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Book Title	You, the People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building
Book Author	Chesterman, Simon
Bibliographic Information	Oxford University Press, Inc., Pages : 320, \$35.00, ISBN 0199284008

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Review Title

Reviewer [d'Aspremont,](#)  
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## Short review

You, The People. The United Nations, Transitional Administration and State-Building. By Simon Chesterman. Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 296. \$35.00

Reviewed by Dr. Jean d'Aspremont.

In the aftermath of the international administration of Bosnia, East Timor and Kosovo, the question of transitional administration of territories has swiftly come to attract the attention of scholars. This is not to say that transitional administration of territories is an utter new problem. The international administration of territories under the auspices of the League of Nations and the decolonization had already prefigured many of the problems arising in the context of transitional administration. This renewed interest may rather be ascribed to the soaring and non-linear development of these state-building missions during the few last years. Despite the existence of a flourishing literature on the topic,

the volume written by Dr. Simon Chesterman is much more than an additional contribution to that thriving debate. On top of providing a comprehensive analysis of both past and recent experiences of transitional administration of territories from various vantage points, the book offers a fresh classification of the contemporary state-building mission on the basis of the purpose and trajectory, leaving aside the usual taxonomies based on the amount of power exercised. At the same time, the book singles out the flaws and the successes of a practice which has been driven by improvisation so far. It even ventures to draw some interesting conclusions as for possible future missions of that type.

Dr. Chesterman's book is directed at a large community which stretches well beyond legal scholarship. While the reader will appreciate the hindsight provided by the book which tackles cross-border questions (such as the thorny concept of "ownership"), no doubt that policy-makers, diplomats or scholars in other areas can find some interest in this pragmatic and sometime very down-to-earth outline of contemporary transitional administrations of territories. Indeed, the great value of Dr. Chesterman's work not only stems from the outstanding legal analysis which has been carried out. Arguments are also buttressed by relevant illustrations inferred from the practice – what undoubtedly bespeaks the experience of an author who has gone in the field. We are even inclined to think that policy makers – especially those currently embroiled in the prickly (re)construction of one State or another – might be very well-advised to live up to some of Dr. Chesterman's conclusions.

The author identifies five key issues confronting transitional administration: peace and security, the role of the United Nations as a government, establishing the rule of law, economic reconstruction and exit strategies. This is why the bulk of the argumentation rests on five main chapters, each of them grappling with one of the aforementioned questions. These five chapters are complemented by two introductory chapters profitably tackling the past experiences of transitional administration and the evolution of the UN complex peace operations that paved the way for the modern UN State-building operations. The eighth and last chapter of the book reverts – not always with a rigorous logic though – to the issues and contradictions singled out in the previous chapters and leads the author to hint at the underlying justification for the – somewhat astounding – first part of the volume's title.

Some legal scholars may find that the mandate of the peace operations organized and commanded by the UN and explicitly entrusted under Chapter VII with an authorization to use force should have been more comprehensively examined in Chapter 3 of the book. This would have however been at the expense of clarity in that the analysis would have been clouded by the tangle of fickle mandates which have been bestowed upon each of these missions since ONUSOM II in Somalia. It is greatly to Dr. Chesterman's credit to have focused on the essentials in order to unravel a very compound practice.

The lessons inferred by Dr. Chesterman from the contemporary experiences of transitional administration are sometimes very bold. Some of them could even look "politically incorrect" if taken at their face value. But seen against the backdrop recalled by the author and underpinned by cogent references to the practice, there is undoubtedly a grain of truth in most of them. For instance, one cannot help but agree that the problem of transitional administration is not that they are colonial in character but rather that they are sometimes not colonial enough (page 12). Likewise, the author seems right when he points out that local consent (or "ownership") is not the linchpin of the legitimacy of these missions

which rests, at least at the beginning, on some form of military occupation (pages 152-153 and page 242). This is the reason why he plays down the importance of accountability and expounds that it should not be expected that the actors put at the helm of these missions be held accountable from the start. By the same token, the author highlights that elections should not be the focal point of international involvement – as they have sometimes been – and that the focus should rather be placed on peace and security, sustainable institutions and economic stability (page 234). Some of these illuminating conclusions will probably stir a debate among both policy-makers and scholars. For that reason too, Dr. Chesterman's sterling volume cannot be ignored by anyone interested in transitional administration and state-building.



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