

Foreword

Interim Governments: Institutional Bridges to Peace and Democracy? is a significant and timely contribution to the increasingly important study of transitional regimes. With a broad spectrum of countries currently under or likely soon to be under some form of interim government, the centrality of the volume's subject to ongoing scholarly and policy debates about nation building and post-conflict reconstruction is readily evident. After all, a firm understanding of transitional experiences in societies that have recently emerged from conflict is vital for defining best practices in the present, particularly within today's context of regional upheavals and international activism. It is also vital for ensuring successful transitions in the future—that is, for strengthening efforts to institutionalize security and democratic governance in all post-conflict societies.

Although peace and democracy are the stated objectives of virtually every present-day transitional regime, tellingly, editors Karen Guttieri and Jessica Piombo have framed the volume's subtitle as a question rather than fact. Do interim governments reliably serve as bridges to peace and democracy, particularly as the international community becomes increasingly engaged in shaping and even administering transitional regimes? The volume explores many meaningful aspects of this question: how have interim models changed since the end of the Cold War; how does international involvement in the transitional process transform the balance of power among domestic elites; how does an interim regime affect the nature of the posttransition government? The fundamental question posed in the title gets to the volume's core, helping the contributors focus on pragmatic, practical, and pressing issues of transitional governance.

To help navigate these questions and attendant political, governmental, social, and security issues, Guttieri and Piombo enlisted a team of world-class scholars from the fields of comparative politics and international relations. Productively organized around three main sections—theories, case studies, and conclusions—the volume presents penetrating theories and wide-ranging empirical findings in a coherent and integrated fashion. The five theory-based chapters each offer keen insight into the latest thinking on

transitional governance, offering many stimulating and useful prescriptions, such as encouraging self-rule, promoting agents of change, and engaging minorities. The nine case-study chapters—which either individually or comparatively examine the transitional experience of countries ranging from Afghanistan to Liberia—each provide insights into the broad challenges faced by interim regimes, such as local spoilers, endemic corruption, and budgetary and resource constraints.

While I will leave it to the reader to discover how the volume's many questions are explored and/or answered, I trust the editors and contributors will appreciate my highlighting two salient themes. Although each transitional government is unique in context, form, and structure, the first theme is a common one: legitimacy, governance, and security are inextricably intertwined aspects of stabilization; they are mutually reinforcing elements essential to the success of any transitional regime. As is so starkly evident in present-day Iraq, without meaningful security, good governance and the provision of public services are difficult to attain; without public legitimacy, meaningful security and the rule of law are threatened; and without good governance, legitimacy and public acceptance are lost. Somewhere within this precarious triangular construct sits the role of economic development, which is equally critical to achieving a long-term, successful transition.

While these elements form the core of any transition plan and are touched on throughout this volume, one additional element needs consideration: the role of personality. The personal qualities of interim leaders not only sway the interactions and decisionmaking of key actors in transitions, they also influence the legitimacy and functionality of any government structure—interim or not. As a corollary to this factor, the leadership style of local politicians can greatly affect public perceptions and attitudes. Just as a weak leader can undermine an effective government or transition process, so too can a strong leader help a country heal and evolve. Although these are highly subjective matters not easily measured nor frequently cited as significant variables in comparative politics or international relations, they are wild card factors that warrant serious study.

The volume's second salient theme is that the role of the international community in interim governing structures has a significant bearing on the legitimacy of the transitional and posttransitional regimes—and, by extension, on the security, governance, and economic development of the country. As Guttieri and Piombo argue, the identity of those international agencies forming and administering governments is strongly related to the overall legitimacy of resulting regimes. Further, they observe that the very idea of internationalized interim administrations "harks back to an imperial era, the [bitter] memory of which for many around the world is still fresh." Although this observation about past grievances is not elaborated, the idea of historical memory and perception is highly significant and warrants consideration as

another subjective element contributing to a transition's success or failure. In short, internationalized interim regimes are not formed or administered in a vacuum. When creating, implementing, and overseeing transitional regimes, the international community in general—and the United States in particular—must be acutely aware of this fact. Their administrative actions in one country can have a dramatic effect on perceptions elsewhere, and thus have broad implications and unintended consequences for future internationalized transitional regimes and nation-building missions, even in distant parts of the globe.

Interim Governments is only the most recent in a long line of important and timely volumes on peacemaking and nation building in USIP's publication catalog. Just within the past year, the Institute has published, among many other volumes, *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict*, by Teresa Whitfield; *Human Rights and Conflict: Exploring the Links between Rights, Law, and Peacebuilding*, edited by Julie Mertus and Jeffrey Helsing; *Council Unbound: The Growth of UN Decision Making on Conflict and Postconflict Issues after the Cold War*, by Michael J. Matheson; *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, edited by Chester Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall; and *Constructing Justice and Security after War*, edited by Charles T. Call.

Although transitional regimes are by intent meant to be temporary, their presence on the international scene will undoubtedly remain a constant as long as violence and conflict plague the world. But should decisionmakers and policy implementors pay heed to the thoughtful, astute, and telling observations and conclusions contained herein, perhaps there will be less need to ask whether interim governments are reliable bridges to peace and democracy.

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