

# BOOK REVIEW

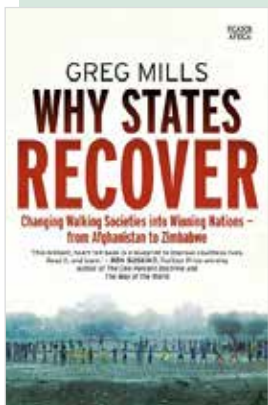
**DICKIE DAVIS** is a Major General in the British Army. Having started his career as military engineer he served extensively on operations over the last 30 years in wide a range of appointments from the tactical to the strategic.

## Why States Recover by Greg Mills

*For once we have a book that is much more than just a critique of what went wrong in a particular country. What makes Greg Mills' book unique is the number and depth of the case studies, the overview of the topic this generates and the way he brings them together to pull out the threads of potential success.*

Starting with nine case studies entitled 'Pathologies and Threads of Failure' Greg takes a critical look at why countries become failed states and the routes to becoming one. Each is fascinating, very readable and filled with the insights of someone who has travelled in and studied the countries. I was particularly struck with the study of Haiti: why is it that the fortunes of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have been so different when they share the same island and the same forces of nature? "Better evidence of the importance of human development and an attitude of self-help and local ownership would be difficult to concoct," Greg concludes. Of moving forward he remarks: "Getting there requires acknowledging why things went wrong. It also requires building a competitive economic base. Above all ... it demands changing the Haitian mindset, from victim to being in charge." Often people shy away from telling the truth in a relationship for fear of confrontation, when what is needed to move forward is an honest appraisal: this is something of which Greg cannot be accused, for he does not pull his punches.

He moves on to examine seven recent examples of intervention, some of which are still ongoing and about which all readers will have some knowledge. Again the insights are thought-provoking and the critique robust. The chapter on Liberia highlights what can be achieved with long term sustained engagement combined with a Government determined to improve the country. Contrast this with the chapter "Libya after Regime Change", in which Greg remarks, the international community approached the challenge with "short arms and deep pockets". As a boy I grew up in Libya and vividly remember rushing, with my family, to Benghazi airport to catch the last flight before the revolution that brought Col Gaddafi to power. It is such a beautiful country; but it has been so misunderstood by the West. For me, Greg is spot on when he quotes an African Development Bank specialist as saying: "Thus, when people refer to the need to rebuild the Libyan state after Gaddafi...what they are really referring to is the need to build the state from scratch." Here is the rub: often events happen so quickly that those empowered to intervene often do so on fairly thin knowledge, when what is actually required is a very deep understanding of the way the country operates. Greg is right: here money is not the issue. Libya is not poor, but unless a basic level of security can be achieved thus enabling a political process, the future looks bleak. Time will tell but intervention from the air has its limits and what a small ground force could have achieved at the beginning may now take a much larger one later on if, indeed, it is even an option.



**WHY STATES RECOVER**  
by Greg Mills  
ISBN: 9781770103252  
Published by Picador  
Africa

Having served in Kosovo I read the chapter with interest and was pleased to see that it homes in on what was, undoubtedly, the most challenging area for this intervention: delinking politics from the black economy and corruption. Many recent interventions have tried to ignore all but the most blatant corruption, regarding it as too difficult an issue to tackle – only to realise too late that, ultimately, it can undermine everything the intervention seeks to achieve. For it is, in many respects, the acid test of how a government relates to its people. Finding an effective way forward is not easy when the sums of money are so huge relative to the wages of those trying to enforce the rule of law. It is an issue that plays into how aid money flows into a country; do the donors trust the government enough to manage the money or do they want to channel it direct to projects? If you have deep knowledge of a particular case study you might find some of them a little short on detail, but from my personal dip-test Greg's analysis captures the big issues.

The last set of 10 case studies picks up on aspects of recovery. Unsurprisingly the chapter on South Africa and the remarkable contribution of Nelson Mandela in fostering forgiveness and in starting to move his

Nation on from a legacy of past wrongs stands out. Indeed what is disturbing about the evidence presented in this book is how much a lack of ability to move on from past wrongs and a 'victim' culture plays into the problems of failed and failing states. It is about the government deflecting the blame rather than taking responsibility and striving to deliver a better service to its people. Why, for example, do some of these failed or failing countries impose a system of visas on foreign visitors and thus deter tourism and investment by making travel harder?

The chapter on Colombia records the Government's progress in running a counter-insurgency campaign that has now brought the FARC to the negotiating table in search of peace. Having recently spent a week in Colombia studying the campaign, I was struck by how much there is to learn from the progress of the last fourteen years. While there is a danger that the peace could be a victor's one with all the potential for future problems that this entails, the fact is the Government has done much right and the country is recovering fast. As Greg notes: "It highlights many lessons of relevance to dealing with Boko Haram in Nigeria or Al-Shabab in East Africa."

In pulling the threads together Greg arrives at some relatively straight forward conclusions: the mind-set of the government is vital: they must be in it for their people not themselves; the solution must be locally owned and driven; to be of help outsiders need a deep knowledge of the country, its issues and must support a local lead; and getting the economy going is key. Of security he notes that "Little progress can be made without security, although security by itself is not enough to ensure recovery, and has to be integrated closely with civilian action around the economy and governance, and be part of a wider political framework." Of course there are a range of other more detailed observations, but it is the weight of underpinning evidence and the recognition that recovery is a highly complex, localised task that cannot be reduced to a list of actions to fix the problem that makes this section remarkable. On intervention he observes: "And forced state-building involving major social, political, economic and cultural change, cannot be managed relatively quickly, and not by outsiders. Indeed, remedying state weakness is fundamentally a

*"Little progress can be made without security, although security by itself is not enough to ensure recovery, and has to be integrated closely with civilian action around the economy and governance, and be part of a wider political framework."*

political act ... Even so, it is often conceived as an apolitical exercise, one driven by technocratic imperatives, not least because these are easier to deliver." Oh how true, I found myself thinking!

Having been engaged in a series of intervention operations, I recognised instantly many of the mistakes and difficulties that Greg highlights in this book: what I had not realised was how widely repeated they were. I found myself reflecting that I wished I had read such an overview at the start of my military career, for I might have avoided a few of them myself. You might not agree with everything in this book, but it will certainly get you thinking and, as a result, enhance your understanding of the world we live in and how to help those less fortunate than ourselves.



# helen.suzman.foundation

promoting liberal constitutional democracy

*"I stand for simple justice, equal opportunity and human rights: the indispensable elements in a democratic society – and well worth fighting for."*

*Helen Suzman*

## INVITATION TO BECOME A FRIEND OF THE FOUNDATION

We invite you to assist the Foundation in promoting liberal constitutional democracy.

Democratic South Africa faces challenging times. There is much to celebrate in South Africa but much that gives rise to concern, frustration and even anger. Each of us can make a difference to ensure the development of South Africa.

The Helen Suzman Foundation is making a difference. We protect the rights enshrined in our country's constitution, tackle issues of governance and accountability in the public arena, disseminate informed research and provide a platform for public engagement and dialogue.

More recently, the Foundation intervened successfully in the Western Cape High Court where we challenged the constitutionality of the Hawks. We have made significant interventions into the public domain. These include:

- The selection of judges by the Judicial Service Commission
- The Protection of State Information Bill
- The proposed National Health Insurance system
- A Youth Program to disseminate knowledge of the Constitution.
- The Traditional Affairs Bill
- The Civilian Secretariat's Green Paper on Policing

The Foundation is not aligned to any political party. We engage actively with a range of people and organisations to enhance the country's emerging democracy.

The Foundation invites you to support our work and become a Friend of the Foundation.

Subscription levels (per annum) – Silver R1 000, Gold R5 000 and Platinum R10 000+

Donations are tax deductible and a receipt will be issued in terms of Section 18A of the Income Tax Act.

Our banking details are: Helen Suzman Foundation, Nedbank, Branch code: 195 805, Account Number: 1958 496006, Swift Code: NEDSZAJJ

We trust that you will respond positively to this appeal. If so, please confirm payment by advising name, email address, telephone number and postal address to Roshan Arnold (roshan@hsf.org.za).

Yours sincerely

Francis Antonie  
Director

**helen.suzman.foundation**  
promoting liberal constitutional democracy

[www.hsf.org.za](http://www.hsf.org.za)