



BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE: A Savage Order

February 5, 2020

We got together a group of experts to review Rachel Kleinfeld's book "A Savage Order," which examines the causes of persistent violence.

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1. Introduction: A Roadmap for Tackling Entrenched Violence

Stephen Tankel

Rerum cognoscere causas. Taken from Virgil's *Georgics* and translated as "to know the causes of things," this is the motto of the London School of Economics. David Keen, who was one of my professors there, used to recount how he had tried to convince university administrators that the motto should be "to know the functions of things." The course I took with him focused on complex emergencies — a term used to describe humanitarian crises that are linked to large-scale violent conflict. Keen's argument was that to focus solely, or even primarily, on the causes of such emergencies missed the ways in which they ultimately served the purposes of the different actors involved in them. A humanitarian crisis linked with large-scale violent conflict was a tragedy for many people, but it also had a functional benefit for some. Only by understanding the functions these crises served could we hope to end them.

I was reminded of Keen's admonition when reading Rachel Kleinfeld's *A Savage Order*, which persuasively argues that focusing on state weakness as the cause of persistent violence overlooks the functions that this violence serves for those in power. Specifically, she asserts that "Privilege Violence" is a major source of the problem. The word privilege comes from the Latin *privus*, or "private," and *legis*, or "law." Kleinfeld illustrates how leaders create private law to evade justice, politicizing security agencies and institutions in the process so that they answer to political leaders, not any higher legal authority. The result is a "particularly pernicious form of state power in which political and economic leaders on both the

Left and the Right consciously enable violent groups to proliferate in order to protect their perks and maintain control.”¹ Populations are forced to fend for themselves in a country where leaders rely on Privilege Violence to retain power under a process of “decivilization,” wherein the use of violence is normalized. This creates a feedback loop that can be almost impossible to break out of, and which current international efforts are poorly equipped to address.

So how can countries break the cycle? Kleinfeld, who formulated her diagnosis of the problem based on research in Colombia, Georgia, Ghana, India, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Tajikistan, and the United States, suggests several necessary elements.

First, political leaders must have both the courage and canniness to promote government accountability. Moreover, it is important to foster leadership among a broad group of elites, as opposed to vesting power too narrowly. Second, “dirty deals” are typically required. Cutting deals with violent actors to give them amnesty and, often, a piece of the pie as part of a power-sharing agreement can buy time to enact reforms. Third, the middle class must step up and demand not only a reduction in violence, but also better governance and adherence to the rule of law. Such reforms are always difficult, but Kleinfeld argues they are nearly impossible in the absence of bottom-up demands for accountability.

These are not the sum total of Kleinfeld’s recommendations, and she submits they are not guaranteed to succeed. But, as with her diagnosis of the problem, these potential solutions should force us to rethink the challenges and solutions associated with states beset by violence.

¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 24–25.

Conceptions of Violence and “Dirty Deals”

For this roundtable, we have pulled together a diverse group of contributors to wrestle with Kleinfeld’s work. All of them agree, as do I, that it is a tour de force of scholarship and advocacy. Readers may argue over elements of the methodology, findings, and some of the recommendations. But this is a book that demands to be read. It will stimulate new thinking about a set of issues that cries out for innovation, as is evident from the different views of our contributors to this roundtable.

All of the reviewers agree that developing the concept of Privilege Violence and its impact on so-called weak or fragile states is one of the path-breaking aspects of *A Savage Order*. Most of the reviewers focus on the implications of such violence for interventions by the United States, the international community, and multilateral institutions. Ike Wilson takes a different approach, zeroing in on the consequences of Kleinfeld’s conception of violence. He sounds a warning when it comes to moving away from the traditional boundaries that have long distinguished war and peace and guided our conception of the different types of conflict that exist.

Although Wilson acknowledges that Kleinfeld makes a very convincing argument for “thinking beyond” boundaries to recognize violence as the fundamental scourge and roadblock to democracy and order, he fears that the explanatory power of this approach also threatens to erode further the limiting norms and principles that govern the use of force. He worries specifically about the erosion of institutional, territorial, legalistic, and normative boundaries that have occurred at a particularly accelerated rate since the Cold War ended and what this augurs for how states respond to the types of violence Kleinfeld describes. Wilson is

especially concerned about the implications with regard to the concept of “responsibility to protect,” but he also makes the case that embracing the erosion of boundaries as an explanation for the type of violence she describes may further undermine the norms that restrict such violence. This thought-provoking critique is broader than just a critique of Kleinfeld, in that it reflects on how our societal conceptions of war and violence inform responses to them.

The other reviewers — Laura E. Bailey, Susanna Campbell, and Dan Mahanty — each engage in one way or another with Kleinfeld’s argument that “dirty deals” are necessary. Bailey highlights the risk that emphasizing the need for such deals and the leaders who make them will lead away from a focus on promoting just institutions. Campbell and Mahanty also recognize the dangers of “dirty deals,” but note that Kleinfeld does as well. It is true that Kleinfeld contends such deals may be necessary to pause the fighting, but she is also clear that, on their own, they might reinforce Privilege Violence. Based on their own work and research, Campbell and Mahanty endorse Kleinfeld’s emphasis on the need for bottom-up accountability to challenge the interests and privilege of the government. They also caution that typical Western interventions often fail to reflect this nuance, and therefore are unlikely to support the type of state-society transformation Kleinfeld calls for in her book.

Campbell observes that international interveners — often anxious to show results to their own constituencies and hemmed in by bureaucratic strictures — are prone to reinforcing the power of predatory leaders. She also notes that, at a fundamental level, the guiding assumption when it comes to civil wars is that a peace agreement among former warring parties will address the causes of the war and create the basis for a sustainable peace. Mahanty is even more critical,

especially of the United States, which he believes exacerbates the cycle of Privilege Violence and decivilization by providing security assistance to the very elites who are responsible for perpetuating this cycle. He asserts that a structural rethink is in order regarding the reasons for providing assistance to states where these phenomena occur and the ways in which this assistance is provided. Without such a rethink, Mahanty fears that Kleinfeld's deeply researched analysis and recommendations will not gain greater salience.

Based on her 10 years studying the Burundi Leadership Training Program, which was implemented during Burundi's civil war, Campbell agrees with Kleinfeld that well-targeted leadership interventions may help foster courageous and connected leaders, who are necessary for successful war-to-peace transitions. She also concurs with Kleinfeld that international actors must make themselves accountable to national stakeholders that represent diverse constituencies. Campbell notes, however, that shifting the locus of accountability requires that international actors be held accountable for delivering what conflict-affected populations need, even if it clashes with what their bosses in Washington, New York, Brussels, or Beijing want. This is a tall order, and it is unclear whether the actors in question are up to the task. Bailey sounds a similar note of caution, suggesting that, "there's some compelling evidence from the state-conflict-and-war community that even in the well-financed multilateral network that is focused on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, we are overestimating our ability to genuinely deliver the results we want to see."

Conclusion

Kleinfeld ends her book with a call to arms. She makes no secret of the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead, but also provides a roadmap for how to tackle them. It is unclear if outside actors — states, multilateral institutions, or civil society — are up to the task. By forcing these actors to reckon with the functions of Privilege Violence and the ways in which outside intervention may fuel the fire, Kleinfeld has done a valuable service. She has robbed us of our illusions. She has also forced those of us living in the United States to confront the fact that, as Mahanty notes, this is not just a problem for weak states in need of intervention. America's own security institutions may be more fragile than many Americans think. Indeed, Kleinfeld spends a good portion of her book recounting America's own bloody history. How we apply the hard lessons learned is up to us.

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2. Don't Look Away:

The Complex Story of Privilege Violence

Laura E. Bailey

Despite our origin story in the chaotic aftermath of World War II, multilateral development banks such as the one where I worked for two decades have largely ignored the toll of interpersonal violence, focusing instead on inter- and intra-state conflict. It was only in the 1990s that international financial institutions began to slowly conduct the experimentation and research that could underpin policy — and eventually investments — focused on economic and social opportunities in order to redress the damage of inter- and intra-state wars. Since then, we have found a useful place for ourselves in the messy critical work of addressing the causes and consequences of structured conflict. But we still are ill-equipped to address the lives and livelihoods damaged by violent paramilitaries, gangs, state actors, organized crime, and ordinary people. We have created high profile metrics to monitor the focus of our investments — poverty and inequality,² and human

² In 2013, the World Bank Group (WBG) adopted two new goals to guide its work: ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. More specifically, the WBG Twin Goals are “to reduce extreme poverty in the world to less than 3 percent by 2030, and to foster income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population in each country.” These are goals the WBG has for the world, not goals for the WBG investments in each country to achieve. A 2015 review assesses these metrics and, not surprisingly, concludes with a call for “an improved data infrastructure” to “ensure that progress towards these goals can be measured, and policies to help achieve them can be identified and prioritized.” See, “A Measured Approach to Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity : Concepts, Data, and the Twin Goals,” World Bank Group, 2015, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20384>.

capital³ — and have comforted ourselves that those metrics are a viable, albeit indirect, way to monitor the trajectory of global peace. Surely these are the numbers that matter?

Rachel Kleinfeld, however, won't allow us this delusion. In her first 43 succinct and chilling pages, she draws the boundaries of the problem (83 percent of all violent deaths, albeit with data subject to undercounting, occur outside of conflict zones); diagrams the politically inconvenient reality of state security killings and state killing of civilians alongside homicide, terrorism, and war; and wrenches away the camouflage of simplified explanations derived from religion, culture, or ethnicity. And then, she moves in for the kill: Violent crime doesn't correlate closely with poverty or economic shocks, or with weak state capacity, the system of governance, or state ideology. Using data from my own institution, Kleinfeld maps the ability of countries to provide most of their population with public services and achieve high ratings in executing World Bank-financed projects, and then graphs the incidence of murdered journalists and violence against minority groups.⁴ Conventional wisdom in the operational development community about poverty and weak state capacity is wrong: "Privilege Violence," where violent powerful

³ The Human Capital Index quantifies the contribution of health and education to the productivity of the next generation of workers, and underpins the World Bank's desire to "help countries tackle the worst barriers to human capital development, using a 'whole of government' approach," barely by assessing "how much income they are foregoing because of human capital gaps, and how much faster they can turn these losses into gains." Embedded in one of the subordinate measures in the Index (adult survival rate), but not directly measured, are the consequences of dying prematurely of violence. See, "Human Capital Project," World Bank Group, accessed Feb. 2, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital>.

⁴ Rachel Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security* (New York: Pantheon, 2018), 34–35.

actors are enabled by complicit states whose political or economic power is in turn sustained by those violent actors, is the real villain.

A Savage Order is a powerhouse of a book that is deeply researched, impeccably documented, and a compelling combination of evidence and story. Kleinfeld not only wants you to believe there's a problem and understand its scope and depth, she wants you outraged at how much of our supposedly civilized world has become profitable and powerful through complicity with violence. For the tens of thousands of development professionals who were drawn to a career of service anchored in global values, especially those whose personal experience or institutional credentials lie outside the realms of community policing or security sector reform, reading this book may be a painful experience.

It was for me. Not because there is too much data, or not enough — real people and hard numbers get equal play in Kleinfeld's book. Not from an imbalance of failure and success — the country cases provide a cross-section of rich and poor and global north and global south, and include perspectives on American history that aren't included in public school curricula (but should be). Instead, the pain comes from two sources: how close the development community and multilateral institutions might be to malignant state actors responsible for privilege violence, and how far the development community is from wielding the levers that can effect immediate change.

In Search of Solutions

There's a risk, highlighted by governance scholars like Mary Kaldor, that emphasizing flawed leaders and the necessity of their "dirty deals," as Kleinfeld

does, will overshadow the importance of justice institutions that support less-dirty leaders. Kaldor has also pointed out the dangers of neglecting the role of globalized finance and communication as an enabler and threat multiplier for privilege violence.⁵ Both of these challenges — building justice institutions and safeguarding global finance — matter for development actors, and should be taken up with renewed vigor precisely because they can be malignant tools of violence in the hands of bad actors. When the World Bank added an explicit focus on corrupt theft of capital to the global governance conversation through the StAR initiative on stolen assets recovery,⁶ it created real leverage.

I found Kleinfeld's treatment of governing leaders and governance systems to be properly balanced. The literature on governance and justice systems is robust enough, and to my mind the gap comes not in Kleinfeld's treatment. Kleinfeld shines a light on the timidity with which the key actors in the global development architecture make the explicit connection between corruption and impunity and the shocking human toll paid in the currency of violent death. Kaldor is correct, however, that the poorly understood mechanisms that connect telecommunications and finance with violent networks need more attention. Investment in deeper research and public debate could sharpen what is now the hazy terrain of cinematic conspiracy theory. International financial institutions should be part of that work, and although I appreciated Kleinfeld's suggestions in

⁵ Mary Kaldor, "Modern War Isn't About Winning or Losing — It's Just About Violence," *Washington Post*, Dec. 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/modern-war-isnt-about-winning-or-losing--its-just-about-violence/2018/12/28/36836f92-f4d3-11e8-aeea-b85fd44449f5_story.html.

⁶ "The Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR)," The World Bank Group and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed Feb. 2, 2020, <https://star.worldbank.org>.

the concluding chapter on this topic, they were too narrowly focused on the United Kingdom and the United States. Parallel bilateral actions cannot adequately counter the increasingly sophisticated networks that run outside of, and faster than, individual countries' treasury departments.

Other scholars, such as Thomas Abt, have argued for a stronger emphasis on generating a global demand for and supply of better data, and for concrete, evidence-based combinations of policies and interventions to curtail violent crime.⁷ Kleinfeld doesn't make an explicit appeal for more data, but her argumentation itself is so data-rich that one imagines she would agree with Abt. In fact, this drive for data is something most people who work in development embrace, as the complacent excuse that "some countries just have bad data" has worn thin. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute is leading the way. Created more than a half century ago to provide the basic data needed to understand the arms race and global insecurity, this institute is now launching the Global Registry of Violent Deaths to count deaths caused by all forms of violence and offer open-source data on violence at global, regional, national, provincial, city, and municipal levels.⁸ Kleinfeld's deft use of evidence, however, illustrates that the potency of

⁷ Thomas Abt, "The Real Killer: Fighting the Scourge of Everyday Violence," *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2019-04-16/real-killer>. See also Abt's new book focused on violent crime in America: Thomas Abt, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence—and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

⁸ The GReVD database will hold a single entry for every violent death, including time, location, perpetrator, victim, and type of violence. The sources will be verifiable news reports of lethal events and processing will involve machine coding to handle the volume of entries, as well as human coding to ensure accuracy and consistency. See, "New Initiative Measuring Violent Deaths

data lies partly in the connective tissue of history, sociology, and politics that weaves together the numbers — an empowered middle class doesn't form around statistics alone.

While Kleinfeld's final chapter is telegraphic, she convincingly frames a set of ideas that are welcome to the community of professionals who are generating evidence and adapting proven crime and violence reduction and prevention programs to local contexts.⁹ Across the globe — most commonly in bilateral agencies like USAID but even increasingly in development banks too —efforts to produce data and the policy conversations are happening. As country manager for the World Bank's programs in Papua New Guinea (a country whose levels of violence often escapes notice only because of the impressive paucity of data), I was able, in 2014, to open a conversation by framing the problem as one that could potentially be

Worldwide," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 30, 2019,
<https://www.sipri.org/news/2019/new-initiative-measuring-violent-deaths-worldwide>.

⁹ See, Thomas Abt and Christopher Winship, "What Works in Reducing Community Violence: A Meta-Review and Field Study for the Northern Triangle," USAID, February 2016,
<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/USAID-2016-What-Works-in-Reducing-Community-Violence-Final-Report.pdf>; Laura Chioda, *Stop the Violence in Latin America: A Look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2017),
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25920/9781464806643.pdf?sequence=2>;

and the newest compilation from the Poverty Action Lab: Aprille Knox and Cillian Nolan, "How Can RCTs Help Us Reduce Violence and Conflict?" Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, Sept. 6, 2019,
<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/9-6-19/how-can-rcts-help-us-reduce-violence-and-conflict>.

both measured and changed,¹⁰ rather than as an immutable aspect of history or culture. I've always believed that conversation worked not only because of the data we generated and the story we told, but because of the novelty effect: An international financial institution, not an NGO or bilateral effort, insisted on highlighting the economic costs of violence.

What More Should We Ask?

I found myself unsatisfied when I turned the final page in Kleinfeld's book, but not because I was hoping for more concrete and specific policy suggestions. The final chapter provided a useful buffet of topics and ideas, many of which Kleinfeld is more articulate on than others I have read. Throughout the book there are excellent transgressive suggestions that could tempt us to turn development metrics upside down. Invert the calculation of investment efficiency so OPIC and IFC don't focus on big deals with big companies that are often more at risk of being captured by (or being a part of) privilege violence. Don't measure the size of the police or their share of the national budget. Instead, monitor how much businesses and the middle class pay for private security, and how many of those private security employees also work for state services. De-emphasize GDP growth and focus on the size of the middle class whose incomes are not connected to the state. Kleinfeld argues against projectized leadership development programs: short-term projects that seek to "pick winners" by identifying individuals and extracting them from their country environment. Kleinfeld proposes an alternative

¹⁰ "The Costs of Crime and Violence in Papua New Guinea," The World Bank, Aug. 15, 2014, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/08/15/the-costs-of-crime-and-violence-in-papua-new-guinea>.

to that approach, which rarely creates lasting support for leaders in their home environment. She suggests adapting the venture capital entrepreneur model to create a “leadership accelerator” to combat violence. And her straight talk about the futility of externally driven governance reform as a core way to reduce violence rubs a little salt in the wounds of those who are still talking about policy conditionality even when they’ve papered it over with the language of aligned incentives.

Rather, what was missing in Kleinfeld’s call to action was what I see in the mirror: a development agent at a multilateral institution. Early on, Kleinfeld argues persuasively that “wars are less deadly today in part because we have learned what works to reduce their carnage.”¹¹ To frame her approach to studying success in reducing violence outside of wars, she then describes the high points of decades of multilateralism, years of research, innovation, and practice that generated positive change in the war arena — but she doesn’t say much about the institutions that made that shift possible. Kleinfeld accurately notes that “(n)o one is going to send US peacekeepers to patrol the streets of Venezuela, or deploy NATO to fight crime in South Africa,”¹² and then she veers off without discussing why the global architecture is so ill-suited to address this challenge, or what new or changed institutions might be needed, or are even possible.

It might be that there are none, that these particular problems sit at a vexing intersection of sovereignty and political power and gaping holes in international law; that the only actors who matter are governments and non-state actors who

¹¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 9.

¹² Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 10.

can negotiate their way into a humble supporting role, subordinate to national change agents. Indeed, there's some compelling evidence from the state-conflict-and-war community that even in the well-financed multilateral network that is focused on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, we are overestimating our ability to genuinely deliver the results we want to see. In her recent work, American University professor and peacebuilding researcher Susanna Campbell, who is also a contributor to this roundtable, systematically uses organizational theory and 15 years of data from the full spectrum of peace and development actors to demonstrate that international organizations, bilateral agencies, and (even) international nongovernmental organizations are, in her words, "ironically and unintentionally designed to fail at peacebuilding." Why? Because the norms and accountability channels that matter to these actors are those of their global governance structures, which are far away from the local realities that will either support or endanger peace.¹³

The economically-minded staff at international financial institutions understand the abstract problem: Violence of whatever variety depreciates human capital just

¹³ In Campbell's 2018 book, *Global Governance and Local Peace*, she explains the limited examples of success that she finds are due to a relatively rare willingness of global institutions to afford their local leadership the room to bend rules and sustain dual loyalties, and the also-scarce ability of local staff to deliver results that matter locally while reporting results in language that resonates with global governors. Her conclusions, while sobering, are not entirely negative; she persuasively identifies characteristics and choices to escape this trap, and suggests that to "the extent possible, organizations should employ accompaniment-focused accountability rather than compliance-focused accountability." See, Susanna Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-governance-and-local-peace/D5F93160F5C5A4B36B91F891E920BEC6>.

as it wrecks markets and shutters small businesses. It prevents some from deploying their accumulated health and education to the benefit of themselves and their families, and stops others from accumulating that capital for future use.¹⁴ And Kleinfeld knows this too, ending her final paragraph with another World Bank reference, citing data from the *World Development Report 2011 on Conflict, Security and Development* to remind us what is at risk: “(t)here are seven billion people on our planet ... we are losing the talents of one in six of them to violence.”¹⁵

What Kleinfeld is silent about is whether there is a role for the human capital of the multilateral system in pushing back this scourge, and what structural changes would be required for that contribution to have a significant impact. Curious multilateral minds want to know.

Laura E. Bailey served as the World Bank’s Global Lead for Stability Peace and Security at WB headquarters in Washington, D.C. from 2017 to 2020. She has spent much of her 30+ year post-graduate career focusing on for thought leadership and operational innovation on matters of fragility, conflict, and violence. Ms. Bailey holds a Master of Public Policy degree from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of

¹⁴ A more direct and longstanding measure than the Human Capital Index of the cost of violence combines disability-adjusted life-years lost with economic data from member states. These calculations are neither globally comprehensive nor annually updated, but a 2002 estimate for WHO member states totaled \$151 billion (in constant 2000 dollars). See, David W. Brown, “Economic Value of Disability-Adjusted Life Years Lost to Violence: Estimates for WHO Member States,” *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health* 24, no. 3 (2008): 203–09, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d25a/dd51010f84aec41b8379e76ac79926c56984.pdf>.

¹⁵ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 295.

Government, and is at work on a book about blind spots in the global development architecture. The opinions she expresses here do not reflect the view of the World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent.



3. Fostering Leadership to End Entrenched Violence

Susanna P. Campbell

Over the past two decades, an entire industry has emerged to help fix the problem of fragile and conflict-affected states. To this end, bilateral aid donors, multilateral organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and private contractors implement a range of activities that aim to strengthen the ability of fragile states to guarantee security on their territory, support socio-economic development, guarantee rule of law, and create liberal democratic institutions.¹⁶ This standard approach to intervention in conflict-affected countries has been referred to as the “International Regime for Treating Civil War.”¹⁷

This approach to international violence prevention and peacebuilding is based on two core assumptions about the nature of the problems plaguing such states and the attendant solution. First, armed groups are one major part of the problem and thus securing political bargains between such groups is a necessary part of the solution. The second assumption is that the fragility of the state is the other big part of the problem and that strengthening the weak state is thus the other important piece of the solution. In her masterful new book, *A Savage Order*, Rachel Kleinfeld challenges both of these assumptions. Although Kleinfeld demonstrates that war-to-peace transitions are possible, her book most convincingly offers a

¹⁶ Susanna P. Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam, *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011).

¹⁷ Richard Gowan and Stephen John Stedman, “The International Regime for Treating Civil War, 1988-2017,” *Daedalus* 147, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 171–84, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00482.

stark warning about the way that international actors intervene in fragile and conflict-affected states. She argues that efforts to create “dirty deals” between armed groups and strengthen these supposedly weak states will only reinforce their capacity to maintain a “savage order.” If Kleinfeld is right — and I think she is — the focus of international aid agencies on peace agreements and state fragility is actually part of the problem.

Dirty Deals Don’t Come Cheap

The civil war treatment regime has as its centerpiece a negotiated peace process — one of Kleinfeld’s “dirty deals” — between the warring parties. Once the warring parties agree to a comprehensive peace agreement, a multinational peacekeeping force usually follows to support its implementation. Then the international community works with the government (composed of former warring parties) to organize democratic elections. Once a new government is elected, international donors provide standard development aid that reinforces the authority, legitimacy, and capacity of the newly elected state (often at least partly composed of former warring parties).¹⁸ The success of the international regime for treating civil war is, thus, based on the assumption that a peace agreement among former warring parties will address the causes of the war and create the basis for democratic institutions and sustainable peace.

In seemingly diverse contexts, Kleinfeld identifies a persistent problem: the presence of “Privilege Violence.” The term “privilege” is derived from two Latin

¹⁸ Susanna P. Campbell and Gabriele Spilker, “Rules of Aid: A Survey Experiment Aid to Conflict-Affected Countries,” Working Paper, July 3, 2019.

words: *privus*, or “private,” and *legis*, or “law.”¹⁹ For Kleinfeld, Privilege Violence refers to the private law that leaders create to evade justice and, in turn, “politicize and weaken security agencies and courts so that they answer to political leaders, not any higher law.”²⁰ Kleinfeld contends that the main problem facing these countries and towns is not ethnicity, religion, culture, or even a weak government. Instead, it is their criminalized and unaccountable state: “a particularly pernicious form of state power in which political and economic leaders on both the Left and the Right consciously enable violent groups to proliferate in order to protect their perks and maintain control.”²¹ Once violence becomes a governing strategy employed by the country’s elite, Kleinfeld argues, the population follows. When people are left to fend for themselves in the absence of government protection, the everyday experience of violence becomes normalized in a process of “decivilization.” Countries that experience Privilege Violence and a decivilized society easily become enmeshed in violence, corruption, and criminality. It is a self-reinforcing cycle that is difficult to escape.

While Kleinfeld recognizes the importance of peace agreements for stopping the fighting, she contends that they do not address Privilege Violence. Rather than addressing the sources of the criminalized unaccountable state, peace agreements can reinforce it by giving violent actors amnesty and, in many cases, positions in a new power-sharing government. To force these new governments to be more accountable, Kleinfeld argues, the middle class must organize itself to challenge the interests and privilege of the new government. She views the middle class as

¹⁹ Rachel Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World’s Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 62.

²⁰ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 62.

²¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 24–25.

the fulcrum for a new relationship between the state and society. Only when the middle class demands greater accountability to the population can bottom-up social movements gain the momentum necessary to create a more equitable society. Finally, she argues, courageous political leadership is needed at both the elite and community levels to pressure elites to give up their reliance on Privilege Violence and convince the population that the government can provide equitable security and social services. Through this back-and-forth, the state and society “recivilize.”

In reality, the entire civil war treatment regime can be implemented without fostering middle-class empowerment, courageous leaders, the development of social movements, or the “recivilization” of state and society. Instead, the international treatment regime for civil wars can have the opposite effect — reinforcing the power and authority of the state and enabling a broader scope for its Privilege Violence. The standard way of supporting war-torn countries suits the needs of Western politicians and bureaucrats who need to make quick decisions about how to respond to these complex contexts.²² It is unlikely to support the type of state-society transformation called for by Kleinfeld.

Fragile States

The second core assumption of many violence prevention and peacebuilding efforts is that state fragility is what causes violence and therefore strengthening the state is the solution to violence. But if the state is one of the primary sources

²² Charles T. Call and Susanna P. Campbell, “Is Prevention the Answer?” *Daedalus* 147, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 64–77, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00474.

of violence, as Kleinfeld claims, then efforts to strengthen the state will only reinforce a violent, discriminatory state. And yet the diagnosis of state fragility as the problem that intervention aims to address persists across bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. For example, the congressionally mandated task force on violent extremism in fragile states (for which Kleinfeld and I both served as senior advisers) was entitled “*Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach.*”²³ In spite of the focus on state fragility in the report’s title, the details of the report, which emphasize the importance of improving state-society relations and not just strengthening the state, can be easily overlooked by an international security and aid industry designed and habituated to reinforce the authority of states, not to empower people.

When aid agencies intervene in a conflict-affected country, the only entity that has any authority over them is the conflict-affected state, not the often disenfranchised populations whom aid agencies aim to help.²⁴ The conflict-affected state decides whether or not an international aid donor can give aid to the country, or whether a multilateral organization, such as the United Nations, can operate on its territory. It is relatively easy for a conflict-affected state to kick out U.N. officials with whom it disagrees.²⁵ Even in cases where the United Nations deploys a Chapter VII peacekeeping mission, the U.N. Security Council usually seeks the consent of the

²³ Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, *Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, February 2019).

²⁴ Susanna P. Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁵ Susanna P. Campbell and Aila Matanock, “Weapons of the Weak State: Contracts and Consent in Post-Conflict Statebuilding,” Working Paper, August 2019.

conflict-affected state for its mission to operate there.²⁶ The conflict-affected state also decides whether international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can operate on its territory, whether their staff can get visas, and whether their supplies can be released from the port. Even when such organizations do succeed in reinforcing conflict-affected societies, they are likely only reinforcing preexisting democratic relationships between state and society, not forging new ones.²⁷

In sum, the way in which international actors engage with a conflict-affected state often reinforces the authority of the state, not the society. As Kleinfeld convincingly argues, reinforcing the capacity of a state engaged in Privilege Violence is likely to exacerbate, not mitigate, violent conflict.

All Is Not Lost

If the current solution to conflict-affected states is part of the problem, what is the *real* solution? As Kleinfeld writes, “the dirty secret is that we know surprisingly little about how to solve these problems.”²⁸ Entrenched violence is difficult to resolve. While there is no magic solution, I have found two of Kleinfeld’s proposals to be particularly effective in encouraging change in conflict-affected societies: 1) fostering leadership among a broad group of elites, and 2) creating bottom-up accountability.

²⁶ Lise Morjé Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²⁷ Susanna P. Campbell, Matthew DiGiuseppe, and Amanda Murdie, “International Development NGOs and Bureaucratic Capacity: Facilitator or Destroyer?” *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (March 2019): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1065912918772941>.

²⁸ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 4.

Based on my 10 years studying the Burundi Leadership Training Program, which was implemented during Burundi's civil war, I think Kleinfeld is correct that well-targeted leadership interventions may help foster courageous and connected leaders who are necessary for successful war-to-peace transitions.²⁹ The Burundi Leadership Training Program, a nuanced, multi-year leadership intervention, enabled dialogue between Burundi's increasingly polarized political elite, even after the peace process was over.³⁰ The international regime for treating civil war assumes that once the warring parties have signed a peace agreement, mediation efforts are no longer necessary. But in many cases, crucial components of the agreement remain underspecified or unresolved, requiring that former enemies work together to solve these intractable issues without the support of a mediator. This leadership training program aimed to address that problem.

After the signature of Burundi's peace agreement in August 2000, the Burundi Leadership Training Program worked to foster dialogue and leadership among a diverse group of influential actors in Burundian society. It selected "leaders" by asking a wide range of Burundian society for the names of individuals who were widely considered to be leaders, for good or for bad. It then brought together these 100 leaders to solve problems, learn about themselves, and learn from one another.

²⁹ Susanna P. Campbell, "INGOs in Peacebuilding: Globally Unaccountable, Locally Adaptive," in *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 92–138.

³⁰ Susanna P. Campbell and Peter Uvin, "The Burundi Leadership Training Program," in *Across the Lines of Conflict: Facilitating Cooperation to Build Peace*, ed. Michael Lund (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

In many ways, the program worked. It created understanding. It improved relationships between former enemies. It even helped unblock negotiations concerning the structure of Burundi's new military and enabled the creation of an ethnically inclusive military, a core component of Burundi's peace agreement. Clearly the program did not stop Burundi from descending into violence after the 2015 presidential elections, but that type of long-term change would be too much to ask of a single leadership development intervention. As Kleinfeld aptly cautions, no single intervention or process can be expected to produce a successful transition. This type of success is far from certain and extremely difficult to achieve: "Flawed human beings must do their best to walk a tightrope too narrow for most stumbling feet."³¹

Kleinfeld also emphasizes the importance of accountability to the populations affected by violence. In my recent book, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding*, I found that for international actors to create change in a conflict-affected country they have to make themselves accountable to national stakeholders that represent diverse constituencies. In other words, only by operating under democratic principles of inclusion and representation within the conflict-affected country can international intervenors help create inclusive social change. I also found that this type of local accountability can be difficult for international intervenors to create. These international actors are accountable to their international bosses and their taxpayers, not to local populations.

³¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 267.

Accountability determines the direction of feedback and responsiveness.

International actors intervening in a conflict-affected country focus on delivering the goods and services that their bosses want them to deliver, which may not be the same goods and services that conflict-affected populations want to receive. Shifting the locus of accountability requires that international actors be held accountable for delivering what conflict-affected populations want, even if it conflicts with what their bosses in Washington, New York, Brussels, or Beijing want.

I have found that this type of local accountability is only possible through the innovative and potentially rule-breaking behavior of individual staff working for these international actors. By deciding to make their organizations accountable to a diverse group of local actors, individual staff may need to bend or break rules that were established to hold them accountable to their global bosses.

Kleinfeld proposes an additional, potentially more revolutionary, solution to the aid accountability problem: Put all international aid intervention to a popular vote. While it seems unlikely that international actors would repeatedly subject themselves to such a vote, Kleinfeld's solution points to the second core problem with the solution to fragile states, discussed above: Most efforts to rebuild these states focus on strengthening the state to the exclusion of society.³²

Fostering leadership that responds to a diverse society and empowering conflict-affected societies to hold national and international actors accountable require

³² Susanna P. Campbell and Michael Findley, *Aid in Conflict: Donor Politics and Agency in Conflict-Affected Countries*, Book Manuscript, July 15, 2019.

that international intervenors change the way that they intervene in fragile and conflict-affected states. This change would enable people in the conflict-affected country to solve their own problems. In Kleinfeld's cases of success, the main remedies for Privilege Violence come from within conflict-affected countries, not from without. Woven throughout *A Savage Order* is, thus, a compelling call for a complete rethinking of how international actors engage with the complex states that they aim to transform. A first step is to understand the problem before proposing a solution. Kleinfeld has made this step a lot easier.

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4. I Bet You Think This Book is About You, Don't You?

Daniel Mahanty

You may have never heard of Ebed Yanes or Kate Averell. Yanes, a 15-year old, was killed in the middle of the night in 2012, likely by the Honduran military.³³ Averell, along with her husband Jim, was lynched and hung by a gang of ranchers as a result of a land dispute near the Sweetwater River in Wyoming in 1889.³⁴

Yanes and Averell are but two of the many characters in *A Savage Order* — some similarly tragic, many others heroic — who help Dr. Rachel Kleinfeld tell the story of her pilgrimage to the likely source of and potential cure for epidemic violence. Throughout *A Savage Order*, Kleinfeld relates her hypotheses to the shared human experience — whether on the Wyoming frontier a century and a half ago, or in places like Bihar, India and Medellin, Colombia. In doing so, she sends a clear message to current and aspiring policymakers in the U.S. government: The United States does not have the ability to *fix* epidemic violence in other countries, nor is it responsible for doing so. But that doesn't absolve it from the need to diagnose the problem correctly and use this understanding to inform its approach to these countries, even if this means ultimately doing less.

As somebody who worked for years in the State Department, often on issues at the intersection of U.S. national security and human rights, Kleinfeld's book was especially meaningful to me. *A Savage Order* is masterfully written, extensively

³³ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 3.

³⁴ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 46–47.

researched, deeply nuanced, practical, and important. If the book suffers from any major flaws, it is an underlying assumption that a chief obstacle preventing the U.S. government from playing a more constructive role in violence-afflicted states, especially when it comes to security cooperation, is faulty analysis of the cause of such violence. Yet, this does not detract from the significant contribution this work makes in terms of uncovering the delicate, and at times paradoxical, relationship between the illiberal policies that both give rise to violence, and sometimes help to end it.

Fueling “Privilege Violence”: Nobody Does It Better

Understanding the root causes of violence internal to other states was not the point of American foreign policy for the better part of the five decades that followed World War II. What mattered most during the Cold War when it came to the internal politics of other countries was ensuring that “our sons of bitches” — whether anti-leftist rebels or anti-leftist autocrats — ended up on top. The hundreds of thousands who died in Indonesia, Guatemala, Chad,³⁵ and elsewhere at the hands of these rebels and autocrats is a statistic often lost or forgotten in sepia-tone renderings of a largely imagined post-war *Pax Americana*.

³⁵ See, for example Vincent Bevins, “The Indonesia Documents and the US Agenda,” *The Atlantic*, Oct. 20, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/the-indonesia-documents-and-the-us-agenda/543534/>; see also various contributors in, “What Guilt Does the US Bear in Guatemala,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/05/19/what-guilt-does-the-us-bear-in-guatemala>; and “Enabling a Dictator,” Human Rights Watch, June 28, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/28/enabling-dictator/united-states-and-chads-hissene-habre-1982-1990#page_.

Kleinfeld points to a paradigm shift that started after the Cold War ended and gained considerable speed with the advent of the so-called “War on Terror,” wherein quelling internal violence suddenly converged with American interests. As a result, policymakers embarked on a new project to re-engineer the internal security orders of violent countries by enhancing the institutional capacities of militaries, police, and courts.³⁶ By 2016, she notes, the United States was providing security assistance to these institutions to the tune of \$18 billion a year in two-thirds of the world’s countries.³⁷ Most of these interventions have failed to reduce internal violence because, according to Kleinfeld, American policymakers misdiagnosed its cause as “state weakness,” or the general absence of the state. These conditions, it was believed, allowed armed groups and criminals to kill with impunity because, as in the American West, there were too few sheriffs to stop them.³⁸

Kleinfeld’s analysis suggests that the principal cause of internal violence in most circumstances does not, in fact, stem from state weakness. Rather, it is what she calls “Privilege Violence,”³⁹ a phenomenon that occurs “when politicians abdicate

³⁶ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 30.

³⁷ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 32.

³⁸ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 31.

³⁹ While Kleinfeld draws from, and acknowledges, a number of sources of philosophy and political science to establish this general breakdown, readers might immediately note the significant compatibility of Privilege Violence with the framework proposed in, Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), a work to which Kleinfeld refers often, along with other works by its authors. North, Wallis, and Weingast differentiated “natural states,” where “access to violence is open to anyone strong enough and well

the monopoly of force and collude with violent groups to maintain power.”⁴⁰ She most effectively illustrates the concept using the American post-war South, where extreme and cruel forms of criminal violence were tolerated and encouraged — even weaponized — by politicians as a means of a political order that favored, and continues to favor, the elite status of whites.⁴¹ Kleinfeld has little trouble finding more contemporary examples, many of which implicate America’s historically most important security partners in the “wars” on terror and drugs. She points, for example, to collusion between the Colombian military and illegal paramilitary groups, and the way in which Pakistan’s intelligence service, the ISI, inflates the threat of radical groups when convenient, while also using them to harass political opponents.⁴²

To Kleinfeld, the problem of Privilege Violence is a three-headed hydra involving corrupt elites, politicians, and a citizenry that looks to alternative sources of security in response.⁴³ But it could also be seen as a snake eating its own tail, resulting in a process of gradual — but total — de-civilization that has the ability to devolve into armed conflict. As such, when the United States provides support (especially security assistance) to the governments in countries affected by Privilege Violence, it is exacerbating this cycle by intervening on the part of elites

organized enough to use it,” from “open access orders,” which are characterized by impersonal rules and institutions that help the state maintain its legitimate monopoly on violence. In the natural state, control of violence is dispersed and used to “manipulate access in the economy and society to sustain political arrangements within the coalition.”

⁴⁰ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 14.

⁴¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 49–59.

⁴² Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 61.

⁴³ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 14.

who are manipulating the use of violence for their own political purposes.

Kleinfeld contends that instead of fixing state weakness, “the goal of security assistance should be to build a functional relationship between the government and its citizens, because lasting security will not prevail until that goal is met.”⁴⁴ She proposes some dramatic, and sensible, revisions to the way the United States conceives of its security partnerships.

There are some promising signs that the U.S. government is catching on to her thesis. During the last years of the Obama administration, initiatives such as the Security Governance Initiative and the Presidential Policy Directive on Security Sector Assistance at least partially reflected the importance of accountability and the need for greater selectivity in security assistance programs.⁴⁵ The more recent Stabilization Assistance Review process (initiated during the Trump administration) acknowledges the need to ensure that security assistance programs don’t exacerbate “conflict dynamics.” Meanwhile, acute forms of violence other than armed conflict continue to garner more attention in the American foreign policy establishment, which has begun to see such violence as a problem worthy of addressing, independent of shadowy transnational terrorist networks, through “stabilization” efforts and “reducing fragility.” An example of

⁴⁴ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 284.

⁴⁵ See, for example, “Fact Sheet: Security Governance Initiative,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Aug. 6, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/06/fact-sheet-security-governance-initiative>; and, “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, April 5, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/05/fact-sheet-us-security-sector-assistance-policy>.

this is the bipartisan legislation in both houses of Congress known as the “Global Fragility Act.”⁴⁶

But for Kleinfeld’s deeply-researched analysis, or her recommendations, to gain greater prominence, the American government’s relationship with violence abroad will need to shift more dramatically than it has thus far.

Reason and Realpolitik: Coming Around Again

It’s not clear that knowing more about the cause of violence — and even what *not* to do in its midst — is or will ever be enough to overcome the status quo of American foreign policy, characterized in equal parts by its threat-orientation, its bureaucratic inertia, and its overtly transactional nature. With as many brilliant minds as the U.S. government has that are capable, and in fact willing, to accept the premise of Privilege Violence, restoring the monopoly over the use of violence in other countries is not a top policy objective and will remain challenging as long as U.S. policies are formulated with seeming indifference to the legitimacy of a partner government.

In many places, American policy, often enacted through security cooperation, remains focused on selling U.S. arms, promoting military interoperability, and

⁴⁶ The Global Fragility Act was included as Title V of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020.

The full text of the act can be found at: “Rules Committee Print 116-44: Text of the House Amendment to the Senate Amendment to H.R. 1865,”

<https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/BILLS-116HR1865SA-RCP116-44.PDF>.

For a description of the act and its provisions, see, “Global Fragility Act,” Mercy Corps,

<https://www.mercycorps.org/global-fragility-act>.

currying political favor from whichever elite faction happens to be in power, whether in service to predictability as an alternative to chaos (“better the devil you know”), or as a form of alliance maintenance. In conflict-ridden or fragile countries prone to internal violence, assistance often is intended to coax a partner government to align against “common” enemies, or to project the image that the United States is doing something — anything — to deal with threats, imagined and real, to satisfy political masters at home. Increasingly, this assistance is also rationalized as necessary to project power and counter the malign influence of China and Russia.⁴⁷

Furthermore, as a famous RAND study once noted about U.S. policy in Vietnam, “Bureaucracy does its thing.”⁴⁸ Even if pockets of expertise in the U.S. government seem able to recognize the cycle of Privilege Violence in rhetoric and proclamations, the government’s bureaucratic structures are still motivated by too many competing incentives, and as a result, tolerate paradoxical and often incompatible approaches to violence in the same places. As long as the U.S. government continues to overshadow its own aid programs, which are intended to reduce fragility, with its major arms sales to corrupt governments, the status quo is unlikely to change.

⁴⁷ See, for example James Saldin “US General Warns of Russian, Chinese Inroads in Africa,” VOA News, Feb. 7, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-general-warns-russian-chinese-inroads-africa>.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: RAND, August 1972).

“Positive” Deviants and Just Plain Deviants: With a Few Good Friends

A *Savage Order* isn’t only about correctly diagnosing Privilege Violence, and it argues for more than just a “Do No Harm” approach in Washington, although such an approach would be an improvement. The book is also about coming to a better understanding about how the cycle of violence ends for good. For the bulk of the book, Kleinfeld explores in detail a selection of societies — the “positive deviants,” borrowing from Jim Collins’ *Good to Great* — that have bucked the system against all odds and made a potentially permanent transition away from violence. Kleinfeld recounts what she learned from these good news stories with the intention of helping people in still-violent societies find their own way forward by applying their lessons. But readers who wish to support the process (within and outside of government) are also certain to find valuable insights in these accounts, not all of which are entirely intuitive or obvious. Those like me who swear by concepts like good governance, who found themselves nodding along with her description of Privilege Violence in predatory and corrupt states, may actually find what her research suggests about the complicated relationship between liberal institutions, human rights, and the end of violence, surprising — and at times discomfiting.

Whereas other sources of scholarship in conflict resolution and peacebuilding have recognized an uneasy relationship between democracy and the transition from conflict, they call attention to the potentially destabilizing effects of rapid or uneven liberalization (or some variation on that theme).⁴⁹ Kleinfeld’s research, on

⁴⁹ Consider for example, Julie A. Mertus and Jeffrey Helsing, *Human Rights and Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006).

the other hand, suggests that illiberal maneuvers are actually needed, at least temporarily, in order to restructure legitimate political orders so that they significantly limit violence permanently. To be clear, Kleinfeld is not suggesting that repression works. Rather, in each of her case studies, she points to “dirty deals” (elite bargains) that exchange accountability for time, less-than-perfect but charismatic individuals, and state surveillance playing a major role in state transformation. This narrative may confound traditional sensibilities about human rights and impersonal, transparent, liberal institutions, but Kleinfeld makes a strong argument that such deals may nevertheless be necessary to create space for violence reduction. She is careful to highlight, though, that real reforms must follow or violence almost surely will return.

Among her examples, she points to the “unsavory” amnesty deals offered to former fighters by President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia to buy bargaining time and space, which likely enabled the success of less controversial politicians that followed. The Italian government used a highly restrictive surveillance and detention regime that has been criticized by the European Court of Human Rights, to curb mafia violence. And finally, President Mikheil Saakashvili centralized power in Georgia to reduce corruption and to coerce accountability from security services. Kleinfeld writes, “In retrospect, it is easy to see that these countries were flirting with authoritarianism. But in the midst of reform, the line is less clear.”⁵⁰

Casual readers ready to support illiberal policies and autocratic leaders as the solutions to violence should look more carefully beneath the surface to heed the troubling truths and caveats that Kleinfeld clearly, and consistently, provides. Her

⁵⁰ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 242.

use of comparative case studies (like the “comparators” in *Good to Great*) shows that although these tactics were present in countries that experienced transformation, they are also as, or more, prevalent in states that failed to do so. It can be very difficult to recognize the difference between a Paul Kagame and a Mikheil Saakashvili.⁵¹ Yet, the success of these tactics was entirely, and critically, dependent on other factors, principally among them a political movement and middle class that provided a public referendum for change, but also ensured some degree of accountability for excess. We learn from the comparators (another term Kleinfeld borrows from *Good to Great*) that more often than not, dirty deals, false peace, and autocratic pretenders can easily masquerade as stepping stones to peace. The reasons are not surprising. For one thing, the public, and especially the middle classes, can be easily won over to supporting a slide toward repression through indifference or fear. Meanwhile, foregoing the individual benefits of power in service of the public good is a challenge for most politicians in any system, let alone in places where doing so can also entail significant personal risk. Finally, governments as institutions are not naturally predisposed to judicious intervention in the private lives of their citizenry without strong oversight and accountability. And even in Kleinfeld’s success stories, some backsliding seems inevitable, such as with the “false positives” scandal in Colombia.⁵²

Perhaps appropriately, the “positive deviants” in Collins’ *Good to Great* — just like the countries in *A Savage Order* — include several companies that also suffered setbacks: Circuit City (bankruptcy), Wells Fargo (personal loan scandal), Fannie Mae (accounting scandal), Abbott Laboratories (charged with second largest

⁵¹ Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 143.

⁵² Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order*, 241.

criminal fine in U.S. history), and Walgreens (sued for contributing to the opioid epidemic). The lesson of the positive deviants seems to be that whether in business, or in the business of governing, progress is neither guaranteed, nor permanent — a message entirely appropriate for Kleinfeld’s American readership.

To Thine Own Self Be True

Throughout *A Savage Order*, Kleinfeld draws on the American experience with violence in every conceivable way, from shootings on the American frontier to gang violence in Los Angeles to the current crime rate in Chicago. It’s a conceit that works to dramatic effect in two very different ways. First, using examples from America’s own backyard makes descriptions of problems elsewhere more relatable, both in terms of their complexity and their familiarity.

More importantly, Kleinfeld’s use of American history and recent headlines reminds us that the existing American political order — and American power — is based in large part on an arrangement forged from the use of gruesome violence, often perpetrated against the most vulnerable, with the complicity of the silent majority. *A Savage Order* is a wakeup call to an American middle class that has remained largely and comfortably complicit with the violence in America’s past, and that which continues today. It cautions that without the right politicians, political movements cannot succeed — clever placards and inspired protests are not enough. It’s a warning that, if Americans are not watchful, their own security institutions can be subordinated to the political ends of a rent-seeking elite.

And it’s a reminder, for a country enamored by displays of power and force, that violence is a cycle that is much harder to end than it is to conceive. As I read

Kleinfeld's book, I couldn't help but think of Hanna Arendt's reflection that, "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world."⁵³

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⁵³ Hannah Arendt, "A Special Supplement: Reflections on Violence," *New York Review of Books*, Feb. 27, 1969.

5. Seeking (and Finding?) “A Relative Peace,” As We Can Come to Know It

Isaiah (Ike) Wilson III

Political scientist Francis Beer once wrote, “[S]ince wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”⁵⁴ This idea of “war,” as well as “peace,” as social constructs brings with it both hope that humans can choose peace and regret that we so often choose war instead. My own experiences as a soldier and a scholar have involved wrestling with the potential good, bad, and ugly of human choices about war and violence, and also with our rationales and explanations for those choices.

After reading Rachel Kleinfeld’s book, *A Savage Order*, I could easily imagine that the author was touched and guided by a credo in her own life of professional service similar to Beer’s observation above about the cognitive roots of conflict. Kleinfeld did not choose as her focus of analysis war, warfare, peace, or peace-building. Instead, she chose violence itself. Specifically, for Kleinfeld, “the security problem of our time is boiling over from countries caught in a vortex of *internal violence*.”⁵⁵ This definitional choice is both the strength, and possibly the most consequential weakness, of the book.

⁵⁴ Francis Beer, *Meanings of War and Peace* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 8.

⁵⁵ Rachel Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World’s Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018) 6; emphasis mine.

The Benefits and Risks of Breaking Down Boundaries

One of the most crucial (and intellectually courageous) contributions Kleinfeld makes is to challenge existing paradigms. She pushes boundaries with her observational and analytical examination of the root causes of the processes of violence as well as the most promising treatments for these processes. Only by looking beyond the distinction between state and nation, domestic and foreign, and, ultimately, war and non-war can we begin to understand violence as the fundamental variable that determines order versus disorder or democratic versus democratizing states and societies.

However, *A Savage Order* does raise concerns about some of the practical consequences of departing from traditional distinctions between the domains of war and peace and the different types of conflicts, uses of force, and operational and instrumental methods of warfare. In this regard, there are at least two concerns that bear consideration when analyzing Kleinfeld's approach.

A Darker Side of the Responsibility to Protect?

While Kleinfeld's approach is noble, her recommendations to view violence through a state-less lens may bring about an acceleration of the organized violence she seeks to mitigate. States still matter in an increasingly complex world, not least because they enjoy a presumption of sovereignty, inviolable borders, and a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. At the geopolitical and geostrategic levels, the negative consequences of blurring or erasing traditional boundaries that have defined states — e.g., institutional, territorial, legalistic — are meaningful, as we

have seen as these boundaries have increasingly come under assault from a variety of sources since the end of the Cold War.

The past 30 years have been a particularly transformational period that has marked the end of the United States' reign as the preeminent global power with the strength to regulate and set rules for the international system. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge to boundaries in this period has been with regard to the rising challenge to the longstanding state-based international order, which has existed in some form since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. As a consequence, the preexisting paradigm (the “traditional regime”), which restricts international intervention based on state sovereignty, faces a profound challenge from a contending paradigm of intervention (the “emergent regime”), based on human rights and the right of self-determination.

The *traditional regime* governs and defines what constitutes legitimate (or even morally obligated) collective, defense-based intervention. Whether or not to intervene is determined by the majority of the international community of states. The traditional regime privileges state sovereignty over other concepts and types of sovereignty, state autonomy regarding affairs within a state’s territorial boundaries, and system stability over self-determination (which can, at times, be destabilizing). The *emergent regime*, on the other hand, places an emphasis on the preferences of the people, the principle of universal human rights, and the principles of self-determination and the primacy of the individual and the nation over the state.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Isaiah “Ike” Wilson, III and James J.F. Forest, eds., *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Politics* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).

Ironically, the “Responsibility to Protect” is an outcome of this emergent regime.⁵⁷ Its focus on internal conflicts and intrasocietal violence challenges and unravels traditional norms and rules regarding the inviolability of state territorial sovereignty and the state’s monopoly over legitimate violence. This has come about, in part, through changes in the international security system, but has also been the result of interveners, among which the United States has been a lead participant. Indeed, the United States has had a profound effect on the destabilization of the international system. Paradoxically this has come from a growing sense of obligation — married with increased technical capabilities and operational reach — to preventively intervene, as well as a sense of obligation to protect through the use of violence born of and fed by the breakdown of the territorial sovereignty of the state and its monopolistic controls over the limitations of uses of violence, regardless of the normative value of the cause. Moreover, America has challenged the traditional legal and normative international regimes that have defined the obligations — and limits — of intervention for half a century. Over the past three decades, the United States has claimed an exemption to Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, prohibiting use-of-force interventions, on numerous occasions.⁵⁸ Thus, in its attempts to reduce “trans-

⁵⁷ “Responsibility to Protect,” United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>.

⁵⁸ United Nations Charter. Article 2(4): “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.” The United States asserted the right to pre-emptive or ‘anticipatory military action’ — as demonstrated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. U.S.-led interventions in Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989) were at least implicit assertions of a right to intervene militarily to restore democracy. The U.N. Security

state” violence by intervening on the grounds of the “Responsibility to Protect,” the United States may have contributed to the very “savage order” Kleinfeld describes.

Losing Control & State Responsibility in the ‘Lost Meanings’ of War, and Peace?

The second consequence of the boundary-breaking blueprint Kleinfeld endorses lies in her central focus on violence as “unbounded” by pre-existing and restrictive notions of different categorical kinds of conflicts and wars. She makes a very convincing argument for thinking beyond boundaries to recognize violence as the fundamental scourge and roadblock to democracy and order, and then to take action to eliminate its use and effects. Yet, such an approach, although liberating, could lead to victories that are ultimately pyrrhic.

While freedom from the restrictive definitions of “conflict” and “war” may allow us to appreciate violence as an explanatory factor, it can also come with even worse consequences. One such negative consequence — and one that has dominated my own professional life both as a scholar and as a soldier — deals with misunderstanding the useful meanings of war and, as a consequence, the limiting norms and principles, rules and decision-making processes and procedures that govern the legal and ethical utility of force and warfare.

Council’s establishment of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq (1991) and during the Kosovo War (1999–2000) are also early precedents for a justification on the grounds of universal humanitarian rights. In 1998 and 2001, the United States invoked self defense to justify military action in Afghanistan and Sudan following terrorist attacks against American targets. The U.S./Coalition Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are only the more recent hyperextensions of traditional legal, normative, and territorial sovereignty-based restrictions to use of force interventions.

My own book, *Thinking Beyond War: Civil-Military Relations and Why America Fails to Win the Peace*,⁵⁹ published in 2007, called on the U.S. military to find new ways to think about conceptualizing and waging war. The book was one of the first evaluations to tackle the shortcomings of U.S. military thought and ask why the U.S. military, with its unprecedented strength, failed to win the wider war in Iraq and bring about peace. As I noted then, “Plainly stated, the ‘western coalition’ failed, and continues to fail, to see Operation Iraqi Freedom in its fullness.”⁶⁰ By limiting its planning, plans, and commitment of resources to only the battles aimed at militarily defeating Saddam Hussein’s army and overthrowing his regime, the United States missed seeing the fuller war. It was blinded by the bright lights of the battles to be fought and won. While the attention of U.S. military forces by April 2003 were turned to *the ports* for redeployment, insurgents and terrorists had already turned their focus toward *the people*. Iraqis, with and without American support, have been dealing with this insurgent and terrorist violence ever since. In light of recent riots in southern Iraq over the future of that country,⁶¹ as well as the apparent failure to transplant America’s Iraq strategy to Afghanistan, the book remains a primer on the questions the U.S. military and political leadership should be asking in order to determine what the use of violence in these

⁵⁹ Isaiah Wilson III, *Thinking beyond War: Civil-Military Relations and Why America Fails to Win the Peace* (New York: Palgrave, 2007, 2013).

⁶⁰ As reported by Tom Ricks, “Army Historian Cites Lack of Postwar Plan for Iraq,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 24, 2004, page A1.

⁶¹ Alissa J. Rubin and Falih Hassan, “Violence Rises in Iraq’s South Amid Crackdowns on Protests and Press,” *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/28/world/middleeast/iraq-protests-violence.html>.

less-than-victorious wars means. Specifically, focusing on *how* America fights is pointless if the country does not ask and answer *why* it fights.

The “fullness” I spoke of in 2007 was about appreciating the relationship between peace and war. The distinction between peace and war, including the different types of presumptive legitimacy and limitations attached to violence in “war” as opposed to violence during times of “peace” has arguably been one of the fundamental principles that defines the centuries-old “western-liberal” international system. That system has modulated — if not moderated and mitigated — the kinds of violence that threaten the relative order of the international system.

Why America wages war — as reflected in the established and agreed-upon rules and norms that undergird how America wages war — defines for the world, and reaffirms for Americans, what the United States is as a nation. Whereas Kleinfeld sees the category of war as overly restrictive and as an impediment to a clear view of the real cause of the problem — violence — I see a need to reaffirm our full understanding of and appreciation for the structured meanings of war and peace as a way toward regaining legitimate control over the use of force and violence.

It is in these modern categories of use of force, conflict, war, and warfare that the norms and principles of the traditional western-liberal order, as well as the rules and decision-making procedures that restrict, restrain, explain, and justify the use of force, are codified. The monopoly on legitimate violence is tied to categories of war and warfare. The meaning, or rather the purpose, of war is not borne of the notion of the peace one seeks. Instead, it flows from what a country is trying to accomplish *politically*. It is in this sense that at least some of the “savageness” of

the “order” Kleinfeld witnessed firsthand may come as a result of the loosening of such categories of war and warfare.

What makes the political aims and purposes behind war and violence decivilizing or recivilizing, legitimate or illegitimate, liberal or illiberal, is a matter of our choices, and the rules and norms we establish. The use of violence, like war, is a social construct, a sign of the times. On this vital point, the author and I agree.

Kleinfeld should be applauded for inviting readers to consider some of the world’s deadliest countries, and their search — sometimes successful, sometimes not — for a pathway to security, as well as for compelling us to look straight into the face of violence and to see both its ills and its potential worth as an odd kind of solution.

Her work has re-raised serious questions about the fundamentals of the modern Western-liberal order, of late more disorderly than orderly, including: Should democracy promotion be pursued? If so, when and under what conditions and on whose terms? Do countries have a “Responsibility to Protect”? If so, who decides that, and at what cost to the country being protected, to the protector, and to the concept of self-determination? And finally, what’s war (and peace) got to do with it all?

For raising these questions and challenging her readers, I, for one, offer her and this work a standing ovation.

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