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Thomas Manig

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Review

A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security

Rachel Kleinfeld. New York: Pantheon Books, 2018. 475pp.

Thomas Manig^{*}

Rachel Kleinfeld studies international conflicts and methods of reducing violence. Previously she published *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad: Next Generation Reform* (2012). She is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She has advised government officials on problems of international security.

Kleinfeld's new book, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security*, is characterized by social scientific methodology rather than abstract theorizing. This book disposes of simplistic generalizations, like the belief that violence is inevitable in certain ethnic groups or localities, or the contrary belief that we can end violence by sitting down and having deep conversations that put people in touch with their gentle side.

Kleinfeld's approach relies instead on data and case studies to draw conclusions about the kinds of violence that exist, and about what methods are likely to work to reduce violence in the world. The cases she describes in *A Savage Order* come from places like

^{*} Thomas Manig, philosophy instructor (retired), Auburn University.

Colombia, Sicily, Ghana, Republic of Georgia, and India, where seemingly intractable large-scale violence has been common.

The book is surprisingly easy to read, considering its hundred pages of endnotes and forty-eight page bibliography.

Early in the book, Kleinfeld tests some familiar suppositions about the correlates and kinds of violence by using statistics and counterexamples. We might have supposed that the biggest category of violent deaths are ones that occur during wartime. But statistics show that many of the violent deaths happen during peacetime, and are directly or indirectly attributable to political factors like corrupt states or weak states. We might have supposed that violent deaths are sure to be concentrated in places that have poverty, ethnic enclaves, or religious orthodoxies. But there are exceptions to all of these preconceived patterns.

The book is divided into three parts: (I) The problem; (II) The solution; and (III) Next steps.

In the first part, we can recognize the influence of Thomas Hobbes. Without the benefit of statistics, Hobbes was convinced that weak states would be unable to guarantee public safety in times of factional violence: the factions could “overawe” the government. And Kleinfeld believes that this generalization is now well-supported by the evidence. She also describes a new category of violence that she calls “privilege violence.” This kind of violence can arise even when the state is strong. Here, a privileged group may control the state, and may use state violence against outsiders to maintain its dominant position. Also, when these outsiders have conflicts among themselves and need police protection, no one comes to help. Either way, violence increases.

In the organization of the first two parts, we can see the influence of the sociologist Norbert Elias, who was known for his investigations of the civilizing process. In part I, the rise of hotspots of violence is described as “decivilization,” and in part II, the exercise of certain devices of *Realpolitik* is supposed to help bring about “recivilization.” In part II Kleinfeld affirms the usefulness of a powerful centralized government. She shares some of Elias’s observations to illustrate the connection between centralized political power and the reduction of violence. Before the feudal system was fully established in France, the petty nobles who stayed at their scattered estates could inflict violence on their serfs with impunity. The French kings eventually saw that it was advantageous to command the petty nobles to move to the capital and live as courtiers. There the petty nobles had to replace

their impulsive ways with refined aristocratic manners. Arbitrary, impulsive violence faded away. People were more secure because of the kings' consolidation of political power.

As a social scientist, Kleinfeld is aware of the limitations of moral persuasion. We cannot go straight to the goal of a peaceful society. The means of achieving peace must meet people at the level of their self-interests. "Dirty deals" are among the devices of *Realpolitik* we are likely to need in the process of ending waves of violence. In many of the case studies, we find criminal syndicates that use violence to maintain and expand their wealth and privileges. The state that expects the consent of the people must do whatever it takes to reduce the murder rate. In particular, the state may have to negotiate dirty deals with the syndicate, in which the syndicate agrees to stop acts of violence in exchange for the state's overlooking other kinds of crimes (extortion, trafficking, etc.). Kleinfeld understands that these dirty deals cannot solve all of the problems of a society. But dirty deals can create a platform for gradually concentrating state power and ending the other kinds of abuses.

In the part of *A Savage Order* that is about solutions, Kleinfeld also discusses the role of the middle class. The middle class can be a moderating influence when countries are subjected to privilege violence. The middle class has interests in stability and justice. Kleinfeld examines the complicated history of the middle class as an agent of reform or as an agent of indifference or repression. Although a solution to the problem of privilege violence may require a middle class that is committed to reform, the cases described by Kleinfeld are not very reassuring. It is not unusual for the members of the middle class to look the other way or to support repression when the members of the lower class are victimized.

Kleinfeld also discusses political movements in the part about solutions. Briefly, her argument underlines the requirement that the movements be *political*. There are anecdotes about the effectiveness of moral or religious persuasion, but Kleinfeld argues that these are neither broadly nor permanently effective. These ends can only be assured by movements that affect the structure of political power.

The third part of the book is: Next steps. In much of this part, Kleinfeld offers sound advice about American policy toward hotspots of violence in the world, ranging from foreign aid to tourism.

The third part also reminds us of the boundaries of Kleinfeld's project. The next steps are intended to show us plausible paths towards greater security, while paying close attention to what is distinctive in each country.

Outside the boundaries of Kleinfeld's project are the paths towards other aspects of a good society, chiefly justice. When Kleinfeld discusses fairness, she describes it as something so fundamental, so primal, that its absence often makes governments fall. Yet in the third part of the book, she says

So the real issue is not this loud, stale debate over justice versus peace. Instead, it is the thorny task of crafting agreements that violent individuals are willing to sign, which also include future-oriented provisions that will slowly reduce their political and economic power over time. Such provisions can increase the chances that a short-term deal doesn't result in the long-term degradation of the state. (276–77)

But the debate over justice versus peace is indispensable. Many revolutionists have held that it is worth risking one's life to achieve justice. It is understandable that in this book, Kleinfeld focuses on peace but not justice. The social-scientific evidence that is relevant to achieving peace can easily fill a book. But other investigators will need to show the way to other morally important ends.