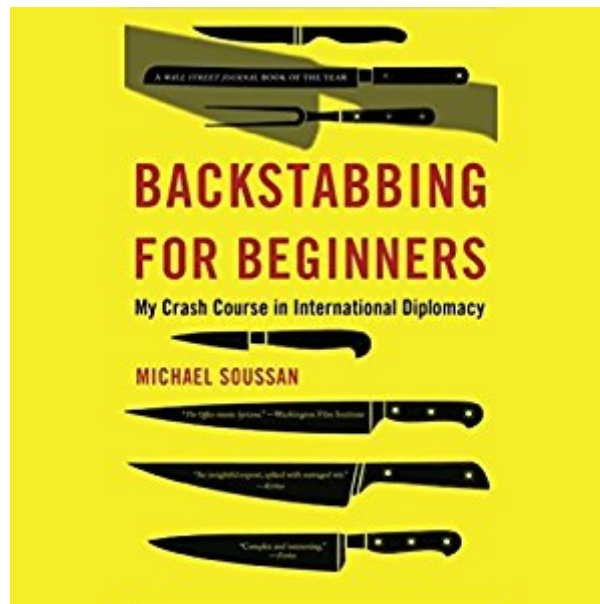# Backstabbing For Beginners: My Crash Course In International Diplomacy

Synopsis

The year is 1997. Michael Soussan, a fresh-faced young graduate, takes up a new job at the UN's Oil-for-Food program, the largest humanitarian operation in the organization's history. His mission is to help Iraqi civilians survive the devastating impact of economic sanctions that were imposed following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. As a gaffe-prone novice in a world of sensitive taboos, Soussan struggles to negotiate the increasing paranoia of his incomprehensible boss and the inner workings of one of the world's notoriously complex bureaucracies. But as he learns more about the vast sums of money flowing through the program, it becomes clear that all is not what it seems. Soussan becomes aware that Saddam Hussein is extracting illegal kickbacks, a discovery that sets him on a collision course with the organization's leadership. On March 8, 2004, in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, Soussan becomes the first insider to call for "an independent investigation" of the UN's dealings with Saddam Hussein. One week later a humiliated Kofi Annan appointed Paul Volcker to lead a team of international investigators, whose findings resulted in hundreds of prosecutions in multiple countries, many of which are still ongoing. Backstabbing for Beginners is at once a witty tale of one man's political coming of age and a stinging indictment of the hypocrisy that prevailed at the heart of one of the world's most idealistic institutions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a unique account of the UN and Iraq from 1997 - 2007 to be read slowly, to savor its humor, its many thought provoking points which go far beyond bureaucratic backstabbing to the inadequacy

today of the original structure of the UN Security Council. It is an accurate, insightful, and funny - and sad - account of working for the UN Organization which, like any bureaucracy, but more so at the UN, seems to breed petty bureaucrats who are overtaken by desires for small personal "empires" and a few who succumb to temptations for unethical advantage that diminish the intended public purposes of their jobs.Soussan was a young, new staff member, in an unusual spot, at a rare time in UN history; thus his self noted neophyte experiences were much different than those of most UN staff who work diligently, unnoticed. Most importantly he explains, with self criticism, how he progressed to make his choice to become a whistle-blower on the UN-Iraq Oil-for-Food fiasco, a system that was put into place by the UN Security Council, namely the USA, UK, Russia, Francis and China, all of whom bear the major opprobrium for the failures, but which they have not accepted. One can also understand the sympathy the author feels for his boss who was tempted to take a few plentiful "apples from the tree" that he saw so many others also steal. Most of the thieves were identified by the Vloker Commission only after incriminating information unexpectedly became available as a side effect of the 2003 ouster of the Sadam.The hilarious nicknames the author's boss used for other players adds to the flavor of this insider's account of human foibles in international government services. The reader will surely laugh at some of his descriptions of UN bureaucrats.

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