

Phillips, R., (2022). *Stabilizing Fragile States: Why it Matters and What to do about it*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

In the years following September 11, 2001, the United States embarked on stabilizing the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan in an effort to protect American interests. These actions have had numerous, profound political implications for both American domestic politics and the global political arena. Phillips' book revisits the stabilization of fragile countries in his new book, *Stabilizing Fragile States: Why it Matters and What to Do About it*. "This book takes the long-range view about the continuing relevance to U.S. national security of our efforts to help fragile states stabilize themselves. Changes in our security priorities such as the emphasis on peer-to-peer competition may obscure for a time the importance of the fragile states issue, but it is certain to reemerge as a challenge to ourselves and our allies" (p.1). Fragile states, in short, are an important policy consideration and Phillips' book joins the academic discussion highlighting his recommendations for these turbulent nations.

According to the book cover, Rufus C. Phillips III "was a political action and counterinsurgency expert with significant foreign experience." This experience included work in the CIA, the United States Army, and serving "as the sole advisor to two Vietnamese army pacification operations, earning him the CIA's Intelligence Medal of Honor."¹ Phillips' work provides a solid foundation as he explains his perspective in *Stabilizing Fragile States: Why it Matters and What to Do About It*.

Phillips explains that "fragile states have been aptly defined as countries with weak government legitimacy and ability—states where there is an absence of or a breakdown in understanding and support between the population and the government" (p.2). Phillips explains

¹ Rufus C. Phillips III, (2021). *USAID Alumni Association*. Retrieved from: <https://usaidalumni.org/rufus-c-phillips-iii/>

that these countries are fragile because of numerous internal issues that are also significantly impacted by “internal armed conflict among unofficial actors fighting for control and creating, or with the potential to create, a safe haven for ideologically motivated attacks against the United States and its allies” (p.2). In short, Phillips explains that fragile states, (and their potential to implode as a country), create serious political and security issues for the international political arena. Thus, Phillips argues that there needs to be a multi-pronged approach for stabilizing these nations before their subsequent collapse creates a larger security problem.

Focusing on the issue of failing states in the twentieth century to currently struggling states in the post-Cold War World, Phillips book is divided into four parts: Part 1: Understanding the Challenge; Part II: Past Interventions; Part III: How to Do Better; and Part IV: The Future. Phillips uses a number of different areas to illustrate interventionist concepts in the Philippines, South Vietnam, El Salvador, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia. While some of these interventions go back to the 1950s and the role of the United States, Phillips does not include other countries like Haiti that were included in the “Banana Wars.” Instead, Phillips focuses on more recent cases as he branches out and explains his ideas for stabilizing fragile states—as highlighted in part III. In Part III of the book, Phillips includes chapters focused on existing capabilities and organizational change; organizing for better assistance; mission and roles; recruitment, education and training; field organization, operations and financing; stabilization strategy and implementation in a hypothetical state.

While Phillips highlights many important pieces of how to stabilize fragile states, he also notes that the current foreign policies and duties to respond in stabilizing these fragile states will continue into the foreseeable future. He writes, “This book is based on the proposition that, for our own security and well-being as well as for that of our allies, we will continue providing

stability assistance” (p.247). Phillips also argues, “Given that assumption, we need to undertake a number of improvements in how the American people, the Congress, and the presidency understand the challenge - how our government orients itself and makes and implements effective policies and how it recruits, trains and deploys, and leads the skilled workforce necessary to accomplish this job” (p.247).

Stabilizing Fragile States: Why it Matters and What to do about it is an important read. Not only does the book explain the security concerns associated with fragile states, but it also gives numerous examples for why this is an important policy initiative, while explaining how the American government system could tighten their efforts with this. This book is an important read for anyone interested in American interventionist policies—undergraduate and graduate students of military strategy, military history or global security and homeland security policy initiatives.

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