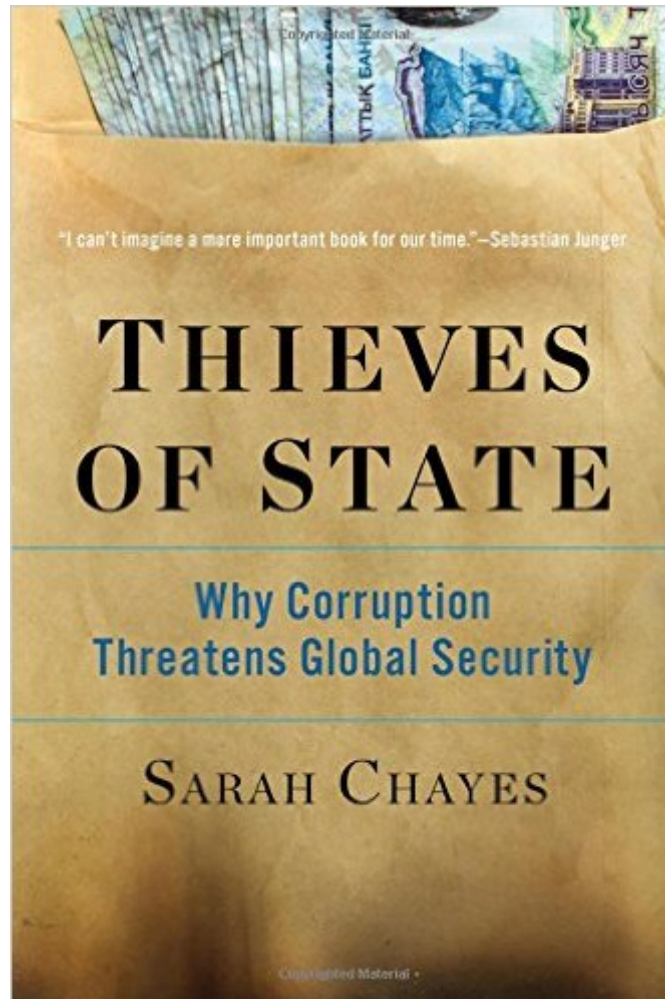


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# Thieves Of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2015 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Current Interest. "I can't imagine a more important book for our time." —Sebastian Junger

The world is blowing up. Every day a new blaze seems to ignite: the bloody implosion of Iraq and Syria; the East-West standoff in Ukraine; abducted schoolgirls in Nigeria. Is there some thread tying these frightening international security crises together? In a riveting account that weaves history with fast-moving reportage and insider accounts from the Afghanistan war, Sarah Chayes identifies the unexpected link: corruption. Since the late 1990s, corruption has reached such an extent that some governments resemble glorified criminal gangs, bent solely on their own enrichment. These kleptocrats drive indignant populations to extremes—ranging from revolution to militant puritanical religion. Chayes plunges readers into some of the most venal environments on earth and examines what emerges: Afghans returning to the Taliban, Egyptians overthrowing the Mubarak government (but also redesigning Al-Qaeda), and Nigerians embracing both radical evangelical Christianity and the Islamist terror group Boko Haram. In many such places, rigid moral codes are put forth as an antidote to the collapse of public integrity. The pattern, moreover, pervades history. Through deep archival research, Chayes reveals that canonical political thinkers such as John Locke and Machiavelli, as well as the great medieval Islamic statesman Nizam al-Mulk, all named corruption as a threat to the realm. In a thrilling argument connecting the Protestant Reformation to the Arab Spring, *Thieves of State* presents a powerful new way to understand global extremism. And it makes a compelling case that we must confront corruption, for it is a cause—not a result—of global instability.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I believe *Thieves of State* is a must-read for anyone concerned about promoting peace and civility in communities, nations, and the world. Sarah Chayes compellingly discusses how the corrupt practices of governments and authorities spawn violent reactionary movements that undermine the security and stability of societies. Chayes's voice is strong and confident, her prose is taut, fact-rich, and colorful, sometimes passionate but never indulgent. The book is intelligent and well-researched and refreshingly accessible, with a strong narrative current to draw the reader along. More than that, this is an important book, one with the potential to alter the discussion and--one may hope--the U. S. government's approach to diplomacy and national security issues. Chayes, a former NPR correspondent, lived in Afghanistan for a decade; a trained historian, she is not only a thoughtful, penetrating observer, but a talented story teller, and many of her stories are disturbing. Imagine, for example, living in a country where the conduct of simple business--obtaining a license, paying a utility bill--requires you to first bribe a bureaucrat or series of functionaries simply to accomplish your objective. Injustices unremedied, with no channel for redress, sow the frustration and desperation that may ultimately erupt in violence. Although Chayes cites examples of national corruption (Egypt, Uzbekistan, Tunisia, Nigeria) and the responses it provokes, a reader may also consider what happens at the individual or local level when a person's or community's sense of fairness is continually, unapologetically offended. Reading this book has changed the way I see the world and my role in it as an unwitting contributor to its miseries, or more hopefully, to its peace.

Fourteen years after the 9-11 attacks and two costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, those countries are still not secure, and regional jihadist groups, aligned and unaligned with al-Qaeda, have emerged. This situation certainly demands a critical analysis of the effectiveness of all U.S. policies and responses to terrorism. In *Thieves of State*, Sarah Chayes hopes to ignite discourse about the role corrupt regimes play in spawning both jihadist insurgencies, as well as Arab Spring protests, and that alliances with these regimes may not be in our long term strategic interests. Consequently, this book is a must read for policy makers who have yet to conduct a critical evaluation of the impact of strategic alliances with corrupt governments, and whether they have increased not lessened our risk. The book catalogues the author's journey through events in Southwest Asia and the Middle East, which have led her to conclude that these alliances are ill-advised and weaken our

national security. She walks us through her life as a reporter, founder of a non-profit in Kandahar City, Afghanistan, and an advisor to three commanders of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, culminating with an advisory position to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen. While in Afghanistan, Sarah Chayes learned that the corrupt government had been mischaracterized as a simple patronage system. In reality, it operated as a vertically integrated criminal syndicate where financial rewards were not distributed downward from patron to client, but instead moved *up* the chain of command in the form of gifts, kickbacks, levies paid to superiors, and the purchase of positions. This realization drastically altered her understanding of corruption and sent her on a mission to understand how other kleptocracies operate. This mission led to her discover that kleptocracies all have the same purpose, self-enrichment, but that they organize differently to achieve this end. In *Thieves of State*, she explains and categorizes different organizing models which range from Egypt's Military-Kleptocracy Complex to Nigeria's Resource Kleptocracy. Throughout, she champions the voices of common citizens she met along the way who were the victims of the venality of public officials. Unfortunately, since governments are designed to interact with other governments, U.S. officials assigned to these countries have often been caught off guard by regime threatening events because they have been denied access or avoided these voices. The reader will find woven in her personal journey historical references to *mirrors* - which are treatises written by European and Islamic political advisors to their contemporary leaders on how to achieve successful governance. These quotes indicate that across time and geography, leaders were consistently advised to avoid engaging in corruption themselves and to swiftly punish those of their employ who did, as corruption was the spark that would ignite rebellion and threaten a sovereign's reign. The book analyzes how different corrupt states are organized not to govern, but to fulfill the political leaders' objective of personal wealth building at the expense of the country. She argues that because of corruption, outsiders viewed these countries as weak or failed states. However, since their goal was avarice not good governance, they succeeded. And while policy makers will find this book filled with key insights from an experienced policy analyst, I also recommend *Thieves of State* for anyone who wants to better understand the complexity of these issues in a clear, concise, yet personalized account.

Kirk E. Meyer  
Founding Director,  
Afghanistan Threat Finance Cell  
Afghanistan, 2006-2011

It is very easy to get depressed while reading Ms. Chayes book. Well intentioned donors and individuals need to be very careful when operating in predatory states like Afghanistan, Angola,

Nigeria, etc. in that they can certainly exacerbate things. She does outline a series of extensive recommendations at the end of her book on how to Do No Harm. What she doesn't talk too much about is how resilient people are in such societies and how they are able to cope and survive. Some migrate, but most sit tight and cope with the predatory nature of institutions surrounding them. One highly theoretical solution not mentioned is Economist Paul Romer's concept of Charter Cities run by a consortium of nations. These Charter Cities would be established in predatory countries and facilitate getting government out of the way of private enterprise and letting them create needed economic activity and create jobs. Charter Cities are underway in Honduras and India and worth tracking.

I highly recommend Thieves of State to anyone looking to expand their understanding of the corruption that cripples global security. Sarah Chayes spent 10 years living in Afghanistan among corruption; this first-hand experience granted her the ability to bestow a deeper understanding of corruption on the ground. Corruption as it occurs not only in Afghanistan but in corrupt societies around the globe. Furthermore, her ability to link what may seem like localized regional corruption to global insecurity is truly illuminating. From the first page, I was hooked. This is a book that succeeds in both entertaining and informing its readers. Thank you, Ms. Chayes, for speaking up on a topic that is all-too-often overlooked.

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