the process is not required to be conceived entirely by local actors, as Edomwonyi’s definition seems to imply. International actors can certainly contribute in supporting a process perceived as locally legitimate, for instance, by working through and influencing local actors. Hannah Reich’s contribution in the field of security sector reform is particularly relevant. Reich states that ‘instead of aiming towards the impossible goal of literal “local ownership” of a foreign-funded project, which by definition inscribes the roles of donor and beneficiary, the focus should be on
the nature of the *relationship* between the donors and the beneficiaries (italics in the text).\(^{32}\)

Thus, the purpose for promoting local ownership is not to argue for the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process—a clearly utopian aim, especially in light of the literature on spoilers and peace processes.\(^{33}\) Some actors will prefer to opt out of the process while others might compromise the whole reconciliation process by their mere presence. The goal of local ownership is therefore to change the nature of the relationship between international and local actors, based on the demonstrated limits of top-down approaches to state-building. Furthermore, as hinted by Derick Brinkerhoff, one should approach local ownership as a continuum rather than as a binary variable.\(^{34}\)

For Timothy Donais, local ownership means the following:

\[ \text{A] consistent support of both international and local actors [to a broad range of policies].} \]

Rather than viewing ownership in binary, either/or terms, then, it perhaps makes more sense to view ownership as a specific configuration of political authority that emerges from a process of negotiation across the local/international divide, in which both international and local actors claim legitimacy.\(^{35}\)

In this framework, local ownership becomes a process rather than a state.

The second major issue that we have to deal with is as follows: who are the ‘locals’ who ‘own’ the process (and who selects them)? This is a particularly thorny question, and the answer has to be modelled on the specificity of the local context. UNTAET’s reliance on a small fringe of the local population in Timor-Leste, the Portuguese-speaking elite and the Gusmão and Ramos-Horta duo specifically, has led to unforeseen consequences in the state-building process. However, this reproach can appear slightly disingenuous. As noted by Sergio Vieira de Mello, ‘the more powers conferred on local representatives, the closer power is to the people and thus the more legitimate the nature of the administration. But conferring power on non-elected local representatives can
also have the undesired effect of furthering a particular party.’ The problem here is twofold: Vieira de Mello realised too late that the CNRT was not a ‘particular party’ per se, but rather a ‘resistance umbrella’ and the traditional structures were largely ignored. One could argue that the process of local ownership has to be as wide as possible, encompassing a vast array of local social structures of legitimacy and traditional leaders, including those who do not fit well into the Western conception of a statesperson. The process of local ownership must also look beyond the small political elite speaking English. In that regard, Rocklyn William argues for ‘indigenising the concept of security sector reform’ to make the concept both consistent with the indigenous traditions of the African continent and supportive of the ongoing attempts by Africans to take control of the political processes to which they are bound. This is also the opinion of Bendix and Stanley, who noted that the concept is revived by scholars who emphasise ‘the crucial role of non-state actors and the potential contributions to SSR of non-Western institutions that are so frequently overlooked in donor blueprints.’ By expanding the number of stakeholders, and reaching beyond the Western conception of civil society or political leaders, international actors stand a better chance at fostering a truly legitimate process and nurturing a viable ‘social contract’, binding institutions and society together. Only in this way will local ownership come to mean ‘national’ ownership rather than a mere governmental ownership.

Furthermore, and this is crucial, this political process has to be accompanied by the substantive devolution of authority to local stakeholders—no longer to be used as a rhetorical device for international actors to extend their control and privileges. Like most authors on the subject, Reich notes that local ownership tends to serve ‘as an important discursive function’ while Eric Scheye and Gordon Peake warn that ‘local ownership as currently conceptualized is much more a
rhetorical device than an actual guide for implementers.\textsuperscript{40} Similarly, Simon Chesterman remarks that the ‘question of ownership is often used disingenuously—either to mask the assertion of potentially dictatorial powers by international actors or to carry a psychological rather than political meaning in the area of reconstruction.’\textsuperscript{41} For Nina Wilén, the concept fills a particular function in peace operations, namely ‘to increase the operations’ legitimacy without containing a precise substance.’\textsuperscript{42}

Furthermore, the whole process of local ownership does not mean that international actors are powerless in the process—they retain the capacity to influence social structures and to channel the state-building process in a desired direction. In fact, UN official Lakhdar Brahimi argued that is precisely by recognising local actors that one obtains credit and influence. However, in order to be able to influence local actors, external actors have to properly understand the local setting and the local dynamics of legitimisation and power. Although this last point may seem evident, it bears repeating in light of recent state-building experiences.\textsuperscript{43} It also means that the whole framework of participatory intervention is not compatible with monopolisation of authority in the hands of the international administrations, as witnessed in Kosovo and Timor-Leste.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{THE UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL OF THE ‘LIGHT FOOTPRINT’ APPROACH}

An alternative vision of the UN role in state-building was put forth by Lakhdar Brahimi while serving as SRSG to Afghanistan from October 2001 through December 2004. In the midst of the doctrinal debate concerning the place of Kosovo and Timor-Leste in the evolution of UN peace
missions—were they a ‘historic anomaly,’\textsuperscript{45} representing a ‘high-water mark of UN peace operations’\textsuperscript{46} or a ‘permanent or recurrent feature of international life (…) likely to be with us for some time’\textsuperscript{47}—the ‘light footprint’ approach as it came to be known—a term that was coined during the planning of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)—appeared as a coherent alternative to the ‘more is better’ paradigm gripping the world of state-building at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{48} The light footprint approach advocates that UN activities should be limited to those that are appropriate to the local needs and context, and, in order to ensure local capacity-building, international staff should be limited to the minimum required so that nationals can take over from the UN as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{49} The Secretary General Report preparing the establishment of UNAMA states that ‘UNAMA should aim to bolster Afghan capacity (both official and non-governmental), relying on as limited an international presence and on as many Afghan staff as possible, and using common support services where possible, thereby leaving a light expatriate “footprint.”’\textsuperscript{50} 

As discussed in the context of local ownership, giving a more prominent role to local actors does not mean the end of the intervention per se—it merely implies a different way of exercising authority. As Lakhdar Brahimi noted, ‘to underscore the primacy of local over foreign concerns in no way means that the international partners have to accept the views of the local parties unconditionally and without discussion. But it does mean that arrogance is not acceptable, and humility and genuine respect for the local population indispensable.’\textsuperscript{51} Hence, ‘it is \textit{precisely} through recognizing Afghan leadership that one obtains credit and influence.’\textsuperscript{52} As Yama Torabi states, it allows the international actor to enjoy ‘in return the kind of legitimacy to monitor, advice and even discipline.’\textsuperscript{53}
It is important to note that there were calls for setting up an international administration at the time of the conception of a UN mission in Afghanistan. For instance, Sergio Vieira de Mello stated that the UN’s work to rebuild Timor-Leste could be a model for the new interim administration anticipated in Afghanistan: ‘there are similarities in what we found in East Timor in November 1999 and what the new interim administration in Kabul will have to deal with.’54 However, he made it quite clear that the new ‘international administration’ should be quite different from the one he experienced in Timor-Leste:

Those international administrators involved directly in repairing Afghanistan’s institutions and infrastructure must also not overreach. If there is one lesson to be learned from the United Nations’ previous attempts at nation-building, it is to include national political figures and parties. Be as inclusive as circumstances permit. Whatever mandate you are given by the Security Council must be shared with Afghan leaders themselves. If those representatives are not consulted every step of the way—indeed, if they do not lead the process of reconstruction—then those who have come to help will come to be seen as invading interlopers.55

Hence, as the editorial of the New York Times advocated, ‘whoever takes on the enormous task of nation-building in Afghanistan and elsewhere needs to learn from these lessons [from Timor-Leste]. The most important job is not to run the country, but to enable its citizens to do the job themselves.’56 Lakhdar Brahimi and Kofi Annan were heedful of this advice. At the same time, a cursory glance at the country’s history shows how any new international presence runs the risk of being seen as the latest invasion force owing to the British and the Russian occupations.

Brahimi previously served in Afghanistan as SRSG between 1997 and 1999, which allowed him to form extensive contacts with various Afghan groups and build a strong knowledge of the
country.\textsuperscript{57} He made it clear that ‘the United Nations is “definitely” not seeking to form a protectorate,’ as he said in a press conference.\textsuperscript{58} He soon repeated his intention that the Afghan would ‘feel ownership,’ insisting that ‘otherwise, it has no future,’ while adding ‘all the resolutions of the United Nations say that the Afghans are independent, that the country must remain united, that there should be no interference in their affairs.’\textsuperscript{59} Outlining his plan to the Security Council, Brahimi repeatedly stressed that any plan must be broad-based and developed from within the country to stand a chance of acceptance. Seemingly referring to the UN doctrinal evolution towards more intrusive peace operations, Brahimi added ‘the bitter experience of the last 10 years shows that the solution must be carefully put together and be homegrown, so that it enjoys the support of all the internal and external players, and so that there are no spoilers from the inside or outside who would disrupt its implementation.’\textsuperscript{60} The political plan outlined by Brahimi included an initial meeting with representatives of the Northern Alliance and other exile groups to agree on a framework for political transition, which would be followed by the constitution of a loya jirgah, a traditional national assembly (‘Grand Assembly of Elders’), to approve the program. The plan put forward by Brahimi was later codified in the Bonn Agreement of December 2001.\textsuperscript{61} The ‘Bonn formula’ envisions an all-Afghan Interim Authority, and then an Afghan Transitional Authority and Administration with the international community, including the United Nations and multinational peace forces, playing only an ‘assistance’ role, ‘eschewing therefore the options of partnership with an Afghan government, control of parts of it, or complete governorship over it’ as Alexandre Their and Jarat Chopra notes. According to the same authors, ‘this choice is a reversal of the increasingly intrusive trend in transitional administration from the Lemay-Hébert - \textit{The Unfulfilled Potential of the Light Footprint Approach for Peace Missions}
international exercise of executive and legislative powers in Eastern Slavonia, Brcko, and Kosovo to global sovereignty in East Timor.\(^6^2\) The Afghan Interim Administration was actually endowed with power to ‘advise the Interim Authority in establishing a politically neutral environment conducive to the holding of the Emergency Loya Jirga in free and fair conditions.’\(^6^3\)

UN Security council Resolution 1401 officially mandated the new UN mission, UNAMA, with a mandate consistent with the Bonn Agreement. The military presence in the country is, however, closer to the Timor-Leste and Kosovo models, where the allied operation against the Talibans, spearheaded by the United States, exercises effective control of many parts of the country.\(^6^4\) The mission would not be substantially modified over the years and local ownership remains a central principle guiding the UN action in the region. The Afghan Compact between ‘the international community,’ in reality the donor countries, and the Afghan government led to an engagement between the two ‘parties’ where ‘the Afghan Government hereby commits itself to realising this shared vision of the future; the international community, in turn, commits itself to provide resources and support to realise that vision.’ It is clearly stated that the implementation of the Compact, which comprises various benchmarks, is led by the principle of ‘working on the basis of partnership between the Afghan government and the international community’—the latter pledging to ‘engage further the deep-seated traditions of participation and aspiration of the Afghan people.’\(^6^5\) The Afghan expert Rory Stewart has summarised one of the main principles behind this stance: ‘the more responsibility we take in Afghanistan, the more we undermine the credibility and responsibility of the Afghan government and encourage it to act irresponsibly.’\(^6^6\) However, the reality of the light footprint was complicated by the fact that, although UNAMA

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had few staff on the ground, the myriad of UN agencies and programs had a relatively heavy footprint, creating parallel service delivery mechanisms.\textsuperscript{67}

The light footprint approach is arguably more than simply the recognition of the difficulties pertaining to the social and political reality of Afghanistan. Actually, the ‘neo-trusteeship’ approach has all but been buried by Lakhdar Brahimi in his report on UN peace operations, which directly questions whether the ‘United Nations should be in this business at all.’\textsuperscript{68} For David Malone, ‘Brahimi’s approach is designed in reaction to many things he did not like in East Timor and Kosovo, mainly the idea of the UN governing, rather than assisting local leaderships in governing.’\textsuperscript{69}

The light footprint approach has influenced international intervention in different sectors. For instance, the post-conflict justice system has been shaped according to a different perspective than in Timor-Leste: it paid due attention to the legal and judicial systems previously in place, leaving the restoration of the sector to be in charge of the Afghan government, while international actors performed a limited coordination role.\textsuperscript{70} As noted by the UN Secretary General, ‘although the international community has, at times, imposed external transitional justice solutions, a more open and consultative trend is emerging, visible in places such as Sierra Leone and Afghanistan.’ Referring to the limits of externally-led approaches, the Secretary General continues: ‘although the lessons of past transitional justice efforts help inform the design of future ones, the past can only serve as a guideline. Pre-packaged solutions are ill-advised. Instead, experiences from other places should simply be used as a starting point for local debates and decisions.’\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{15}Lemay-Hébert - \textit{The Unfulfilled Potential of the Light Footprint Approach for Peace Missions}
Of course, the light footprint approach, similar to the local ownership paradigm, is no silver bullet. It can create its own problems, and is a concept prone to manipulation, like any other concept of political science. The light foot approach can also raise the issue of having to deal with ‘reluctant’ leaders who are not fully committed to the reconstruction process. Furthermore and up to a certain extent, the limits of the international intervention in Afghanistan resided in the concept of light footprint. As the International Crisis Group noted, ‘by favouring failed powerbrokers the new set-up failed to make a clean break with Afghanistan’s bloody past. In many ways the conflict today is a continuation of almost three decades of war involving nearly all the same players.’ However, if the reconstruction process in Afghanistan has run into many difficulties so far, it seems fair to admit that ‘those difficulties [at least initially] appear to be attributable, not to the vesting of civilian authority with Afghans themselves, but to two other problems: the lack of a sufficient amount of foreign aid and the political obstacles to extending the international security presence beyond Kabul.’ The lack of sufficient funds is also compounded with the way the aid is distributed: only approximately 25-30 per cent of all aid coming into the country is routed through the government, ‘eroding its legitimacy, planning capacity and authority.’ As Astri Surkhe noted, ‘there are parallel structures on virtually all levels of government. International advisors are ubiquitous. About two-thirds of all aid is channeled through an “external budget” that is administered directly by foreign donors.’ The dynamic towards a heavier footprint as experienced on the ground is a response in part to the ideology of liberal internationalism that frames state-building thinking. In that regard, there is a need to separate the light footprint approach as a concept from the actual experiment in Afghanistan. Besides, however dire the problems related to state-building are in Afghanistan, it

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nevertheless leaves one to wonder what would be the state of Afghanistan if the international community decided to impose an international administration in the country. In light of the political evolution in Timor-Leste and Kosovo, it seems safe to assume that such international presence would have had major legitimacy issues in terms of governance.\textsuperscript{78}

It is true that the light footprint approach should not be seen as a general template for state-building activities, which would turn this alternative model into what it tried to oppose from the outset. However, the light footprint approach has been replicated in subsequent UN missions, ‘which suggests that the basic principles of the “light footprint” have become the basis for a new consensus on peacebuilding.’\textsuperscript{79} Chesterman also admits that ‘one element of the “light footprint” approach that is certainly of general application is the need to justify every post occupied by international staff rather than a local.’\textsuperscript{80} It is arguably the core meaning of the light footprint approach as conceived originally by Brahimi, and the philosophy behind his approach: ‘quand on se rend dans un pays pour l’aider à se reconstruire, il est inacceptable de prétendre savoir tout mieux faire que les ressortissants de ce pays. C’est philosophiquement inacceptable (italics in the text).’\textsuperscript{81} The approach alleviated the worst aspects of the UN presence in a war-torn country. ‘The relative lightness of the international “footprint” has encouraged Afghan ownership of the development process and placed at least some controls on the distortions caused by the arrival of hundreds (rather than thousands) of international staff.’\textsuperscript{82} Salman Ahmed, who served as Special Assistant to Brahimi in Afghanistan, stated:

[R]ather than tout it as a model, [the light footprint approach] should be understood as an attempt to apply the general lessons of the 1990s to a unique and trying set of circumstances. Reconstruction is more likely to succeed when all key local constituencies
have agreed on how to share power, when and how to move toward full democracy, and what role the international community should play in the effort.\textsuperscript{83} 

\textit{Philosophically}, as would say Brahimi, it makes a lot more sense.

\textsuperscript{1} Dr Nicolas Lemay-Hébert is a Marie Curie Experienced Researcher in the Department of International Development, University of Birmingham. Contact info: University of Birmingham, International Development Department, Muirhead Tower, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. Email: n.lemayhebert@bham.ac.uk.


\textsuperscript{5} Richmond (note 3), pp. 561-566.


\textsuperscript{13} Orr (note 10), p. 140.


\textsuperscript{15} Hansen and Wiharta (note 6), p. xv.

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25 Interestingly, an OECD study notes that there is a common perception in the developing world of security sector reform as a “foreign-driven, often political process, informed primarily by Western experiences of how security institutions should be governed.” Of course, in this context, it appears clear that executive operations stand out of the pack as especially “foreign-driven.” As noted by security sector expert Edward Rees, “while executive operations [in the security sector] may be imbued with broad power, these are inherently undermined by the fact that they lack indigenous credibility.” Hence, similarly to governance aspects of peace missions, local ownership has to be identified as pivotal for the success of security sector reform, and such ownership is distinctively difficult to achieve if the international administration monopolises authority in its hands. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *A Survey of Security Sector Reform and Donor Policy: Views From Non-OECD Countries*, 6-7 September 2004, para. 2. Available online at: [http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN018499.pdf](http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN018499.pdf); Edward Rees, ‘Security Sector Reform and Peace Operations: “Improvisation and Confusion” From the Field,’ New York, Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, March 2006, p. 11.

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Lakhdar Brahimi, ‘State-Building in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries,’ Lecture at the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, Vienna, Austria, 26-29 June 2007, p. 3.


“East Timor: Lessons For Nation-Builders,” The New York Times, 7 February 2002. This was a prevailing view inside the UN. For instance, John Ruggie stated that “simply handing off all or parts of the country to the United Nations once the bombing stops, as [US] administration officials have debated in recent days, would be a terrible idea.” John Ruggie, “Why the UN is No Quick Fix,” The Washington Post, 26 October 2001.

Serge Schmemann, ‘Architect to a Nation, Post-Taliban,’ The New York Times, 12 October 2001. He also had contacts with the Talibans in 1992, when he was the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to try to convince them not to expand their ideas across the Arab world, notably in Algeria. ‘Brahimi, le Faiseur de Paix,’ Afrik.com, 7 December 2001.


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The ‘light footprint’ approach as devised by Brahimi is commonly mixed with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s ‘light footprint’ approach, which advocates minimal commitment of ground forces by the United States in Afghanistan. However, the two approaches should not be bundled together, as they are in fact completely different. After all, Rumsfeld’s conception has nothing to do with ‘working ourselves out of a job;’ but has everything to do with the need to keep US troops for the forthcoming Iraqi invasion and focusing on the ‘war against terror’ in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, Brahimi never advocated a minimal security presence in the country. To the contrary, he relentlessly advocated for a security presence deployed over the entire Afghan territory. For a review of NATO and the US’s ‘light footprint’ approach in Afghanistan, and its change to ‘heavy footprint,’ see: Astri Surkhe, ‘A Contradictory Mission? NATO From Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan,’ *International Peacekeeping* 15/2 (2008), pp. 214-236.


71 United Nations (note 17), para. 16.

72 As noted by Tondini, ‘some laws are officially passed by the Afghan parliament but are in fact drafted by “independent” experts hired by foreign government cooperation agencies and assigned to local institutions, while the latter are in turn pressured by international donors to cooperate.’


Even if for Brahimi, one of the problems in Afghanistan is the popular base of the interim administration put together in Bonn under President Karzai was far too narrow. Brahimi advocated including the Talibans, a policy that will be considered seriously only recently, under the leadership of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton: “Around the middle of 2003, I went around begging everybody to do what I called then a Bonn 2 conference. Unfortunately, there again nobody was listening. The Americans had by then invaded Iraq. I am tempted to say that the conference Secretary of State Clinton is now talking about is very close to what would have been the Bonn 2 Conference. Alas, it comes after six very long, wasted years.” Barbara Crossette, “Lakhdar Brahimi: Afghanistan’s Future,” *The Nation*, 9 March 2009; Lakhdar Brahimi, “A New Path for Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, 7 December 2008. It has to be noted that for some commentators, some of the Afghan problems came from Brahimi’s insistence on including the warlords in the Loya Jirga in 2002. See: International Crisis Group, *The Afghan Transitional Administration: Prospects and Perils*, Asia Briefing No. 19, 30 July 2002, 1; Laura Secor, “The Pragmatist,” *The Atlantic*, July-August 2004. For others, the Loya Jirgah experience was a top-down exercise, isolated from the daily realities of Afghans. See: UNDP, *National Human Development Report 2004: Security With A Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities*, 21 February 2005, 126.

Kreilkamp (note 68), p. 662. In the two years following the initial international intervention, Afghanistan received only $67 in annual per capita assistance, while Bosnia and East Timor received $249 and $256 per capita respectively. United States General Accounting Office, ‘Afghanistan Reconstruction: Deteriorating Security and Limited Resources Have Impeded Progress; Improvements in US Strategy Needed,’ Report to Congressional Committees, June 2004, p. 50. Furthermore, only a fraction of the aid promised by the international community has thus far actually been delivered to the country: donors pledged $25 billion in aid from 2002 to 2008, of which only $15 billion has actually been spent. Furthermore, some 40 per cent of that $15 billion has ended up back in consultants’ salaries and company profits. See: Matt Waldman, ‘Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan,’ ACBAR Advocacy Series, March 2008, pp. 6-7.

Aunohita Mojumdar, ‘Afghanistan Adrift in Misplaced Aid,’ *Asia Times Online*, 29 March 2008. As Kai Eide, the former special envoy to Kosovo who worked as SRSG in Afghanistan stated, there is a need for a renewed partnership where ‘the international community says “yes, we will spend our resources better” and the [Afghan] government says “yes we will fight corruption more vigorously.”’ UNAMA, ‘Press Conference With Jean-Marie Guéhenno, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and Kai Eide, Special Representative of the Secretary-General,’ 22 May 2008.


Nevertheless, for tenants of more assertive or robust peacebuilding, like James Dobbin, ‘what’s lacking in Afghanistan is the robust UN mandate given for the mission in Kosovo, which has been a virtual UN protectorate for nearly four years.’ Quoted in Robert McMahon, ‘UN: “Light

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79 Alex Bellamy, Responsibility to Protect (London: Polity, 2009), p. 179. The ‘light footprint’ parlance has been used in the context of Somalia and Iraq recently.

80 Chesterman (note 40), p. 248.

81 ‘When we go into a country to help the reconstruction process, it is unacceptable to pretend knowing to do everything better than the nationals living there. It is philosophically unacceptable.’ Lakhdar Brahimi, ‘L’ONU Entre Nécessité et Minimalisme [The UN Between Necessity and Minimalism],’ Politique Etrangère 2 (2005), p. 307.

82 Chesterman (note 40), p. 43. Thus, it goes against what the UN official Hansjörg Strohmeyer calls ‘the natural reflex of an international organization to dump lots of international people into a situation.’ Samantha Power, Chasing the Flame (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), p. 315.