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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Veterans Committee
Tuesday, July 20, 2021 - 6:30 PM
This meeting was conducted via Zoom**

Minutes:

Why Nation-Building Matters: A presentation by the author, Keith Mines.

Keith W. Mines is Director for Latin America at the U.S. Institute of Peace, where he focuses on sustaining the peace in Colombia and finding a solution to the Venezuela crisis. He is a former Special Forces Officer and Foreign Service Officer with service in Central America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South Asia. He has published widely in the *Foreign Service Journal*, *Parameters*, *Orbis*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Denver Post*, and with the Foreign Policy Research Institute and CENSA.

- 1) Keith Mines opened the presentation with a brief recap of his background and experience: humanitarian service in Colombia in the late 1970s and government service in the 90s and 2000s , 82d Airborne & special operations in the military, humanitarian interventions in Somalia and Darfur, post conflict stabilization in Haiti, extended service in Iraq (beginning in 2003), as well as role(s) in Afghanistan. The book also discusses roles he had in the Reagan-era operation in Grenada and El Salvador. Currently, he works at the Institute of Peace in Washington, DC.
- 2) When he began working on his book, 'Why Nation Building Matters,' Keith was initially going to focus on Iraq. However, an advisor suggested he look at US efforts related to nation-building over several theaters of action – in both military and civilian capacities – and see what lessons he could draw about what did work, and what didn't work.
- 3) The book goes into significant substantive detail about his experience in each country – covering both the context, the nature of the intervention and an assessment of how well the intervention worked – citing dimensions of success, and areas of weakness or failure.
- 4) In opening the presentation, Keith challenged some basic misconceptions about nation-building:
 - a) Nation-building doesn't matter – or provide sustainable, longer-term benefits. (It can and does – although the outcome is very specific to the conditions on the ground in each country and region).
 - b) Nation-building never works. (Colombia – after 50 years of conflict, Grenada and its Soviet and Cuban-based infiltration, and the Balkans are counterexamples of clear success, and others such as Somalia and El Salvador are examples of partial success.)
 - c) We can't impose our system on other countries. (On this point, he described our system as flexible and adaptable to the cultural and political realities of other countries).

- d) Nation-building can be done quickly. (Given cultural and political conflicts that built up over decades or centuries, to assume the underlying issues can be addressed, even in a few years is a fallacy. Even 20 years in Afghanistan is not a 'forever war,' when viewed in the context of centuries of conflict.)
- 5) A Doctrine of Nation-Building: What are some basic principles about the conditions that determine success or failure.
- a) Politics: First, the political compact – the understanding among key ethnic and/or political parties – must be right. That is, the parties must buy into it, and have a desire to function as a consolidated political entity - rather than preferring ongoing division as separate political entities.
 - b) For example, in Iraq, there was a need – perhaps through violence - for an adjustment to adequately reflect the essential needs and interests of the Sunnis, the Shiites, and the Kurds after the downfall of Saddam Hussein.
 - c) All peace is local – those conditions to achieve a degree of peace and stability must apply at the local level, as well as the national level.
 - d) A 'good guy' (or group) must hold the 'nationalist card.' Those aiming to take on the leadership role in the country must be widely viewed as acceptable and legitimate.
 - e) The US leadership must combine and balance the use of 'hard' and 'soft' power. (Reagan was cited as adopting this philosophy and approach.) There is a tendency in the current environment among 'chicken-hawks' – those who avoided military service, to become oddly militaristic when they become part of the governing administration.
 - f) Leadership matters. The individual(s) in positions of top leadership in our system and the supported country must recognize and manage the implications of their decisions, their style and the policy outcomes.
 - g) Don't fear the gray areas. Don't become overly focused on or believing in absolute notions of right and wrong conditions or outcomes. The partial, the imperfect and the beginning steps towards better policies, institutions and outcomes are realities to be accepted, coped with and managed, often over extended periods of time.
- 6) His basic models for intervention are two. (Note: While this recap may be somewhat simplistic, the models were described in more detail in the presentation.)
- a) The 'Sheriff Model': Go in, go after the bad guys (if you can identify them), put them in jail or kill them, and then leave – hopefully leaving the region more secure and politically stable.
 - b) The 'Mayor Model': Build sustainable institutions, to address community needs, including security, education, health, streets, water supplies, sanitation and public infrastructure – possibly also private sector entities, like banking and financial services.
- 7) A brief synopsis of some of the case studies Keith discussed:
- a) Colombia – a success story, after 50 years of conflict
 - i) The rebel faction, the FARC, were allowed by the government to control significant territory from the 60's to the 90's- up to 15% of the country.

- ii) There was reasonable alignment of US objectives – to control the drug trade – and the Colombian government – to control territory.
 - iii) Contractors often filled a gap that the US military could not fill- and added considerable value through their work in those (non-military) areas.
- b) Grenada ('83) and Panama ('89) could be described as hostage rescue situations.
- c) El Salvador – a long case of catching up, requiring a military intervention.
 - i) There was an extreme concentration of land and agricultural resources, benefiting the few, and leaving most of the population in extreme poverty.
 - ii) Seeing a bear in very poor health at the national zoo, a child commented 'this country just doesn't work' – a reflection of the views of the population – perhaps too harsh in a period where conditions were improving at least slowly and incrementally.
 - iii) The US analyst, Diana Villers-Negroponte, commented 10 years later – 'perhaps we lost interest too fast'.
- d) Haiti – After 100s of years of brutal dictators, a positive turnaround is likely to occur only slowly.
- e) Somalia – Following the fall of the Siad Barre dictatorship, the clan/tribal nature of the country led to a melt-down of any 'nationalist' sentiment – leaving Somalia as a 'failed state.' Through many ups and downs however, the country recovered a sense of nationhood and is now a low functioning country, but a country.
- f) Darfur – Darfur suffered a genocide – with 100s of thousands killed, up to 2005. Then it became a (relative) success story – with the introduction of EU and UN advisors along with some U.S. retired military advisors and U.S. logistics support that allowed the pacification of the country. Keith served as post conflict stabilization officer in an Embassy outreach facility alongside the African Union peacekeeping force. It was a success we could not trumpet to keep the pressure on the Bashir government in peace talks.
- g) Afghanistan –
 - i) The 9/11 attack by Osama Bin Laden was formulated and launched by Al Qaeda from ungoverned parts of Afghanistan – which were in part protected by the Taliban.
 - ii) Keith served at a time when the local practice of a 'Loya Jirga' was created to resolve the conflicts among different ethnic groups and reset the national vision.
 - iii) In Keith's view, the US and other international partners, notably the UN, were needed to provide coaching, logistics, and inducements for what the Afghans could not do alone. 'They held the equivalent of a national dialogue and selected Hamid Karzai as their president.
 - iv) Limitations of the process: The Taliban was excluded, Pashtuns marginalized, and issues with regard to the containment of previous war lords not addressed.
 - v) Keith came back to Afghanistan 10 years later as Consul General in Mazar e-Sharif, with responsibility for the nine provinces of the north, and found that significant progress had been made. As one example, aid programs to train midwives led to a reduction in maternal

and infant mortality of 50%, and in agriculture, wheat yield had increased by 50% with the introduction of a new wheat seed.

- vi) In Afghanistan, the US did not fail – it just quit. The ratio of forces was 2500 US, and 5000 (EU and other), along with contractors. It was eminently sustainable.
 - vii) The Taliban are advancing outside the major cities – but taking over major cities like Kabul will be considerably more difficult and less certain.
 - viii) With the US and civilian contractors leaving, the Afghan air force will be short on maintenance, and less available to support Afghan military units in the field. This is resulting in the Iraqi field units surrendering to the Taliban in rural areas in the country.
- h) Iraq: ‘The cornered Sunnis of Al Anbar province’
- i) Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, there were major unresolved tensions among the Sunnis (the majority of the population), the Shiites (the controlling minority) and the Kurds (in the north, towards Turkey).
 - ii) The Kurds wanted some degree of independence, but preferred to be a semi-autonomous region, rather than complete independence, within Iraq.
 - iii) Civil affairs – staffed by US Army reservists – were important to institution building in finance, health (e.g. a Pfizer executive) and government administration. They became important mentors and advisors in building local institutional capacity – at relatively modest expense. (This represents the application of the ‘Mayor Model,’ as distinguished from the ‘Sheriff Model.’)
- i) The UN Peacekeeping model also deserves more respect as a mechanism for intervention, whereby the expenditure is divided 25% US, 75% Rest of World, and the forces are provided largely by other countries.

Peter Patch, Chair

David Menegon, Public Member