

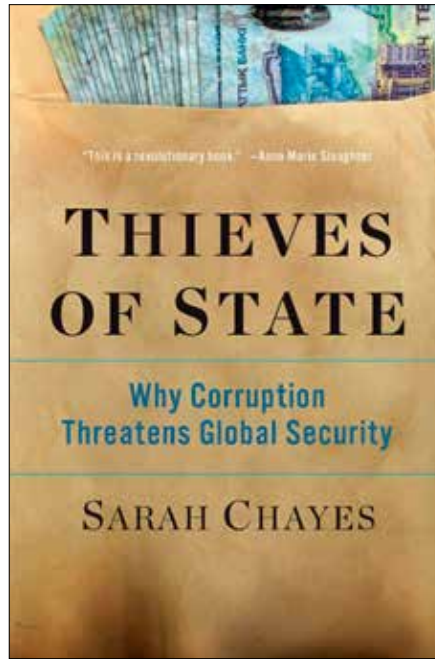
from others so familiar to those of us who have gone through it ourselves.

The book may be designed to spur readers to action, to force them to spring from their comfortable lives outside these wars and immediately find the closest veteran and shower him or her with care and affection. If you take the message too literally, though, you might come away with the impression that everyone who has served in the military is suffering and that the only way to ease their pain is to pity them.

Bouvard should be commended for her attempt to reach out, even if too much of her book is based on clichés and the unfortunately common philosophy of thinking that veterans have a monopoly on suffering that civilians cannot understand. She writes, “Living in the present, civilians have the luxury of managing their memories. We all have both good and difficult memories, but we are able to turn them off if we wish.” But a person who has had a friend killed in a car crash or lost a relative to an unexpected disease—or who experiences any of the feelings of grief central to the human existence—can sympathize, if not empathize. We should not try to single out veterans as the owners of traumatic loss, but rather use that loss as a starting point to form bonds with others who have felt the same. Each side in the civilian-military conversation would benefit from sharing their stories with each other, as well as listening to the stories of their counterparts. JFQ

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### **Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security**

By Sarah Chayes  
W.W. Norton, 2015  
262 pp. \$26.95  
ISBN 978-0393239461  
Reviewed by William H. Waggy II

Spring in Afghanistan brings the annual renewal from winter's snowmelt, as rivers threaten their banks and bring much-needed water to the country's valleys. This year, spring brought the onslaught of another seasonal occurrence: the annual evidence of rampant corruption in Afghanistan. March brought a story from *Stars and Stripes* that highlighted the Kabul market for gaudy mansions constructed over the last decade with no small assistance from foreign aid. April was no different, as a \$100 million fuel contract scandal garnered attention in the Afghan press. Later that same month, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction released a report on the oversight of personnel and payroll data that showed deficient control mechanisms allowing personnel to be paid regardless of attendance.

Sarah Chayes, a historian and award-winning PBS correspondent who later became a high-level advisor to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, lived in the midst of Afghan corruption beginning in 2002. Originally sent to Kandahar on a reporting assignment following the U.S. overthrow of the Taliban, Chayes decided to stay in Kandahar as part of a nonprofit venture. She provides her first-hand knowledge of the payoffs, bribes, and embezzlement seemingly entrenched in southern Afghanistan during that time period. Corruption has never gotten better, but Chayes's perspective has changed. Later brought into the highest policy circles of the U.S. military, she advised multiple International Security Assistance Force commanders in the late 2000s including Admiral Mullen.

Corruption has long been on the mind of national advisors. In an early chapter, Chayes surveys so-called mirror literature, tracks from the Middle Ages that provided advice to future rulers. Though Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* may be the most famous example, such advice transcends cultures and empires. She persuasively shows that writers across the centuries warned rulers of the dangers of corruption, some actually pointing to corruption as a source of weakness and instability in their kingdoms.

Chayes expands on the idea that corruption causes instability and applies it to Afghanistan. In this respect, she admirably contributes important ideas to conversations about Afghanistan security and stability. Chayes convincingly explains how unchecked corruption causes instability, national frustration, and ultimately violence. Corruption should not be viewed as merely a by-product of weak national governments or an inherent problem of insecurity. Rather, corruption erodes any support for governmental institutions, breeds cynicism throughout the population, and pushes people toward violent and puritanical solutions.

As governments fail to contain predatory impulses, the population looks for solutions that promise fairness. Looking across several countries, Chayes shows

that Islamic radicals seize upon this frustration and pledge to end corruption. Just as the Taliban promised to end the depredations of the warlords, so too do Uzbek radicals pledge relief from the vilely corrupt government in Tashkent. Liberal reformers typically lose in this popular battle, as the ideas that they advocate are inexorably linked to U.S. support for corrupt regimes. With liberals discredited, religious reformers gain the upper hand in this war of ideas.

Chayes offers a host of recommendations to fight corruption, although many of her suggestions are vague and nebulous. She advocates that intelligence analysts should study corrupt networks and develop models for understanding them. A functioning government takes in revenue that it passes through the bureaucracy to the population in the form of benefits, social welfare, and physical projects. A corrupt network reverses the flow of money in the government, taking in revenue from the population and passing the revenue up through the bureaucracy, with members at each level siphoning their cut of the money.

A comparison to a Mafia-style organization is telling. Calling the Afghan government a vertically integrated criminal network, low-level government officials skim money from the population and pass the money up the chain. The high-level officials receive the preponderance of the loot and in exchange promise protection from prosecution. Illustrating how the system works, Chayes tracks the case of a corrupt “two-bit border police buffo” arrested over stealing funds. Despite a seeming chasm separating this official from proper Kabul, bureaucrats up to then–Interior Minister Hanif Atmar frustrated the investigation, prevented his replacement, and ominously warned of unrest if a prosecution unfolded. The corrupt system took care of its own.

Though only associated with the military late in her career, Chayes effectively captures the military jargon and often irreverently highlights contradictions within the military’s response to corruption. Easily readable, *Thieves of State* should sound a warning about allowing

corruption to take root. Corruption undermines the institutions we develop in Afghanistan. Less a necessary evil and more just an evil, corruption feeds insurgency and provides legitimacy to religious zealots. Chayes does not provide all the solutions to this problem, but the first step will always be to admit that there is a problem. JFQ

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