Publications

Western Intervention and Informal Politics: Simulated Statebuilding and Failed Reforms
Troels Burchall Henningsen
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This book examines the political and military dynamic between threatened local regimes and Western powers, and it argues that the power of informal politics forces local regimes to simulate statebuilding.

Reforms enabling local states to take care of their own terrorist and insurgency threats are a blueprint for most Western interventions to provide a way out of protracted internal conflicts. Yet, local regimes most often fail to implement reforms that would have strengthened their hand. This book examines why local regimes derail the reforms demanded by Western powers when they rely on their support to stay in power during existentially threatening violent crises. Based on the political settlement framework, the author analyses how web-like networks of militarized elites require local regimes to use informal politics to stay in power. Four case studies of Western intervention are presented: Iraq (2011-2018), Mali (2011-2020), Chad (2005-2010), and Algeria (1991-2000). These studies demonstrate that informal politics narrows strategic possibilities and forces regimes to rely on coup-proofing military strategies, to continue their alliances with militias and former insurgents, and to simulate statebuilding reforms to solve the dilemma of satisfying militarized elites and Western powers at the same time.

This book will be of much interest to students of statebuilding, international intervention, counter-insurgency, civil wars, and international relations.

About the author
Troels Burchall Henningsen is an assistant professor in the Institute for Strategy and War Studies at the Royal Danish Defence College.
In 2007, Iraq was in the midst of violent sectarian cleansing. Col. Steve Miska led a team within the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division (known as Dagger Brigade) that established an underground railroad from Baghdad to Amman to the U.S. for dozens of Iraqi interpreters facing near-certain death at the hands of the “death squads” that hunted down and slaughtered interpreters and their families.

The mostly young men and women who embraced American idealism risked their lives to support U.S. service members in countries where understanding the language, the people, and the contours of the culture are often a matter of life and death. Yet, according to recent estimates, more than 100,000 interpreters and at-risk family members remain in Iraq and 70,000 remain in Afghanistan, each in grave danger.

The plight of Iraqi and Afghan interpreters left behind by the United States remains one of the most significant human rights issues of the Global War on Terrorism, America’s longest, and ongoing, military conflict.

Baghdad Underground Railroad is a sober reminder of the far-reaching human and national security consequences of abandoning U.S. allies in countries of conflict. Above all, it is an exploration of universal questions about hope, brotherhood, and belonging—questions that strike at the heart of who we are as a people and as a nation.

About the author

Col. Steve Miska served as an officer in the United States Army for 25 years before retiring in 2015. From 2011 to 2012, Steve served in the White House as Director for Iraq on the National Security Council. He has written extensively about the need to protect soft networks, and has acted as an advisor to several non-profits that aim to support and protect foreign military interpreters, including No One Left Behind and the International Refugee Assistance Project. He is the Founder & CEO of Servant Leader Citizen (SLC) Consulting, which exists to educate others about national security and counterterrorism issues in an increasingly global environment, and executive director of the non-profit First Amendment Voice, a nonpartisan effort to reinvigorate civic awareness about First Amendment issues.
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