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Statebuilding and the Origins of the "American Empire": Towards the Problem of Legitimizing Sovereign Inequality in the 21st Century

Alexey N. Bogdanov ⓘD ✉

Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation

✉enlil82@mail.ru

Abstract. In recent decades, "statebuilding" policies in the Greater Middle East have been used by Washington as a tool for forging an "American empire" based on unequal relations between the U.S. and its dependent regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, current research focuses mainly on the instruments for implementing these policies and ensuring the acceptance of new political and economic institutions by the local population. Unlike the established approaches, the author examines Washington's statebuilding efforts as a specific practice of legitimacy aimed at entrenching sovereign inequality and institutionalizing the US political control over "client-regimes." The study draws on the theoretical legacy of the English school, which views "legitimacy" as a phenomenon inextricably linked with "international society," comprising a group of states bound by common goals, institutions, and values. The legitimation strategies adopted by members of this society involve the performance of various international roles through which states acquire recognized statuses, rights and obligations. Focusing on the US roles such as "imperial power" and "patron," the author concludes that Washington's statebuilding efforts were aimed at linking the US interventionism in Afghanistan and Iraq with the collective goals of international society, and thus served to legitimize inequitable relations with "client-states" under the formal legal equality of members of international society. Therefore, the application of the proposed approach helps to shed light on the underexplored aspects of the legitimizing instruments of the US dominance and the means of institutionalizing sovereign inequality inherent in the "American empire" in the 21st century.

Key words: United States, statebuilding, empire, legitimacy, English school

Государственное строительство и истоки «американской империи»: к проблеме легитимации суверенного неравенства в XXI веке

А.Н. Богданов ⬇️ ✉

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация
✉enlil82@mail.ru

Аннотация. На протяжении последних двух десятилетий политика государственного строительства на Большом Ближнем Востоке использовалась Вашингтоном в качестве инструмента построения «американской империи», опирающейся на неравноправные отношения между США и зависимыми от них режимами в Афганистане и Ираке. При этом современные исследования в основном фокусируются на инструментах реализации этой политики, обеспечивающих принятие местным населением новых политических и экономических институтов. Изучаются усилия Вашингтона в сфере государственного строительства как специфическая практика легитимности, нацеленная на закрепление суверенного неравенства и институционализации политического контроля США над «режимами-клиентами». Исследование опирается на теоретическое наследие Английской школы, сторонники которой рассматривают «легитимность» в неразрывной связи с «международным обществом» как группой государств, объединенных общими целями, институтами и ценностями. Используемые членами этого общества стратегии легитимации предполагают исполнение различных международных ролей, посредством которых государства обретают признанные статусы, права и обязанности. Фокусируясь на таких ролях США, как «имперская держава» и «патрон», автор приходит к выводу, что усилия Вашингтона в сфере государственного строительства были направлены на увязывание американских интервенций в Афганистане и Ираке с коллективными целями международного общества и поэтому играли важную роль в процессе легитимации неравноправных отношений с «государствами-клиентами» в условиях формального юридического равенства членов международного общества. Таким образом, применение предложенного подхода помогает пролить свет на малоизученные аспекты механизмов воспроизводства доминирования США и институционализации суверенного неравенства, присущего «американской империи» в XXI в.

Ключевые слова: США, государственное строительство, империя, легитимность, Английская школа

Introduction

According to widespread opinion, the United States' ultimate withdrawal from Afghanistan witnesses Washington's intention to revise its extensive international commitments (Tsvetkov, 2021; Samuilov, 2022), assumed after 9/11 terrorist attacks. At the same time, scholars tend to examine J. Biden's decision in the context of the growing confrontation between the U.S. and the "rising powers" (China and Russia), downplaying the fact that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan was part of the strategy aimed at building the so-

called "American empire" since the beginning of the "global war on terror." As part of this ambitious project, the United States sought to provide comprehensive support for political reforms in the countries of the Greater Middle East[1] in order to end tyranny and facilitate regional stability and prosperity.[2] These efforts

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[1] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism // White House. September 2006. P. 11. URL: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/ (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[2] Democracy Promotion: Cornerstone of U.S. Foreign Policy? // CRS Report for Congress. December 26, 2007. P. 1. URL: https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/

were intended to help to create a "balance of power that favors freedom"[3] and ensure the triumph of the "civilized community" over the forces of chaos and destruction that had engulfed a historically turbulent and resistant region, which resisted outside interference. The main priority of the United States was the radical transformation of Afghanistan's and Iraq's social systems through statebuilding policies, which presupposed the domestic rearrangement of states exposed to military interventions and the transformation of "old adversaries into new and vital partners."[4]

Thus, identifying the role of statebuilding as a tool for legitimizing inequitable relations between the U.S. and its "clients" in the Greater Middle East seems important for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which sovereign inequality is reproduced as a pillar of the international order that suits the US interests. To this end, the author draws on the theoretical legacy of the English school, whose proponents consider "legitimacy" as a phenomenon inherent to "international society," conceived as a group states bound together by common rules and institutions, as well as by regular interaction (Bull, 1995, p. 202). According to this approach, international society represents "a purposeful organization through which its members pursue collective goals and enshrine shared values" (Morris, 2005, p. 265), ultimately leading to the formation of sustainable patterns of interactions that maintain international order. For this reason, legitimizing power relations between states implies linking their actions to the social structure of international society, assigning its

members differentiated statuses (e.g., "great" and "middle" powers, "patron" and "client", etc.) and setting parameters of acceptable behavior.

This creates incentives for members of international society to engage in "endless legitimation strategies so as to present certain types of activities or actors as legitimate" (Clark, 2005, p. 2). These strategies imply the performance of various "roles," the core of which are "institutionalized practices of special rights and duties" (Clark, 2011, p. 4), associated with the state's position within the international society (e.g., "great power", "hegemon", "security guarantor", etc.). The successful performance of these roles allows states to entrench their privileged status and authority within the existing system of power relations. From this viewpoint, "statebuilding" can be seen as a specific role practice, linking interventionist policies and restrictions of the client-regimes' sovereignty with the collective goals of the international society (ensuring regional stability, solving the problem of "failed states", etc.).

The successful performance of the "state-builder" role helps to reconcile the contradiction between the obvious inequity of the "patron — client" relationship and the social structure of international society, which is constituted by principles of sovereignty and formal legal equality of its members. Therefore, the application of the approach summarized above will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of the so-called "American empire" by focusing on statebuilding as a practice of legitimacy, ensuring the reproduction of sovereign inequality between Washington and its "clients" in the world periphery.

"Imperial" Legitimacy and the Problem of "Failed States" after the Cold War

Although empires historically rested on the overwhelming material superiority of the "metropole" over the "periphery," the

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20071226_RL34296_39232d9d9bfdd071ad684649d3b6535503cd2f8f.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[3] Rice C. A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom // Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics. October 1, 2002. URL: https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/a-balance-of-power-that-favors-freedom-oct-1-2002/ (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[4] National Strategy for Combating Terrorism // White House. September 2006. P. 23. URL: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/ (accessed: 23.03.2022).

persistence of imperial rule to a great extent depended to a large extent on the persuasiveness of the ideological justifications of the policies for colonization and territorial conquest. Thus, the legitimation of the inequality inherent in empires was ensured through the promotion of institutional practices of the "core" (Motyl, 1999, p. 133) and the cultivation of peculiar images of empire (Kupchan, 1994, p. 122), which provided plausible explanations of the "metropole's" supremacy over the "periphery."

Typically, these images constituted "empire" as the only possible form of organizing social space (Kaspe, 2007, p. 276), whose spread across the world leads to the triumph of the most progressive form of rule, bringing order and civilization to less developed peoples. For this reason, the implementation of the imperial project implied the promotion of a specific legal condition that embodied supreme law and justice and presupposed the establishment of a unified law, that rejected all differences in rights and traditions (Kohn, 1966, p. 120) in order to rationalize, harmonize, and assimilate the legal systems of the peripheral actors.

In this way, the imperial powers sought to unify the subjects of the external world, conceiving them as a "chaotic mass… which desperately needs ordering" (Isayev, 2007, p. 38). After all, these efforts were aimed at ensuring the unity and homogeneity of the world, as well as the elimination of differences and contradictions that threatened stability of imperial rule. These considerations influenced the imperial states' inclination to project their identities towards the heterogeneous "periphery" in order to socialize it to the values of the "core" (Nexon & Wright, 2007, p. 254), to justify the exclusive prerogatives of the dominant polity, and thus to enshrine sovereign inequality (Wendt & Friedheim, 1995, p. 700).

Moreover, legitimizing imperial dominance implies the provision of socially demanded goods that are "available and profitable for at least some (elite) groups in peripheral zones of empire" (Saull, 2008, p. 312). Such strategies of establishing "imperial" control presuppose following the practices which imply that the dominant powers fulfil some special duties by satisfying basic social needs, in order to link their actions to societal expectations existing at the level of the "core — periphery" structure. Thus, the most important aspects of the "imperial" role are usually the establishment of common law, the prevention of turning international competition into military confrontation, the provision of protection against external aggression (Munkler, 2005, p. 153), as well as the integration of the empire's political space and the dissemination of the achievements of progress (Batalov, 2005, p. 337). If an imperial power is successful in this role, its privileged position and expansionist policies are more likely to be seen as legitimate, in line with existing understandings of the collective good.

With regard to contemporary conditions, it is worth noting that the re-emergence of imperial traits in the political organization of the post-bipolar international system is the result of a number of factors. The most important are the deepening of socio-cultural differences and the growing number of intra-state conflicts, leading to clashes between central governments and separatist groups. According to some observers, this creates the conditions for a fundamental crisis of statehood, constitutional and legal norms, and a general erosion of societies on the verge of collapse (Lapkin, 2018, p. 39). At the same time, the deepening institutional crisis of the nation-state determines the need to develop instruments of international control over "failed states" that could become sponsors of terrorism or seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The efficiency of this control depends on the ability of international administrations to ensure security and justice for the population, to shape sustainable economic structures, to organize humanitarian aid and to create an

institutional basis for democratic legitimacy (Bonacker & Brodocz, 2017, p. 403).

After the end of the Cold War, achieving these goals implied coordinating the actions of the international community by the U.S. as the only superpower willing to assume the role of "leader" and "patron," facilitating the emergence of more efficient forms of governance in the "states of concern." In doing so, the United States could hope to enhance its special responsibility to resist growing chaos in the world's periphery and to ensure the triumph of "order," "civilization" and "progress" by ensuring the transformation of the domestic systems of these states.

At the same time, Washington sought to achieve such collective goals as the non-proliferation of WMD and the neutralization of the threat of transnational terrorism, resulting in a "historically unprecedented situation in which polities with very limited material capabilities can threaten the security of much more powerful states" (Krasner, 2004, p. 86). Therefore, the "imperial" role of the United States, which entails the establishment of order and progressive rule in those states that are "unable or unwilling to govern themselves according to the new standards of civilization" (Colas, 2007, p. 159), became particularly important in terms of achieving the collective goals of international society. If the United States were successful in fulfilling this role through the implementation of statebuilding practices in the world's periphery, it could expect to strengthen the legitimacy of its privileged position by institutionalizing its special rights as "state-builder" and "patron."

Statebuilding as a Strategy of Legitimizing the "American Empire"

Along with institutional reforms, statebuilding policies imply the legitimization of actions aimed at profoundly transforming the key social and political structures of the countries exposed to foreign intervention and occupation (Paragi, 2016). Thus, official justifications for the US statebuilding efforts emphasize that "inability of many states to police themselves effectively or to work with their neighbors to ensure regional security represents a challenge to the international system."[5]

This argument stresses that various subnational groups undermine the stability of key states and threaten the regions vital to the United States. For this reason, Washington should solve the problem of "dysfunctional states," representing the "locus of terrorism, drug-trafficking, development of WMD" and "threatening order and stability across the world" (Rao, 2004, p. 146).

This logic also implies that the United States should take responsibility for establishing stable forms of governance in the world's periphery, especially in cases where it is a matter of restoring state institutions after multilateral intervention. Thus, since the mid-2000s, the so-called "operations on ensuring stability" have acquired the status of Washington's primary military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These missions formed the core of the statebuilding policies, which included forcibly stabilizing the situation in the occupied countries, restoring the functioning of governmental institutions, as well as exporting a new value system in the country, which proved to be too weak to get and retain an independent status (Rykhtik, 2003, p. 91; Samuilov, 2010, p. 21). These efforts should lead to the transformation of "failed states" into relatively stable societies, based on sustainable institutional foundations and with peaceful relations with their neighbors.

In a narrower sense, statebuilding policies involved developing the capacity of "failed states" to control society, as well as defining the way, in which state-society relationship should

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[5] National Defense Strategy // National Security Strategy Archive. June 2008. P. 2. URL: https://nssarchive.us/national-defense-strategy/national-defense-strategy-2008/ (accessed: 23.03.2022).

be organized. Solving these tasks implied assuming by the United States responsibility to ensure "good governance" and to protect human rights (Barnett, 2006, p. 91). In practice, these responsibilities were embodied in the US efforts to participate to in the creation of "new trusteeships," combining structures of international administration and domestic governance, and presupposed institutionalization of external control over internal instances and key economic functions of the "failed states" (Fearon & Laitin, 2004, p. 7). The implementation of these organizational form has led to the emergence of de-facto protectorates (Bosnia and Kosovo in 1990s and 2000s, Afghanistan and Iraq in 2000s and 2010s), that were supposed to be transformed into modern states based on the fundamental principles of the rule of law, market economy, and democracy (Barnett, 2006, p. 88). At the same time, the United States' ability to perform the role of "patron," allocating resources and setting the rules, underlying hierarchies of control over sovereign domains of the "failed states," became the key factor in maintaining order and ensuring security. This circumstance also determined the centrality of statebuilding practices that shaped "patron — client" relationships and perpetuated sovereign inequality.

Afghanistan

After the occupation of Afghanistan in October, 2001, the United States has assumed the "state-builder" role by supervising democratic reforms, maintaining security and legal order within the country as necessary preconditions of creating sustainable political institutions. In addition, Washington concentrated the functions of distributing vital resources to facilitate the strengthening of the local government's ability to control the country's territory. Fulfilling this role also meant advancing democratization by creating a representative regime, conducting counter-terrorism operation against the Taliban[6] and Al Qaeda,[7] as well as providing financial resources to the Afghan government (Dobbins et. al., 2003, pp. 132—133). Washington's aid in educating, equipping, and consulting the Afghan National Security Forces, as well as strengthening the effectiveness of Afghanistan's security institutions[8] was also critical. The central role was assigned to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), whose participants were under the exclusive jurisdiction of their national governments and enjoyed immunity from arrest or detention by the Afghan authorities.[9]

Subsequently, the transfer of ISAF to NATO control in 2003 marked an important phase in the evolution of the Alliance, which was expected to expand its area of responsibility beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. At the same time, NATO had to play the institutionalized role of a "crisis manager" (Burlinova, 2010, p. 78), assuming responsibility for peacekeeping and restoring internal order in Afghanistan. In particular, the North Atlantic Alliance supported the training of the Afghan military and police, provided financial assistance to the national army of Afghanistan, and participated in the implementation of training programs in military and civilian areas (Boguslavskaya, 2019, p. 45).

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[6] Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

[7] Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

[8] Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan // U.S. Department of State. May 2, 2012. P. 3—4. URL: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/12-704-Afghanistan-Relations.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[9] Military Technical Agreement between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Interim Administration of Afghanistan ('Interim Administration') // Berlin Information-center for Transatlantic Security. 2002. P. 1. URL: https://www.bits.de/public/documents/US_Terrorist_Attacks/MTA-AFGHFinal.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

The effectiveness of these efforts was to a great extent determined by the two sides' consent with the goals of US military presence in Afghanistan — defeating Al Qaeda and its supporters and ensuring regional peace, stability and prosperity. To achieve these ends, the United States declared the need to restore "historical role" of Afghanistan as a bridge connecting Central and South Asia with the Middle East. This, in turn, presupposed solving such tasks such as creating regional trade and transit initiatives, strengthening trans-border coordination between Afghanistan and neighboring states, implementing infrastructure projects, and attracting international investments to facilitate Afghanistan's rapid integration into the region.[10] No less importantly, the Declaration on Partnership between the United States and Afghanistan envisaged assigning the latter with status of "key partner beyond NATO" to ensure a long-term basis for cooperation in the area of defense and mutual security.[11] This cooperation implied the Alliance's assistance in developing and reforming security ministries and other national institutions, strengthening the professionalism of Afghan security forces, and providing access to resources of military and civil expertise of NATO.[12]

At the same time, the United States assumed greater costs associated with the intervention, providing the dominant military capability to fight Taliban and taking part in the fiercest clashes. It is also worth noting that American dominance during the occupation and post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan was manifested in Washington's relations with junior allies within NATO. As O. Schmitt observes, this dominance was not only conditioned by the United States' prevailing contribution to the military action, but was also the product of a number of practices on tactical (ISAF) and strategic (NATO command) levels. Thus, the US officers clearly dominated the chain of command, whereas the European allies essentially had no influence on the adoption of the operational plan, recognizing Washington's decisive contribution for the ultimate success of the enterprise. In particular, the dominance of the United States in adopting the plans of operations helped to justify its claims for the competence of its actions, which in turn allowed Washington to position itself as a leader of the intervention (Schmitt, 2017, p. 508). This also helped the United States to perform the role of "patron," which presupposes that it retains full control over Afghanistan as a "client-state" and allows it to enhance the legitimacy of the US influence over the local regime, NATO-allies and partners in the "coalition of the willing" alike. The "state-builder" role implied utilizing the United States' leading position in the NATO-led international coalition to facilitate the establishment of domestic order and security in Afghanistan and to consolidate efficient administrative structures in the country. Therefore, both material (financial resources, military might) and positional (leadership within NATO, position of "patron" in relations with local regime) resources were involved in structuring inequitable relations between Washington and Kabul. As a result, power asymmetry and sovereign inequality were enshrined as properties of the "imperial" structure of domination through which the United States sought to control internal policies and external ties of Afghanistan.

Iraq

After launching the military invasion of Iraq in March, 2003, the United States sought to replace dictatorship of Saddam Hussein with a

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[10] Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan // U.S. Department of State. May 2, 2012. P. 5. URL: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/12-704-Afghanistan-Relations.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[11] Ibid. P. 2—3.

[12] Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership // NATO. September 6, 2006. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_50575.htm (accessed: 23.03.2022).

stable and democratic regime capable of facilitating liberal reforms and enhancing security in the Middle East. According to official rhetoric, Washington's top priorities included such goals as building "stable, plural, and efficient national institutions," creating Iraqi security forces and strengthening the capacity of local institutions to "provide services, promote the rule of law, and nurture civil society," as well as "reforming the Iraqi economy according to market principles."[13]

After the overthrow of the local regime, American troops undertook to restore peace and legal order, while Washington's allies, which joined the "coalition of the willing" provided military support. It is important to note that, as in the case of the creation of ISAF in Afghanistan, the United States' *Enduring Freedom* operation in Iraq implied the use of military force within the limits, which could allow retaining perceived legitimacy of the United States' actions on the part of local actors (von Billerbeck & Gippert, 2017, p. 281).

The Interim Coalition Government (ICG) also took responsibility for reconstruction, the reorganization of the civil service and the establishment of an interim administration. This allowed the United States to deploy a wide range of material and organizational resources in the process of playing the role of "state-builder" by providing vital goods to the local population, strengthening the local government's capacity to control the country, and ensuring legitimacy of "patron — client" relationship between Washington and Baghdad. For example, the US-Iraqi "Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship" articulates such as protecting Iraq's democratic system from internal and external threats, facilitating national reconciliation, and transitioning to a market economy. No less importantly, the Declaration envisages "enhancing Iraq's position in regional and international institutions" so it "could play positive and constructive role in the region and the world," as well as facilitating "Iraq's further integration in regional and international financial and economic organizations."[14]

At the same time, the efforts on stabilizing and recovering Iraq were aimed at convincing the international community that the United States was successfully fulfilling its "imperial" role by making a decisive contribution to such collective goals such as fighting international terrorism and counterproliferation of WMD[15] through the democratization of the Middle East, which "for too long suffered from a freedom deficit."[16] Consistent with official rhetoric, the United States' assumption of this role was conditioned by its unprecedented position in the world, which was associated with special opportunities, obligations and responsibilities.[17] No less importantly, these prerogatives of "imperial power" justified Washington's interventionist policies and helped enshrine the sovereign inequality intrinsic to the "patron — client" relations. Thus, during the post-war reconstruction of Iraq, the United States sought to assume the burden of statebuilding, taking the form of "militarized interventions by a foreign state or coalition with the explicit goal

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[13] National Security Strategy of the United States of America // Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense. March 2006. P. 13. URL: https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2006.pdf?ver=Hfo1-Y5B6CMl8yHpX4x6IA%3d%3d (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[14] Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship Between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America // The White House. November 26, 2007. URL: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071126-11.html (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[15] National Security Strategy of the United States of America // Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense. March 2006. P. 19—22. URL: https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2006.pdf?ver=Hfo1-Y5B6CMl8yHpX4x6IA%3d%3d (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[16] Ibid. P. 38.

[17] National Security Strategy of the United States // U.S. Department of State. September 2002. P. 1. URL: https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

of creating a new regime" (Lake, 2010, p. 259), and its subsequent transformation into semi-sovereign protectorate. In particular, this implied the creation of such structures as Joint Coordination Committees (including Supreme Coordination Committee), ensuring monitoring the parties' compliance with their commitments, the coordination of the activities of government agencies and the resolution of disputes.[18] An important role was also assigned to Joint Military Operations Coordination Committees, which were to assist Iraq "in its efforts to maintain security and stability… including cooperation in the conduct of operations against Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups… and remnants of the former regime."[19]

It should be noted, however, that although the declared goal of statebuilding policies in Afghanistan and Iraq remained unchanged (the creation of stable, democratic, and peaceful governments), the ways of legitimizing restrictions, imposed by the United States on the "client-states'" sovereignty, have visibly evolved. For example, until the mid-2000s, the U.S. emphasized that its actions were aimed at building legitimate states, which implied an understanding of "legitimacy" as a phenomenon derived from democratic political institutions and based on the premise that "what made a state legitimate were broad-based elections and a degree of popular representation in and control over the state" (Lake, 2010, p. 265).

However, in the second half of the 2000s, against the backdrop of the apparent ineffectiveness of the US efforts to build democratic states in Afghanistan and Iraq, Washington's role as a "state-builder" was reframed. In particular, since 2007, the United States has begun to elaborate a new statebuilding strategy, based on an understanding of "legitimacy" as a phenomenon, stemming from the dominant powers' desire to gain the support and recognition of "clients" by providing vital public goods such as security and the maintenance of the legal order.

This, in turn, meant a shift in focus towards protecting the local population and providing essential goods to ensure their support (Lake, 2013, p. 108). In this way, the U.S. sought to ensure the efficiency of statebuilding, which allowed the hope of legitimizing Washington's control over the sovereign territories of Iraq and Afghanistan by playing the role of "patron," supplying the necessary resources, offering protection and facilitating the gradual integration of its "clients" into the "civilized community."

In particular, as D. Lake points out, although this strategy was aimed at democratization and economic reforms, its fundamental goal was to satisfy basic needs of the population of the "failed states," which allowed expect successful implementation of the social contract theory of creating government as the most efficient way of establishing legitimate state (Lake, 2010, p. 273). The practical implementation of this strategy implied that the United States would play the role of the "state-builder" in order to ensure the reproduction of inequitable structure of the "American empire" through institutionalizing the regular interference of the "patron" into sovereign affairs of the "clients." The status of "client" served as the basis for normal and non-exclusive relations between the U.S. and "failed states," suggesting that "no matter how unsavory a client regime may be, the U.S. must be willing to make significant efforts to maintain it" (Sylvan & Majeski, 2009, pp. 238—239). This helps to explain Washington's proclivity to use such means as military interventions, practices of informal control, or the provision of material aid to the

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[18] Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and Cooperation between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq // U.S. Department of State. November 17, 2008. P. 6—7. URL: https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/122076.pdf (accessed: 23.03.2022).

[19] Agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq on the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of the Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq // Peace Agreements Database. November 17, 2008. P. 4. URL: https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/1577 (accessed: 23.03.2022).

"clients" with reference to specific system of role differentiation, assigning the United States position of "patron" and shaping appropriate societal expectations. The performance of the relevant roles by "patron" and its "clients" had to facilitate enshrining sovereign inequality as a pattern of international order in the Greater Middle East region.

Conclusion

Following the declaration of the global "war on terror" in response to 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States used statebuilding not only as a tool for transforming the "states of concern," but also as a legitimation strategy aimed at maintaining sovereign inequality within the so-called "American empire." This asymmetrical and inequitable political arrangement was based on the overwhelming material superiority of the United States and its privileged position of "patron" in relations with such "client-states" such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Enormous power disparity and the unequal distribution of rights and duties helped to maintain sovereign inequality that underpinned the political hierarchies maintained by Washington.

These hierarchies were designed to enhance US control over the sovereignty of its "clients" and to institutionalize the patterns of intervention and subordination as socially acceptable practices that would help solve the problem of "failed states." Thus, the United States tried to link its interventionist policies to the collective goals of international society by assuming special responsibility, institutionalized as the roles of "imperial power", "state-builder", and "patron."

In particular, the U.S. sought to oppose the challenge of "failed states" and "rogue states" (in case of Iraq) through military interventions and subsequent statebuilding, aimed at creating a "client-regime" that would support Washington's efforts to provide international security and regional stability. These actions, accompanied by an emphasis on the "civilizational mission" of the United States and its special responsibility for promoting progress, modernization and democratization in the world's periphery, have largely defined the nature of the imperial role of the United States in the 21st century.

It is worth noting, however, that successful performance of this role is to a great extent complicated by Washington's recent efforts to reorganize its international commitments in order to get more resources necessary to maintain dominant position on the global scale. In particular, this priority implies cutting such burdensome (and inefficient) practices as statebuilding, along with reducing other costs of domination.

As a result, the redistribution of material burdens should facilitate the strengthening of the capacity of the U.S. to meet challenges to its dominant position, as it provides more opportunities to use various incentives and coercive measures. At the same time, cutting international commitments weakens Washington's global role as the link between the US policies and the collective goals of international society. Consequently, the reluctance of the United States to perform the role of "patron," sustaining regional stability by exercising control over the "failed" or "dysfunctional" states, complicates the legitimation of sovereign inequality inherent in the "American empire." For this reason, Washington's retreat from statebuilding as a strategy for legitimizing American dominance creates the risks of crises in the mechanisms that ensure the reproduction of political inequality and hierarchies of authority, which are designed to strengthen the privileged position of the United States within the international system.

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About the author: *Bogdanov Alexey Nikolaevich* — PhD (Political Sciences), Associate Professor, Saint Petersburg State University; ORCID: 0000-0002-9608-0708; e-mail: enlil82@mail.ru