

# Organized Crime as Irregular Warfare

## Strategic Lessons for Assessment and Response

By David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks

Organized crime both preys upon and caters to human need. It is corrosive and exploitative, but also empowering, and therefore pervasive. Indeed, though often out of sight, organized crime is everywhere: wherever governments draw the line, criminal actors find profitable ways of crossing it; wherever governments fail to deliver on human need, criminal actors capitalize on unmet desire or despair. For those excluded from the political economy, from patronage systems or elite bargains, organized crime can offer opportunity, possibly also protection. On aggregate, it amounts to an illicit form of governance, furnishing alternative services to a wide range of clients—be it the vulnerable and weak or a covetous elite. Reflecting the strength and resilience of this illicit order, those who stand in its way—individuals, institutions, even states—find themselves corrupted, co-opted, or violently eliminated.

The breadth of organized crime, its clandestine nature, and its blending of creative and destructive effects present acute analytical and policy-related challenges. Much like the response to the threat of terrorism post-9/11, our efforts to counter organized crime are stymied by 1) conceptual uncertainty of the problem at hand; 2) an urge to address the scourge head-on without acknowledging its socioeconomic-political context; and, therefore, 3) unquestioned pursuit of strategies that miss the point, whose progress is difficult to measure, and which may even be counterproductive. Thus, despite occasional operational success, the global illicit economy continues to grow so that, by 2021, 80 percent of the world's population lived in countries with high levels of crime and low levels of resilience to its effects.<sup>1</sup>

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In the case of counterterrorism, *irregular warfare* (IW) emerged as a corrective lens, in that it framed terroristic violence within its essential political context and as a component of a broader struggle of legitimacy. This approach has encouraged a more politically informed understanding of terrorism, insurgency, and other irregular challenges. Might a similar lens also improve our understanding and approach to organized crime? The convergence between the two phenomena suggests a way forward.

First, much like terrorism and insurgency, organized crime is a scourge that survives due to the functions and benefits it provides to desperate populations with few other options. Second, both are intensely political—if not in motivation, then certainly in origins, activities, and effects. Third, much like irregular threats, organized crime is oppositional to the rule of law and feeds on the state’s vulnerabilities. Fourth, both problems expose deep cracks in an international system supposedly governed by capable states exercising sovereignty over their peoples and lands. Fifth, both phenomena have a clandestine facet but are enmeshed with the licit world in often unpredictable ways. Thus, much like counterinsurgency, efforts to counter organized crime must operate both underground and above-ground, both counter a threat and address its drivers, and proceed with far greater awareness of what constitutes success—and for whom.

Based on these commonalities, this article applies the insight of IW to the study of and response to organized crime. The argument is divided into three parts. First, the paper makes the case that, despite key differences, organized crime shares fundamental features with other irregular challenges—principally insurgency. Second, the paper lays out six major lessons of irregular warfare, informed by the bruising campaigns associated with the “War on Terror.” Third, the paper applies these lessons to various state efforts to counter organized crime. The analysis challenges how organized crime is typically

understood—its character, expression, and purpose—and encourages a more politically informed way of assessing and responding to this threat.

## The Overlap: Organized Crime and Irregular Warfare

Much like terrorism, organized crime is at once easy to intuit but difficult to define. If policymakers can be accused of adopting too narrow a focus on the criminal behavior itself, academics often overtheorize the concept to the point of irrelevance. For the purposes of this analysis, organized crime is defined as *any group, with some degree of structure, whose primary objective is profit and whose methods include illegal activity, ranging from the use of force, to the corruption of public officials and predation of civilian populations*. This definition captures some of the phenomenon’s key components: its 1) collective nature; 2) pecuniary objective; 3) illicit ways; and 4) exploitative effects.

These components allow organized crime to nest conceptually within irregular warfare. The U.S. Department of Defense defines irregular warfare as “a struggle among state and non-state actors to influence populations and affect legitimacy.” It adds that “IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, irregular warfare like organized crime, is concerned with 1) collective action, that 2) uses violence among other illicit methods, and 3) which has corrupting, or outright destructive, effects on society.

As a rubric, IW comprises principally the challenges of insurgency and terrorism. The contribution of the IW lens is that it posits these threats as components of a contest for legitimacy, wherein violence merely supports a political struggle. In contrast to the “regular wars” that, supposedly, are won just through military means, irregular actors combine several lines of effort, weaponize narratives

to gain or erode support, and exploit societal, economic, and political weaknesses to build strength and sustain the challenge. This is the playbook of insurgents, forcing governments to respond in kind, via political and informational channels and with security forces in support.<sup>3</sup>

The major difference between organized crime and IW actors is the objective: insurgents or terrorists pursue a political or ideological objective whereas criminals are thought to be concerned solely with profit. Still, much like insurgents, actors involved in organized crime shape the surrounding political landscape to maximize profit, be it through corruption, the erosion of institutions, or their insistence on impunity. In effect, the organized criminal element is engaging in a “struggle among state and non-state actors to influence populations and affect legitimacy.” The goal is to align behavior with the criminal business model, so that an illicit alternative emerges to the rule of law. In this way, criminal enterprises come to determine “who gets what, and when,” which is the very essence of politics.<sup>4</sup>

Given these commonalities, the response to organized crime and to insurgency should also overlap. In suggesting counterinsurgency theory as a crime-fighting tool, a caveat is immediately needed given the term’s military connotations. The point is not to militarize further the response to organized crime. Instead, counterinsurgency *in its theory* is a political activity. Its contribution to consideration of organized crime is to cast the phenomenon as fueled by specific political and social drivers which must, alongside the criminal actors, also be addressed—perhaps as the primary focus. In a similar vein, the purpose of irregular warfare (despite its allusion to *war*) is to position the competition of legitimacy and influence over contested populations as the primary concern, and the violence as a contingent component of the overall struggle.

The discussion of legitimacy requires two clarifications. First, the state cannot in any way

assume to hold legitimacy merely because it is “duly constituted” or has legal status. The tendency to view the state unquestioningly as a provider, and its enemies as the threat, wishes away the very heart of the problem: a lack of government legitimacy and split loyalties among the population. Legitimacy is subjective, fluid, contextual, and contested; nothing can be taken for granted.

Second, legitimacy in irregular warfare is not a popularity contest but speaks instead to the “right to lead.” Winning legitimacy means controlling or co-opting contested populations, or shaping the “beliefs and attitudes of the affected actors regarding the normative status of a rule, government, political system or governance regime.”<sup>5</sup> Popular views can be shaped mainly through coercion, but sustaining cooperation is made easier if co-option also plays a role. Either way, gaining legitimacy means more than emotive affinity; it also involves a self-interested calculation that such loyalty is likely to pay off. This is, indeed, what is meant by winning both hearts *and* minds.

## The Lessons of Irregular Warfare

So much for the theory. It is no secret that counterinsurgency, as practiced by the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, has not adhered to the ideals laid out in doctrine. It would be facile to suggest that the theory remains valid even if practice falls short. Such a defense shields theory from criticism and generates unfalsifiable assertions. The better source of insight lies precisely in the accumulated experience from the field—ours and that of others, both negative and positive. Six major lessons stand out.

### *The Socio-Economic and Political Context*

It became clear soon after the 9/11 attacks that the United States and many of its European allies had unlearned whatever they might once have known about irregular warfare, particularly the matter

at hand: terrorism. In responding to attacks by al-Qaeda, no real distinction was made between the use of terrorism *as part of a strategy* and the use of terrorism *as a strategy in and of itself*. As Wiewiorka and others have argued, most groups use terror as one of many “methods,” yet for others it becomes all-consuming, that is, the entire “logic” of the political project.<sup>6</sup> We can term the former *insurgents* and the latter *terrorists*—in the end, the labeling is secondary to the implications raised.

Indeed, with *terrorism* (also known as “pure terrorism”), armed politics is divorced from the purported mass base in whose name action is undertaken. These groups have so isolated themselves structurally that they have no social standing and can only express themselves via attacks, with minimal political follow-up. In such circumstances—really, a “failed insurgency”—the state can focus on the perpetrators themselves because these clandestine actors are the sum total of the “movement.” With *insurgency*, however, a focus on “rooting out the terrorists,” to the exclusion of political mediation, often leads to new cycles of violence.<sup>7</sup> It then becomes important to understand the functions that insurgency serves among its constituents and to design a response that addresses these aspects along with the use of violence.

The American-led response to the 9/11 attacks seldom made this differentiation. It did not concern itself with the reasons for isolated yet significant pockets of support for al-Qaeda or the factors that might spread it further.<sup>8</sup> A similarly narrow approach characterized early operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the latter, U.S. forces were certainly capable of defeating the Taliban but it proved far more difficult to address the continued instability in the country, never mind the geostrategic factors that sustained the insurgent struggle. In the former, the U.S. military initially treated the Iraqi insurgency as if its members were both finite and few—as if taking out enough “dead-enders” would do the job.<sup>9</sup>

Any gains made in this manner failed to change the political motivation for insurgency or the opportunities of mobilization.<sup>10</sup>

Missed in both cases were the political and social drivers of insurgency. The purpose of security forces should be to provide the shield behind which the government enacts the policies necessary to mobilize support, thereby marginalizing violent hardliners. This attempt at social engineering, all while bullets are flying, is also what makes counterinsurgency so difficult. In many cases, political elites are more interested in retaining power and privilege than addressing the reasons for strife. Even where there is political will and the right policies have been identified, one cannot overstate the challenges of sequencing, of balancing short- and long-term goals, of pushing change through a bureaucratic system, and of measuring progress appropriately—all necessary steps. Of course, the complexity is compounded where the state is weak or never exercised sovereign control to begin with.

### *Militarization of Response*

Counterinsurgency emerged as a corrective to the narrower counter-terrorist lens of the War on Terror, yet a review of its application in the 2000s and 2010s reveals the second major lesson, namely the tendency to militarize even “whole-of-government” endeavors. In Iraq and Afghanistan, counterinsurgency, at best, shaped only *military* operations. Outside of the Pentagon, even the term *counterinsurgency* was problematic, given its military connotations. Within the Pentagon, it was not seen as real warfighting and as worthy of institutional investment.

In the end, this approach deprived the efforts of political content, leading to the eventual failure of the (mostly military) “surges” in both countries. In Iraq, despite improved security, the United States could never truly address the sectarian Shia elements it had anointed the future leaders of the country.<sup>11</sup> This political contradiction undid the

hard-won gains of the surge and fueled violence well beyond the departure of U.S. troops. The jury is still out as to whether the latest mowing of the grass—the military dismantling of the ISIS counter-state—will be politically sustained or have a more transient effect.<sup>12</sup>

In Afghanistan, no political plan emerged to address the conflict's regional dimension or to resolve contradictory Western aims.<sup>13</sup> Despite a strategy that hinged on the legitimacy of the Kabul government, its corruption and the abuses of its security forces persisted with impunity. Similarly, the political plan constructed in the West paid scant attention to Afghan norms, resulting in a highly centralized national government that ran counter to the fragmented nature of the Afghan state. It did not help that, in both theaters, the United States gave counterinsurgency only two or three years to work, betraying faith in this concept as a quick military fix to deep-rooted political problems.

The charge of militarization in the U.S. and allied response should not be taken to mean the military has no role to play in countering political violence. There is a clear need for security forces to target predatory actors and provide security for contested populations. The issue is that strike operations typically receive far more resources than security, and that neither are linked to a viable political process that gives military activity strategic meaning.

### *Mirror-Imaging: State, Society, Interests*

A third lesson, from Afghanistan and Iraq, but also elsewhere, lies in the tendency to confuse the interests and norms of the intervening states with those of the state where the conflict unfolds. Mirror-imaging takes many forms. Militarily, the United States and allied partners have typically evinced insufficient understanding of the abilities and needs of the institutions they seek to support, and assistance therefore defaults to the norms and practices of the intervening institution.<sup>14</sup> A conventional

military approach to these conflicts is rarely appropriate, and yet, as Greentree notes, "It is hard to get around the fact that militaries can only attempt to transfer what they know."<sup>15</sup>

More fundamental is political mirror-imaging, or where an intervening government assumes its interests are shared by the frontline governments through which action is to be taken. The United States long presumed that both it and the fledgling Iraqi government were united in seeking representative democracy, and yet the sectarian parties thus elevated were also those running radical Iran-backed militias.<sup>16</sup> The entire surge was based on the political desire of Maliki to reconcile with the Sunni tribal leaders and political elite, but it did not occur.<sup>17</sup> In Mali, the West's counter-terrorism assistance presumes that the political elite will move to spread "good governance" in the areas most affected by extremism. Instead, it has proved extremely challenging to sway the "indifferent political elite in Mali," which some perceive as having done "the bare minimum ... to invest in the violence-wracked north and central regions of the country."<sup>18</sup>

In Afghanistan, NATO and the international community were so uncertain of their political aims that counter-terrorist prerogatives often conflicted with, or eclipsed entirely, efforts to stand up local institutions capable of sustaining peace and security.<sup>19</sup> In the midst of this confusion, it was never clear which goals, if any, enjoyed buy-in in Kabul. Certainly, Karzai's theft of the 2009 election and his government's complicity with organized crime suggested significant divergences on two of the campaign's major fronts.<sup>20</sup> Given this brittle political foundation, NATO's mission too often devolved into peripatetic charity services in the rural hinterland in the hope of thereby winning hearts and minds (but for what?).<sup>21</sup>

At the broadest level, this concerns not only divergent political interests but completely different conceptions of the state. In Nigeria, Mali and indeed most of the Sahel, in Mozambique, the Democratic

Republic of Congo, and—in Asia—Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Philippines, insurgencies drag on in part because the areas most affected are not those of concern to the elite. Efforts at “state-building” do not often acknowledge this reality and instead assume a level of local ownership that does not obtain.

Even in Colombia, where counterinsurgency helped beat back FARC, entrenched schisms in the state have hampered the crucial political consolidation of the neglected hinterland. There are undeniably compelling arguments for any government to focus on the western *sierra* region, where the major cities are located and 95 percent of the population lives, rather than the more vulnerable minority, which resides in FARC’s former stronghold and where violence, drug trafficking, and insecurity still prevail.<sup>22</sup> Still, given the lack of alternative livelihoods, the profits of the drug trade, and the power of local gangs, there are also compelling arguments for the rural population to return to coca cultivation. Thus, the schism endures—something that should inform grand plans to unify the state.

Indeed, the case of Colombia raises the crucial question whether “state-building” and “good governance” are at all realistic approaches to conflict termination. In Colombia, the counterinsurgency effort benefited from professional security forces, generous U.S. military aid, and a tradition of democracy reaching back to the late nineteenth century. Even then, the incentives of electoral democracy and the strict limitations on national resources made truly unifying the country a fleeting priority. For international attempts to advise less stable or less coherent nation-states, the implications are deeply inauspicious.

### ***Community Mobilization***

Despite overall success, the Colombian counterinsurgency strategy points to a key political lesson: the need for more creative ways of tying the periphery to the center, all as part of a stable political compact.<sup>23</sup>

If a government evinces no political will to exercise sovereignty in line with Weberian norms, how can it nonetheless fend off insurgency and limit insecurity? Some scholars suggest an alternative order—one that reflects the fissiparous nature of statehood yet retains sufficient central oversight to avert conflict. Ken Menkhous terms the approach a “mediated state,” one wherein “the government relies on partnership (or at least coexistence) with a diverse range of local intermediaries and rival sources of authority to provide core functions of public security, justice, and conflict management in much of the country.”<sup>24</sup> Others call such arrangements “hybrid political orders” and laud this lens as a pragmatic recognition of how many states function in reality rather than in theory.<sup>25</sup>

This approach not only acknowledges the artificiality of the state in many insurgency-threatened contexts, but also that, in such contexts, the attempted imposition of the state can be deeply counterproductive. In Somalia, a major reason for popular resistance to the strong state sought through various Western interventions is that, historically, that very same state has acted as “a catalyst for criminality, violence, and communal tensions.”<sup>26</sup> In Afghanistan, local communities rejected central authority in part owing to vivid memories of abuse, injustice, and cruelty perpetrated by the state.<sup>27</sup> In Iraq, the continued empowerment of an increasingly sectarian Shia government to deal with a Sunni insurgency led to predictable outcomes, with death squads in government uniforms cleansing entire neighborhoods and pushing their Sunni compatriots into the arms of al-Qaeda.<sup>28</sup> Here and elsewhere, “more state” is no recipe for more stability.

This insight reveals the limitations of counterinsurgency theory, which aims to expand governance to previously “ungoverned areas.” For one, while the theory emphasizes that government control spreads like ink spots across paper, it does not display much concern for what was on that



Men, women, and children work and live from what they find in the Juarez garbage dump. They collect what they find for themselves or to sell. Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, September 1, 2021. Photo by David Peinado Romero at Shutterstock ID: 2035787651.

paper before the ink reached it. In fact, the analogy is critically flawed, as there really is no societal equivalent to a blank piece of paper. Instead, each human locality heaves with activity, intrigue, and politics, and the challenge lies in understanding and engaging with this local level.<sup>29</sup>

The point matters, because how these areas are understood determines how they are handled. If seen as places where institutions are absent, the go-to solution will be to quickly impose the state to fill the void. More promising is to engage with the local structures that regulate life away from the state, so that they may be co-opted to benefit both center and periphery within the context of a loosely unified national compact. Be they systems of governance, security, or justice, these local institutions are often seen as more legitimate by the local population. In

Afghanistan, for example, the thin spread and many deficiencies of the national courts meant that most Afghans preferred informal bodies—such as *jirgas* and *shuras* of local elders—for conflict adjudication.<sup>30</sup> In Mali, popular trust in traditional structures by far exceeds that placed in the police and national courts.<sup>31</sup> In post-conflict Timor Leste, rural areas beyond the state’s administrative reach are governed through “customary forms of community organization.” As Bjoern Hofmann notes, state-based institutions “acknowledge these forms of self-governance and work alongside them, while at the same time aiming to strengthen the new administrative structures staffed by elected representatives.”<sup>32</sup>

Combining top-down and bottom-up initiatives in this manner may be the best political model for several insurgency-threatened states.

The burning question is what level of decentralization to accept, and at what cost. Even if authority is ceded to the periphery, the state must nonetheless be capable of intervening when local-level mechanisms turn predatory and risk the legitimacy of the arrangement and of the state. The key lies in the state underwriting and empowering informal variations on the periphery, thereby satisfying local needs, empowering local political allies, and contributing to a desire to be part of, rather than resist, the state at the heart of it all. Needless to say, while the mediated state provides a more realistic lens, it does not significantly simplify the task of achieving justice and peace.

### *Lack of Strategy*

For American and other soldiers, the discovery of counterinsurgency promoted an understanding of war more “as is” rather than “as imagined.” Particularly instructive were various “counterinsurgency principles” that emphasized the importance of political understanding, of unified command, of intelligence-led operations, of population control and support, and of using only the appropriate use of force for campaign objectives.<sup>33</sup> For a conventionally minded force, this guidance—though banal—was also important, highlighting the limited utility of military force in the absence of legitimacy.

The issue was that the guidance came to fill a function that it could not possibly play—that of strategy. In Afghanistan in particular, military units let the necessarily broad principles of counterinsurgency become the campaign plan—not least because of pervasive confusion as to the actual strategy in place.<sup>34</sup> The problem was not necessarily the absence of actual strategic goals but rather their multiplicity, contradictions, and lack of ordering.<sup>35</sup> Instead of achieving clarity at this level, the general conception was that, if the counterinsurgency principles could just be upheld, stability would ensue, allowing U.S. forces to withdraw.

Clearly, “best practice” is not “best strategy.” Strategy—in this instance—can be defined very simply. Eliot Cohen casts it as “the art of choice that binds means with objectives.” He elaborates, “It is the highest level of thinking about war, and it involves priorities (we will devote resources here, even if that means starving operations there), sequencing (we will do this first, then that), and a theory of victory (we will succeed for the following reasons).”<sup>36</sup> Plainly, a counterinsurgency field manual cannot address these difficult questions or resolve the attendant trade-offs, though it may provide some guidance on how to think and engage with the modern battlefield.

Strategic clarity would have required two broad steps. First, the essential foundation is political understanding of the problem. What type of war are we embarking on, asks Clausewitz. French Marshal Ferdinand Foch put it in similar terms: *de quoi s’agit-il?*—or, “What is it all about?”<sup>37</sup> What the military calls mission analysis, also known as a “strategic estimate,” is crucial, because it unpacks a complex situation, places it in political context, and maps the strategies and interests of its various players, thereby to examine and critique our own approach.<sup>38</sup>

This step was all but absent in Afghanistan and only fleetingly applied in Iraq. In Afghanistan, it took too many years to appreciate the geo-strategic context of the Taliban’s struggle, the resistance to a central state, the roles of corruption at the central and local levels, and the exact relation between the Taliban and America’s actual target, al-Qaeda.<sup>39</sup> In Iraq, during the surge years, it was finally acknowledged that within a sectarian Shia-controlled political context, the Sunni community had some legitimate grievances and were pushed toward al-Qaeda on account of government predation. The compacts made with Sunni partners on the ground, to protect them from both Shia death-squads and al-Qaeda coercion, stemmed from this estimate.<sup>40</sup>

An in-depth estimate produces a viable foundation for the second crucial step, namely the formulation of strategy. The key requirement here is a theory of success, or an accounting for how proposed methods will achieve desired outcomes. This theory requires awareness of national interests, existing and needed legal authority, the assumptions necessary to enable planning, and the risks created both by the plan's implementation and by its possible sources of failure. Most difficult, perhaps, is the need to track progress, neither confusing that which is measurable for what to measure nor confusing activity with progress.<sup>41</sup> As Cohen put it above, strategy is “the highest level of thinking about war,”—and about peace—and yet if it fails our efforts are almost certainly doomed.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Black Box of Political Will*

If the art of strategy offers a way out of darkness—a method to structure the response—its countervailing force is the lack of political will for precisely such action. How good are concepts, theory, and best practices if the government that is to act prefers to go in a different direction? By way of illustration, only a handful of the forty-seven countries that deployed troops to Afghanistan authorized them to operate at an intensity appropriate for the campaign. Others imposed caveats on where and how their troops could be used. In Mazar-e-Sharif, a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) of 500–600 soldiers was responsible for stabilizing four provinces and a combined 2.5 million people. What does this say about the contributing states' political will? Can any strategy, or any field manual, truly change the likely outcome of such an investment?

Political will eats strategy for breakfast, as the saying goes. Where it is lacking, the search for better practice and more enlightened approaches appears simply to chase the shadow of a larger problem. Still, an inadequacy of political will is not a dead end. First, how does one measure it? In the absence of some gauge, the main sign of its absence will be

the lack of progress, yet such analysis turns circular: failed operations reflect inadequate will whereas successful ones do not. Political will then becomes a catch-all, purely retrospective argument, both unfalsifiable and meaningless. Second, political will is not static. It fluctuates according to events on the ground, domestic developments, electoral interests, and understandings of foreign affairs.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, while acknowledging political will, those concerned with effecting change must also consider how to shift opinion accordingly, or how to operate effectively within the constraints at hand. Either way, it would seem necessary to focus analysis on *why* states engage in irregular campaigns, how they perceive their adversaries, and the balance of interests that determines both commitment and approach. The lack of honest engagement in these questions—particularly vis-à-vis Afghanistan—lies at the root of the very poor performance seen in that campaign.

### **Lessons of IW Applied to Organized Crime**

The above review of IW lessons argues for more comprehensive analysis of informal political economies and better proficiency at strategy development. What is striking is that any review of state efforts to counter organized crime reveals a similar set of lessons. The precise context differs, but the same tendencies obtain.<sup>44</sup> This commonality speaks to an apparent pathology in how we frame and respond to irregular problem-sets, organized crime included.

### *The Socio-Economic and Political Context*

Much as with irregular challenges, efforts to counter organized crime struggle to internalize the socio-economic and political context in which this phenomenon unfolds. Rather than a self-standing problem of illicit behavior, criminality is enmeshed within social and political networks that must be incorporated in analysis and response. On the latter, it becomes necessary to query and address the

drivers that lead people to participate in or rely on crime, not least when the state is unwittingly or otherwise contributing to the problem.

Though this advice may appear commonsensical, it seldom informs praxis. Efforts to combat wildlife crime in sub-Saharan Africa generally frame the poachers as the problem to be suppressed and fail to consider the local embeddedness of this practice. And yet, in northern Kenya, for example, poaching occurs within a context of “cattle rustling, road banditry, and inter-communal conflict,” and therefore requires a broader, political response.<sup>45</sup> For similar reasons, “commercial poaching” must be distinguished from “subsistence poaching,” because while both threaten local fauna, each has its own drivers.<sup>46</sup> Where poaching is perceived locally as a coping mechanism due to the state’s failure to govern, a response targeting the activity in isolation may bring further polarization, desperation, and—potentially—conflict.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, state efforts to counter corruption must account for its social and political acceptance in contexts where the licit order is failing. Where patrimonialism and nepotism are simply the way to get things done, suppressing these practices risks displacement and chaos.<sup>48</sup>

Here, and elsewhere, organized crime provides a safety valve for populations with few other options. The cultivation and trade in narcotics—in Afghanistan, Peru, and Colombia—stem fundamentally from the vulnerability of abandoned communities. As Buxton describes, these circumstances make the cultivation of drugs an obvious choice, given the minimal start-up costs or technical requirements, the durability of the product, the ease of its transport, and—of course—the reliability of its market.<sup>49</sup> Absent viable alternatives, crop eradication is unlikely to affect this coping mechanism; indeed, it may only exacerbate vulnerability and thereby incentivize exactly the criminality that it seeks to prevent.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, people smuggling is rooted in profound global inequalities and insecurity in

the origin countries. To crack down on the illicit service provided by smugglers, rather than address its demand, is to gamble that those fleeing death or desperation will stop trying at the first sign of difficulty. Basic supply-and-demand economics suggest otherwise. If populations are desperate for the service, smugglers will find new countermeasures and increase their prices accordingly, all while their clients do whatever they can—crime, prostitution, or predation—to source the needed funds.<sup>51</sup>

Criminal gangs, too, can be enmeshed in their community.<sup>52</sup> In Rio, Comando Vermelho blends coercion with co-option, providing employment, some degree of government service, and even entertainment to the disadvantaged citizens of the city’s *favelas*. In a dynamic seen in other contexts, enforcement against the gang therefore is interpreted as an attack on the community, not least due to the “collateral damage,” further alienating it and elevating the gang as local heroes.<sup>53</sup> Given this social embeddedness, Skaperdas recommends viewing inner-city gangs as “essentially part of the larger problem of the successful integration of such areas into mainstream society and the modern nation-state.”<sup>54</sup> This lens, then, generates a different response.

The overriding lesson is that organized crime “is *not* an extension of a foreign body to the existing system, country or infrastructure. If anything, it is the product of a country’s history, its social conditions, its economic system, its political elite and its law enforcement regime.”<sup>55</sup> It must therefore be asked why the social contract and political settlement are fueling organized crime. This is not an invitation to moral relativism. Instead, the framing should help distinguish between crime as coping mechanism and crime as exploitation—and query the state’s role in enabling either. It should also encourage a distinction between foot-soldiers, who in dysfunctional conditions can readily be replaced, and the organizers of criminal activity, who are more inaccessible and may even enjoy some level of state protection.

As a positive example, the nations involved in patrolling the Gulf of Guinea have come to recognize the need not just for coordination at sea but also a comprehensive approach to the push factors on land that are fueling the problem of piracy. As Ralby explains, “Focusing on three pillars—security, development and stewardship—this non-traditional military effort seeks to combine operational security matters with efforts to safeguard the marine environment and improve the quality of life on land. Food security, economic security, energy security, and environmental sustainability are all part of this effort.”<sup>56</sup> Of course, the more comprehensive the strategy, the more challenging its implementation.

Similarly, the strategy adopted by the Contact Group on Piracy of the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) purposefully went beyond the purely military considerations to focus as well on “the financial networks behind the individual groups of Somali pirates...the masterminds, or kingpins, and the funders.”<sup>57</sup> Going further, in some Somali communities, the creation of viable economic alternatives caused local elites to repel rather than shelter pirates.<sup>58</sup> This is the type of systemic response needed, borne out of a full mapping of the problem and players involved.

Within a globalized environment, such “mapping” must extend transnationally. For example, it is unclear how the Philippine government can combat drug use without addressing the transnational connections of that archipelago nation, not least to the lawless parts of Myanmar where the product is cultivated, or to the seas over which it is shipped. To kill an ever-growing number of poor Filipino drug users, or even low-level operators, is to strike the wrong target, at devastating human cost.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, naval patrols in Southeast Asia can catch the low-level pirates, but their bosses, investors, and fixers sit in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore and can easily replace lost earners.<sup>60</sup> Many of the poachers arrested in South Africa are from the lowest rungs of an

enterprise overseen by evasive crime lords, who keep their distance, benefit from political and business protection, and won’t so easily be caught.<sup>61</sup>

Taking embeddedness one step further, the illicit world is enmeshed within its licit counterpart, the state’s systems and institutions. Indeed, in many cases, because of the large sums involved, the threat of violence, and the weakness of institutions, the ultimate enabler of criminal activity can be found within the very institutions charged with response. This situation not only challenges the supposedly bright line that ought to divide “coppers” from “robbers,” but highlights another way in which strategies of response must go beyond the criminal activity itself and also consider its drivers and roots.

### *Militarization of Response*

Much as with campaigns of irregular warfare, the struggle against organized crime typically takes on a militarized form. “Militarization” does not speak exclusively to the use of military forces—though this happens—but rather to a purely suppressive strategy. The theory is that success is achieved by increasing the costs on active criminals and deterring would-be emulators or those relying upon their services. Be it in counterinsurgency or counter-crime, unless these efforts also address the *reasons* behind the behavior, they typically confront the “hydra effect” of eliminating one target only to find another. Also, as the threat adapts to avoid imposed costs, the response must give chase, leading to a spiraling game of cat-and-mouse.

On America’s southern border, the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has adopted an “enforcement-only” strategy that relies on “a single concept—*deterrence*.”<sup>62</sup> CBP is not a military unit, but it is the “largest police force in the world”—accounting for 60,000 personnel in 2014, with a fleet of some 250 planes and other aerial assets. Yet, as Erickson explains, deterrence “failed to address the complexity behind peoples’ decision to move, struggled to measure success in relation to



Boy sitting on destroyed tank on the hills over Kabul City in Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2012. Photo by Karl Allen Lugmayer at Shutterstock ID: 1710655522.

recidivism and reaped immeasurable human costs and daunting economic ones.<sup>63</sup> It has also made the services provided by smugglers more lucrative.<sup>64</sup> Similar outcomes can be seen in the use of warships to fight smugglers in the Mediterranean, Australia’s detention of migrants in off-shore detention centers, Turkey’s military deployments on its beaches, and the mining of the Turkish-Syrian border.

Likewise, anti-poaching efforts often apply the same search-and-destroy method as seen in the “War on Terror,” resulting in hunting expeditions to target those who themselves hunt. On the seas, well-intended expeditions to stop the poaching of whales follow the same logic—that by locating the actors involved and obstructing their business model, the activity will stop or at least be reduced. In both cases, a necessary (but often absent) component would

be to address the political economy sustaining the market. Unless it is addressed, our countermeasures risk making crime more profitable, as those involved claim higher premiums due to elevated risks.<sup>65</sup>

As a final illustration, various counter-gang operations in Central and South America have revealed the futility of force as a self-standing strategy. Operating from tightly packed slums where opportunity is lacking, the gangs use the local population as labor, creating a symbiosis—but also a human shield to deter enforcement. When states do intrude into these areas, the operations are hugely dislocating to the local community and ineffectual in weakening the gangs. Typically, they either empower the gang by cementing its bonds with a beleaguered population or create a power vacuum that new gangs fight

to control. Even so, these strategies are common, as seen in the periodic *mano duro* (firm hand) or *cero tolerancia* (zero tolerance) strategies adopted by Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, and El Salvador.<sup>66</sup>

The causes of militarization are manifold. First, crime invites traditional policing, and the police forces are designed to stop and deter crime. In criminology, deterrence requires the *credible* threat of *swift* and *severe* punishment, leading therefore to increasingly punitive strategies.<sup>67</sup> Second, in a crisis, there is undeniable appeal in how quickly security forces can be deployed to “deal with it.” A comprehensive response requires more generous timelines, more resources across more agencies, and more coordination, all of which presumes great capacity and leadership. Finally, once a security response is deployed, it is all-too tempting for governments to consider the crisis “managed” and move on, rather than transition to that longer-term, less reactive, and more effective approach. As such, what was intended as crisis-response becomes the whole strategy.

Militarization of response is not just ineffective; it can also lead to harm against non-combatants and violations of due process. In response to mounting abuse and corruption within CBP, the Obama administration created an Integrated Advisory Panel (IAP) to professionalize the force. The body’s interim and final reports spoke of a vast entity of uncertain standards that, despite progress, struggled with containing the power and resources handed to it. Indeed, stories from the southern border reveal the mass dehumanization of migrant populations (more correctly, refugees), as the response seeks to make their experience increasingly difficult. As the provider and user of criminal services are conflated, and the focus remains punitive, the result can be mass targeting and incarceration (or worse) of entire populations.

Because these strategies do not work, there is also a danger of spiraling costs and commitment. In the United States, “Congress continues to channel more U.S. taxpayer dollars to immigration enforcement

agencies (more than \$28.6 billion now) than all other enforcement agencies combined, including the FBI, DEA, ATF, US Marshals, and Secret Service.”<sup>68</sup> Over time, such commitments become entrenched, perhaps even irreversible, particularly if they have led organized crime to escalate in response.<sup>69</sup> There are also political costs involved, as militarized strategies provide the semblance of decisiveness and poll very well (the same applies within the context of counter-terrorism). In the Philippines, for example, a drug war that has caused at least 6,000 deaths (and possibly four times that), and which has patently not solved the drug problem in the country, nonetheless meets the approval of 81.6 percent of the population.<sup>70</sup> *In extremis*, militarization creates a nation at war with itself.

The problem of militarization does not mean that enforcement measures should be avoided altogether. “Escalation dominance” is often crucial to strategic effectiveness. Where states seek to address gang problems without such leverage, via negotiations or non-violent measures such as “Community Violence Reduction” (CVR) programs, they have found themselves hemmed in by the gang’s authority. As International Crisis Group notes, bargaining with a gang assumes, at least implicitly, that it is willing to “abandon extortion and other criminal practices, and eventually disarm and demobilize”—and this is unlikely when the state is in a position of weakness.<sup>71</sup> As to CVR, aimed at providing employment and political inclusion, such initiatives face strategic and ethical hazards when attempted in gang-owned territory. In effect, they must choose between working *with the gangs*, even paying them off, and seeking to avoid them altogether—and thereby missing the most at-risk demographic.<sup>72</sup> Many crime experts therefore question the impact of violence-prevention initiatives in contexts of chronic insecurity.<sup>73</sup>

For coercion to gain strategic meaning, it must be integrated within a broader approach, one that addresses the push and pull factors of organized crime *as well as* its manifestations. Much as with

irregular warfare, this requirement raises questions about the type of force needed and alongside what other actors it should operate. As in counterinsurgency, the force should understand the strategically appropriate level of force and how it relates to “political primacy.” Typically, the lack of strategic aptitude and of non-military support almost ensure that these conditions are not met, resulting in more insecurity, illegitimacy and the felt need for more enforcement.

### *Mirror-Imaging: State, Society, Interests*

Much as with irregular warfare, efforts to counter organized crime often involve a better resourced state assisting one less able. Also in both contexts, such relationships can do much good but also be undermined by mirror-imaging, whereby the interests and norms of the donor are confused with those of the recipient. Such confusion can be counter-productive—even disastrous.

The root of this problem is that not all states are similarly seized by the problem of organized crime. Reflecting the very weakness that triggered external attempts to help, some states come to arrangements with criminal groups so that they, and the state, can both function. It is not lost on the government that the criminal group may hold more power, be it in terms of “wealth, organization, communications,” or “weaponry,” all of which “can create qualitatively different bargaining relationships.”<sup>74</sup> Given the dangers of confrontation (and to what end?), striking a pact may appear the better option, not least in states where organized crime fills national coffers (40 to 50 percent of national income in some contexts).<sup>75</sup>

Where third-party states overlook such arrangements, their efforts will disappoint. The role of corruption looms large. As many have stressed, corruption can mask “a vast and intricate system of patronage,” and so “to assail it (especially without proffering any alternative framework of political access or economic redistribution) is to endanger

the livelihood of millions of people, including those who otherwise denounce corruption stridently.”<sup>76</sup> A starting-point is to interrogate the local political economy and norms; to appraise what constitutes “societally approved of, or at least socially ignored, forms of corruption.”<sup>77</sup>

The lack of such understanding contributed to policy failure in Afghanistan. When the West belatedly came to appreciate the problem of corruption, it found a host-nation government that viewed the issue very differently. Ironically, it was initially the United States, for reasons of counterterrorism, that invited into the Afghan government the very warlords who would haunt its later state-building efforts. Still, when the United States sought to undo this damage, it only gradually dawned upon it that its partner in Kabul was itself a main impediment. Warlords that the United States wanted to marginalize were invited back in by the Karzai regime. Major targets for counter-corruption, such as Ahmed Wali Karzai, the president’s half-brother, were effectively untouchable.<sup>78</sup> Stephen Hadley, Bush’s one-time national security adviser, put it starkly: “Karzai was never sold on democracy and did not rely on democratic institutions, but instead relied on patronage.” Christopher Kolenda also reflects the American frustration, recalling that by 2006 the Afghan government had “self-organized into a kleptocracy.”<sup>79</sup>

This frustration reflects not just the teething pains of largely improvised “nation-building” but the compromises that each state makes in relation to organized crime. In Nigeria, for example, the state elected to pay off armed groups in the country’s oil-rich south rather than address their grievances of neglect and abuse.<sup>80</sup> In Russia, write Finckenauer and Voronin, organized crime includes gangsters but also businesspeople and government officials.<sup>81</sup> It “has penetrated all layers of society and the economy.”<sup>82</sup> In Dubai, and in Marbella, Spain, local authorities are known to turn a blind eye to booming organized crime to avoid confrontation and soak

up the cashflow.<sup>83</sup> Whereas conventional wisdom frames criminal enterprises as “an easy and convenient villain,” such a lens can lead to “sloppy analysis and a false diagnosis.” As Peter Andreas further notes, “Pointing an accusing finger at illicit business also tends to deflect attention and blame away from the deeper political roots of conflict and motivation for international intervention.”<sup>84</sup>

Absent a mapping of state involvement in organized crime, external investigators will fail to understand why their view of this scourge will also differ. Some will view the problem as inherently evil. Others will seek to protect criminal institutions if they make the system work or legitimize their privilege. The attempt to wish away such divergences is likely to be unproductive, forcing those seeking change to balance the preservation of order and the quest for justice. Rather than proceed based on unfounded assumptions, the interests and incentives at play—within both the intervening and host governments—must be carefully accounted for.<sup>85</sup>

### *Community Mobilization*

Where governments are enmeshed within organized crime, or otherwise uncommitted, one response is to shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches and to proceed through the community rather than the state. This method relies upon mobilizing those most affected by the problem and those with the highest interest in a solution, so as to build resistance and resilience at the local level.<sup>86</sup>

Human smuggling provides a potent example of where “the debate... and the locus of responses need to be shifted from the state level to a grassroots debate.”<sup>87</sup> The reason, Reitano explains, is that many of the states from which migrants and refugees hail are too mired in conflict to respond or are themselves responsible for the problem. Hoping to address the top-down failures with more top-down assistance—as was attempted with both Sudan and Eritrea—is to put the foxes in charge of the henhouse.<sup>88</sup> Absent

unlikely reform, such interventions compound the problem and make both donors and recipient governments complicit in continued criminality.

Conversely, anti-poaching initiatives in northern Kenya illustrate what can be achieved through the local level. Amid scarce socioeconomic opportunity, minimal interest in conservation, and continued resource-based conflicts, criminal groups found a perfect environment within which to operate. Over time, however, community-based initiatives have challenged their grip. Through UK and U.S. assistance, local-level conservancies have gained assets to gather and share intelligence on poaching with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), which is more trusted than the country’s security agencies. Not only is this partnership informing anti-poaching operations, but the conservancies are also emphasizing the need for local buy-in. Thus, community policing is undertaken by local rangers with local knowledge and support. Counter-poaching policies are also being complemented with “socioeconomic development programmes and land-reform initiatives,” providing clinics, schools, and inter-ethnic conflict-resolution mechanisms. As MacGuire explains, “these programmes have both fomented alternative livelihoods to poaching, and reduced deterioration of rangelands and resource conflict.”<sup>89</sup> Though progress was disrupted by climate crises and national-level political instability, it points to the potential of community involvement.

As Gastelum Felix and Tennant note, community mobilization has also been used in counter-gang efforts. In Chicago, as part of the so-called “Cure Violence” program, civil society leaders and community members mobilized against gang activity, with “violence interrupters detecting and preventing shootings in communities, mediating conflicts between gangs or gang members, identifying and engaging with high-risk individuals and encouraging community mobilization and behaviour change.”<sup>90</sup> In 2004 in Palermo, Italy,

student activists created the AddioPizzo campaign to encourage businesses and consumers to fight extortion by the mafia. As well as raising awareness, the organizers provided legal support to targeted businesses and educated for change, especially among the youth.<sup>91</sup> Informed by such programs, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is engaging in local resilience efforts worldwide, aimed at identifying, organizing, engaging with, and empowering civil society to take on local challenges ignored or abetted by the state.<sup>92</sup>

This approach can work, but it faces the same obstacles as local security efforts in irregular-warfare settings. In the absence of state buy-in, community-led initiatives are often limited by a lack of coordination, funds, and protection against powerful adversaries.<sup>93</sup> Also, because of the informality of these initiatives, there is no guarantee that they will play to the progressive and community-oriented tune hoped for by international donors. Though the “local level” is at times imagined as a refuge from politicking—as an “authentic response of ‘civil society’ to the predation, manipulation and violence of outsiders,” this lens can be misleading.<sup>94</sup> In Tancitaro, Mexico, for example, the local, homegrown response to the predation of gangs was a militia, commanded by warlords, that ruled violently and without accountability.<sup>95</sup> In Rio’s *favelas*, a local response to CV, noted above, is vigilante paramilitary units, structured around ex-police, that provide some degree of security but also extort and target the local population as well as engage in crime.<sup>96</sup> In Colombia, the “local” response to FARC’s guerrilla war and narco-trafficking was a paramilitary force that grew to control 50 percent of the drug market, became as violent as the insurgents, and engaged in extortion, kidnapping, and massacres.<sup>97</sup>

Beyond the need to know your partner, a second consideration: organized crime is infamous for its “balloon effect,” as criminal actors simply move on to where the environment suits them. Thus,

whereas community empowerment can inoculate it against criminal infiltration, crime lords can readily find other communities on which to prey. With piracy off Somalia, it quickly emerged that the local coastal communities were not the key beneficiaries or enablers of the problem but rather an underpaid labor force exploited by political elites inland.<sup>98</sup>

The latter are also those with the start-up capital to entice other communities to cooperate should one prove resistant. Similarly, while enlightened, community-oriented efforts to stem poaching in Kenya’s rangelands have shown promise, those higher up in the ivory-trafficking market remain untouched, adapt, and proceed with widespread impunity.<sup>99</sup>

### *Lack of Strategy*

The latter point speaks to the difficulties of combating organized crime over space and time. Much as with irregular warfare, the problem mutates, involves so many players, and touches upon so many interests that precise interventions and clear definitions of success are unlikely. In both contexts, ineffective strategies lead to reactive policies that go on despite falling short. In terms that capture the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, Rademeyer describes the “war on poaching” as “an unwinnable war”—the same could be said for the “war on drugs.”<sup>100</sup> Still, the wars drag on, much as it did in Afghanistan, with “bureaucracy doing its thing.”<sup>101</sup>

In Afghanistan, an expeditionary counterinsurgency effort lacking strategic direction fell back on principles and slogans that offered some guidance but no prioritization or trade-offs. In the world of countering organized crime and corruption, practitioners looking for strategy come to rely “on ‘best practice’ tactics and solutions whether appropriate or not, or whether they are actually working.”<sup>102</sup> The kingpin strategy in Mexico, for example, was clearly intended to reduce the power of the drug lords by targeting them directly, and yet did not question the effects of a leadership void in an insecure



U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel along with DOD personnel secure the San Ysidro Port of Entry against attempts to illegally enter the United States from Mexico. November 25, 2018. Photo by Mani Albrecht. Photo ID: 4926432 VIRIN: 181125-H-VJ018-9025

and criminalized environment.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the Transnational Institute suggests the “high homicide rates” in Central America’s northern triangle stem in part from security forces ‘successfully’ disrupting the gangs and their markets, which generates a violent competition for the spoils.<sup>104</sup>

The point is that organized crime requires the same strategic process as other irregular-warfare challenges. Again, this process calls for a Strategic Estimate, focused on the nature of the political problem, its contextual drivers, the contending narratives that motivate involvement and usage of criminal networks, and the strategies these actors use to shape their environment, overwhelm opponents, and secure profit. A final question concerns the role of the government response in addressing this problem, or in contributing to it—as may be the case.

Such an Estimate will encourage a more comprehensive mapping of the problems raised by organized crime. It would also help inform a more effective response, one that addresses the full extent of the problem. Such a lens is crucial, in that organized crime is adaptive and will respond rapidly to changes in the environment. Policymakers and strategists must therefore consider very carefully what it is that they seek to achieve and measure progress appropriately. Questions must, for example, explore whether the purpose of an intervention is to halt the crime itself (say, human smuggling), or to target its violent enablers (the smuggling network), or to manage those who rely upon their services (the migrants). Where criminal activity is targeted, strategy must account for the local desire for the functions it provides, be it basic governance in the

*favelas*, a livelihood through poaching or drug cultivation, or a yearning to escape insecurity and fear.

Much as with irregular threats, the effort to counter organized crime requires skill and methodological discipline. A first step is arriving at a broad concept of response, informed by a theory of success—one that can explain how the anticipated inputs will lead to identified outcomes. From then on, crafters of strategy must consider the assumptions—both explicit and implicit—that are incorporated in their plan, as well as the legal authority to proceed as suggested. To balance trade-offs and compromises, a phasing construct can assist in showing how incremental steps are to be achieved over time, to reach—gradually—desired objectives. As with any change in policy, a risk assessment, and discussion of how to mitigate these risks, also becomes necessary. These are the basic foundations of crafting strategy, and yet the task is too often approached with neither the skills nor situational awareness required.

### *The Black Box of Political Will*

Given these difficulties, it is unsurprising that—much as with counterinsurgency—the political will to counter organized crime is sometimes lacking. Not only is organized crime deeply socially embedded, so that interventions are likely to cause extensive “collateral damage,” but—as seen—many governments are also enmeshed with the phenomenon, through bribes, corruption, or outright complicity.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, political will is also indispensable. Thus, much as with irregular warfare, we confront the same obstacle: how to get governments to act and—when they do—to do so in the most strategically appropriate manner.

First, political will is not static. It cannot become, as it oftentimes does, a self-fulfilling alibi for not trying. A better approach is to dissect exactly what shapes the prevailing interest in finding solutions. Malena provides a useful framework, casting

will as a function of political *want*, political *can*, and political *must*—leaders must desire the change, believe that they can achieve it, and believe that doing so is necessary.<sup>106</sup> The breakdown hints at potential levers for how political will can be built up—or destroyed. For example, rather than stop the discussion at political *want*, progress might be possible by illustrating issues of opportunity (*can*) and motivation (*must*).

Starting with the latter—the *must*—much can be achieved through “public pressure and citizen engagement, organisational rules and regulations, and a personal sense of civic duty.”<sup>107</sup> From the bottom up, avenues of communication can allow victims of organized crime to access their political leaders. Particularly as concerns corruption—which typically is where the state comes in—there is merit in adopting a “victim perspective,” not least because corruption is often mistaken as a “victimless” crime.<sup>108</sup> As Marquette and Peiffer argue, by demonstrating how corruption diminishes democracy and “the downstream violence that may occur in chains of activities that corruption facilitates,” it might be possible to generate the allies needed to spark a movement.<sup>109</sup>

Top-down, the international community can play a valuable role in proscribing behavior and reinforcing norms, though enforcement will clearly remain a challenge. In a four-year period starting in 2000, the international community passed a flurry of measures to address transnational crime and corruption.<sup>110</sup> These have since been complemented by more agency-specific conventions. The activity is tremendous, and yet—much as with the UN’s sprawling architecture for counter-terrorism—it suffers from a lack of coordination. The bigger problem is that these conventions ask states to engage productively with politically sensitive areas, where policy is determined by conceptions of interest and fear—not the entreaties of international action plans. There are instruments to ratchet up external

pressure, but does the international community itself have the political will to impose itself on an unwilling government?

International engagement is also relevant to the political *can*. Donors must be able to determine whether the lack of political will stems from a dearth of motivation or a lack of capacity. Where there is a felt need to respond, security cooperation and the building of partnership capacity (BPC) can help generate the needed foundation. As seen, good intentions can easily be subverted through mirror-imaging or a lack of local understanding. Progress presupposes agreement on what are truly common interests (rather than those pushed by outsiders) and mechanisms to ensure implementation. Much as with irregular warfare, it is also critical that BPC be more than episodic, go beyond enforcement agencies, and be tracked carefully in terms of outcomes. Indeed, to avoid militarizing the response to organized crime, those assisting must similarly demilitarize their own guidance and advice.

However political will is broached, it is a crucial factor in strategic design. As with efforts to counter insurgency and terrorism, the response to organized crime must acknowledge the limitations on political will and operate within them, to best possible effect, or take on the task of altering conceptions of will by creatively targeting the sources of resistance and actors involved. Just reacting to the crime itself will almost certainly be insufficient.

## Conclusion

Terrorism and crime are both scourges of society. Both are illegal and conducted by clandestine actors challenging the status quo. The two phenomena share at least one further trait: our response to both is bedeviled by the complexity of the threat, its social and political embeddedness, and the difficulty of mustering political will. Faced with this complexity, governments often focus narrowly on the scourge itself, with inadequate attention paid to its social and

political drivers and the functions it plays. Strategies tend toward the reactive and palliative, producing cycles of desperation that ultimately benefit those who feed on despair.

Based on these commonalities, and others, this article has enumerated the lessons gained in two decades of engagement in irregular warfare, particularly in Afghanistan, and applied these to the countering of organized crime. There is a tendency, in both arenas, to militarize the response or to let it be governed by a purely suppressive logic. There is a tendency to neglect the functions of organized crime and to engage in mirror-imaging, mistaking particular interests and norms as universal. There is also a common need to mobilize bottom-up networks and work alongside communities as crucial partners, particularly where national governments are absent or uninterested. And in both cases, there is a need to engage more closely with what produces political will and with how calculations of elite interest can be shaped over time.

Given these common difficulties, there is a final common requirement—for strategy. Rather than fall back on principles, on best practices, and on conventional wisdom, there is a need for strategic competence. Such competence implies an ability to precisely identify the nature of the political problem underpinning the crime, its contextual drivers (be they political, economic, or societal), and the contending narratives that sustain it. It involves an ability to map not just the strategy of the criminal entity but, equally, the limitations of the state's own response and its role in fueling the problem. Based on such analysis, strategic competence denotes the skill set necessary to craft strategy—one driven by a theory of success, aware of its own legal authorities, assumptions, and risks, and presenting therefore a phased and measurable plan for change via an admixture of ways and means.

Crafting such a strategy is a skill that should be emphasized in professional education and training,

and also in security cooperation, because, as one key strategist puts it, while plans are worthless, “planning is everything.”<sup>111</sup> To date, education in strategic planning focuses almost exclusively on military audiences, which explains why the most sophisticated frameworks for planning are found within its many field manuals. Because the most vexing security problems are far more than military in nature, this is an education that must be broadened and also elevated from the military domain to the strategic. There are crucial precedents in how this can be achieved, and frameworks for the type of learning that it involves, but the investment in education is lagging and, therefore, so is our performance.<sup>112</sup> **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Global Initiative, ‘Global Organized Crime Index 2021’, September 2021, 8, 12, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GITOC-Global-Organized-Crime-Index-2021.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, ‘Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy’ (Arlington, VA, 2020), 2. Though the DoD is redefining the term, this conceptualization is—in our opinion—the most helpful and accurate. For discussion, see David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks, ‘Redefining Irregular Warfare: Legitimacy, Coercion, and Power’, *Modern War Institute*, 18 October 2022, <https://mwi.usma.edu/redefining-irregular-warfare-legitimacy-coercion-and-power/>.

<sup>3</sup>David H. Ucko and Thomas Marks A., *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), 6–13.

<sup>4</sup>Harold D Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958). This dynamic is explored in Douglas Farah and Marianne Richardson, ‘Gangs No Longer: Reassessing Transnational Armed Groups in the Western Hemisphere’, *Strategic Perspectives* (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, May 2022).

<sup>5</sup>Cord Schmelzle, ‘Evaluating Governance: Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood’, SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 16 January 2012), 7, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1986017>.

<sup>6</sup>Michel Wieviorka, ‘Terrorism in the Context of Academic Research’, in *Terrorism in Context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). This is not an esoteric formulation and is reflected in doctrine as well as academia. For the latter, making the same point but using different terminology, a widely accessed work is Tom Marks, ‘Terrorism vs. Terror: The Case of Peru,’ *Counterterrorism & Security* 2, no. 2 (July/August 1990), 26–33.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas A. Marks and Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Tej Pratap Singh Brar, ‘Sri Lanka: State Response to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as an Illicit Power Structure’, in *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition*, ed. Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic (Washington, DC: Center for Complex Operations (CCO) & the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI), 2016), 483–484.

<sup>8</sup>A Pew Poll taken in 2013, for instance, revealed that more than 15 percent or more of those polled in Egypt, Tunisia, Indonesia, the Palestinian territories, and Malaysia had a “favorable” view of al-Qaeda. See Andrew Kohut and James Bell, ‘Muslim Publics Share Concerns about Extremist Groups’ (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 10 September 2013), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/09/10/muslim-publics-share-concerns-about-extremist-groups/>.

<sup>9</sup>Kenneth M. Pollack, ‘The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction’, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 4 (December 2006): 1–20.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Thomas E Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>11</sup>David H. Ucko, ‘Militias, Tribes and Insurgents: The Challenge of Political Reintegration in Iraq’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 3 (October 2008): 341–373.

<sup>12</sup>Steven Simon, ‘The Price of the Surge’, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 May 2008, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2008-05-03/price-surge>; Ned Parker, ‘The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to the World’s Next Failed State’, *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012): 94–110. For ISIS, see Sam Heller, ‘When Measuring ISIS’s “Resurgence”, Use the Right Standard’, *Commentary* (International Crisis Group, 13 May 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/when-measuring-isis-resurgence-use-right-standard>.

<sup>13</sup>David P Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan Fighting Together, Fighting Alone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Timo Noetzel and Sibylle Scheipers, *Coalition Warfare in Afghanistan: Burden-Sharing or Disunity?*, Briefing Paper (Chatham House, 2007); Barbara J. Stapleton and Michael Keating, 'Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001–14: An Incoherent Approach', *Chatham House Briefing*, 2015.

<sup>14</sup>T.X. Hammes, 'Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq', in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard D Hooker and Joseph J Collins (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015), 332.

<sup>15</sup>Todd Greentree, 'Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: US Performance and the Institutional Dimension of Strategy in Afghanistan', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (1 June 2013): 336, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2013.764518>.

<sup>16</sup>Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 8, <http://rbdigital.oneclickdigital.com>.

<sup>17</sup>Steve Negus, 'Iraq Surge Brings a Lull in Violence but No Reconciliation', *Financial Times*, 6 January 2008, sec. Opinion, <https://www.ft.com/content/1138a3ca-bc6c-11dc-bcf9-0000779fd2ac>.

<sup>18</sup>Judd Devermont, 'Politics at the Heart of the Crisis in the Sahel', CSIS Briefs (Center for Strategic & International Studies, December 2019), 8, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/191206\\_Devermont\\_SahelCrisis\\_layout\\_v5.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/191206_Devermont_SahelCrisis_layout_v5.pdf).

<sup>19</sup>Anatol Lieven, 'Afghanistan: An Unsuitable Candidate for State Building: Opinion', *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 3 (October 2007): 483–489; Astri Suhrke, 'A Contradictory Mission? NATO from Stabilization to Combat in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 244.

<sup>20</sup>Craig Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War*, First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

<sup>21</sup>Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2012), <http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/WinningHearts-Final.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup>David H Ucko, *The Insurgent's Dilemma: A Struggle to Prevail* (London and New York: Hurst & Oxford University Press, 2022), chap. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Ucko, chap. 6.

<sup>24</sup>Ken Menkhaus, 'Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping', *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2006): 78.

<sup>25</sup>Volker Boege et al., 'On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: What Is Failing—States in the Global South or Research and Politics in the West?', in *Building Peace in the Absence of States: Challenging the Discourse on State Failure*, ed. Martina Fischer and Beatrix Schmelzle, Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 8 (Berlin: Berghof Forschungszentrum für Konstruktive Konfliktbearbeitung, 2009), 15–36.

<sup>26</sup>Menkhaus, 'Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping', 11.

<sup>27</sup>Fishstein and Wilder, 'Winning Hearts and Minds?', 30, 37.

<sup>28</sup>Ucko, 'Militias, Tribes and Insurgents'.

<sup>29</sup>David H. Ucko, 'Beyond Clear-Hold-Build: Rethinking Local-Level Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan', *Contemporary Security Policy* 34, no. 3 (December 2013): 526–551; Frances Z. Brown, 'The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance', Special Report (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, September 2012), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/09/us-surge-and-afghan-local-governance>.

<sup>30</sup>Michael Shurkin, 'Subnational Government in Afghanistan', Occasional Paper (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 9–10.

<sup>31</sup>Stéphanie Pézard and Michael Robert Shurkin, *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 49.

<sup>32</sup>Bjoern Hofmann, 'Are Hybrid Political Orders an Appropriate Concept for State Formation? Timor-Leste Revisited', in *Building Peace in the Absence of States: Challenging the Discourse on State Failure*, ed. Martina Fischer and Beatrix Schmelzle, Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 8 (Berlin: Berghof Forschungszentrum für Konstruktive Konfliktbearbeitung, 2009), 82.

<sup>33</sup>Eliot Cohen et al., 'Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency', *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>34</sup>Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War', *Survival* 52, no. 5 (October 2010): 157–182, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2010.522104>.

<sup>35</sup>Lieven, 'Afghanistan'.

<sup>36</sup>Eliot A. Cohen, 'What's Obama's Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan?', *The Washington Post*, 6 December 2009, sec. Arts & Living, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/04/AR2009120402602.html>.

<sup>37</sup>Général de Lattre, 'Foch', *Revue Des Deux Mondes (1829-1971)*, no. 4 (1949): 588.

<sup>38</sup> Ucko and Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*, 14–33.

<sup>39</sup> Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban-Al-Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012). Also exceptionally useful with respect to this point, Elisabeth Leake, *Afghan Crucible: The Soviet Invasion and the Making of Modern Afghanistan* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Ucko, 'Militias, Tribes and Insurgents'.

<sup>41</sup> Ucko and Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*, 34–48.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, 'What's Obama's Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan?'

<sup>43</sup> As Jeremy Black has noted, "to talk of American or French interests or policy, as if these are clear-cut and long-lasting, is to ignore the nature of politics and the character of recent history." See Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London & New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 142.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, scholars of UN peace operations and mediation arrive at strikingly similar conclusions. See Mats R. Berdal and Jake Sherman, eds., *The Political Economy of Civil War and UN Peace Operations*, Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (London; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023). Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (London\uc0\u8239{}; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023

<sup>45</sup> Thomas J. Maguire, 'Kenya's "War on Poaching": Militarised Solutions to a Militarised Problem?' in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 69.

<sup>46</sup> Jasper Humphreys and M.R.L. Smith, 'Militarised Responses to the Illegal Wildlife Trade', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 32–37.

<sup>47</sup> Maguire, 'Kenya's "War on Poaching"', 67.

<sup>48</sup> Giorgio Blundo and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, eds., *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens and Public Officials in Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2006); Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer, 'Grappling with the "Real Politics" of Systemic Corruption: Theoretical Debates versus "Real-World" Functions', *Governance* 31, no. 3 (July 2018): 499–514, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12311>; Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer, 'Corruption Functionality Framework', ACE (Anti-Corruption Evidence Research Programme) (Washington DC: Global Integrity, 2021);

Grant W. Walton, 'Is All Corruption Dysfunctional? Perceptions of Corruption and Its Consequences in Papua New Guinea', *Public Administration and Development* 33, no. 3 (August 2013): 175–190, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1636>. "ISBN": "978-1-84277-563-9", "language": "eng", "number-of-pages": "298", "publisher": "David Philip", "publisher-place": "Cape Town", "source": "K10plus ISBN", "title": "Everyday corruption and the state: citizens and public officials in Africa", "title-short": "Everyday corruption and the state", "editor": [{"family": "Blundo", "given": "Giorgio"}, {"family": "Olivier de Sardan", "given": "Jean-Pierre"}], "issued": [{"date-parts": [{"2006"}]}], {"id": "2350", "uris": [{"http://zotero.org/users/3008661/items/76HAUUS9"}, {"http://zotero.org/users/3008661/items/76HAUUS9"}], "itemData": {"id": "2350", "type": "article-journal", "container-title": "Governance", "DOI": "10.1111/gove.12311", "ISSN": "09521895", "issue": "3", "journalAbbreviation": "Governance", "language": "en", "page": "499-514", "source": "DOI.org (Crossref

<sup>49</sup> Julia Buxton, 'Drugs and Development: The Great Disconnect', Policy Report (Global Drug Policy Observatory, January 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, 'Beyond Greed and Grievance: Policy Lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict', in *Security and Development: Investing in Peace and Prosperity*, ed. Robert Picciotto and Rachel Weaving (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 164; Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2007), 281–282; Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl, 'Conflicting Agendas: The Politics of Development Aid in Drug-Producing Areas', *Development Policy Review* 23, no. 2 (March 2005): 183–198, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7679.2005.00282.x>.

<sup>51</sup> Tuesday Reitano, 'Smugglers Inc: The Illicit Industry in Human Migration', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 205.

<sup>52</sup> Stergios Skaperdas, 'The Political Economy of Organized Crime: Providing Protection When the State Does Not', *Economics of Governance* 2, no. 3 (November 2001): 173.

<sup>53</sup> José Miguel Cruz, 'Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression in Central America', in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, ed. Thomas C. Bruneau, Lucia Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), 137–158.

<sup>54</sup> Skaperdas, 'The Political Economy of Organized Crime: Providing Protection When the State Does Not', 194.

<sup>55</sup> Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ian Ralby, 'Approaches to Piracy, Armed Robbery at Sea, and Other Maritime Crime in West and Central Africa', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 140.

<sup>57</sup> Glen Forbes, 'Replicating Success? A Military Response to Maritime Piracy, the Somalia Experience', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 119.

<sup>58</sup> Anja Shortland, 'Dangers of Success: The Economics of Somali Piracy', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 178.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Marche, 'This Man Is the Jeff Bezos of the International Drug Trade', *Toronto Life*, 1 November 2021, <https://torontolife.com/city/this-man-is-the-jeff-bezos-of-the-international-drug-trade/>; Tom Allard, 'The Hunt for Asia's El Chapo', *Reuters*, 14 October 2019, sec. Special Report, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/meth-syndicate/>.

<sup>60</sup> Karsten von Hoesslin and Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, 'South East Asia Piracy: Have We Learnt from Somali Counter-Piracy Operations?', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 157.

<sup>61</sup> Julian Rademeyer, 'An Unwinnable War: Rhino Poaching in the Kruger', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 53–54.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Erickson, 'How US Customs and Border Protection Became the World's Largest Militarised Police Force', in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 237.

<sup>63</sup> Erickson, 242.

<sup>64</sup> Reitano, 'Smugglers Inc: The Illicit Industry in Human Migration', 205–206.

<sup>65</sup> Garrett M. Graff, 'The Green Monster', *Politico Magazine*, December 2014, <http://politi.co/2id3243>.

<sup>66</sup> James Cockayne, 'The Futility of Force? Strategic Lessons for Dealing with Unconventional Armed Groups from the UN's War on Haiti's Gangs', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 5 (29 July 2014): 747, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2014.901911>; International Crisis Group, 'El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence', Latin America Report (Brussels, 19 December 2017), 16.

<sup>67</sup> Edmund S. Howe and Cynthia J. Brandau, 'Additive Effects of Certainty, Severity, and Celerity of Punishment on Judgments of Crime Deterrence Scale Value', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18, no. 9 (July 1988): 797, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1988.tb02356.x>.

<sup>68</sup> 'Border Facts', Southern Border Communities Coalition, accessed 20 March 2022, <https://www.southernborder.org/border-facts>.

<sup>69</sup> Reitano, 'Smugglers Inc: The Illicit Industry in Human Migration', 211.

<sup>70</sup> Regine Cabato, 'Thousands Dead. Police Accused of Criminal Acts. Yet Duterte's Drug War Is Wildly Popular.', *Washington Post*, 23 October 2019, sec. World, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/thousands-dead-police-accused-of-criminal-acts-yet-dutertes-drug-war-is-wildly-popular/2019/10/23/4fd-b542a-f494-11e9-b2d2-1f37c9d82dbb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/thousands-dead-police-accused-of-criminal-acts-yet-dutertes-drug-war-is-wildly-popular/2019/10/23/4fd-b542a-f494-11e9-b2d2-1f37c9d82dbb_story.html); 'Rodrigo Duterte's Lawless War on Drugs Is Wildly Popular', *The Economist*, 20 February 2020, <http://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/02/20/rodrigo-dutertes-lawless-war-on-drugs-is-wildly-popular>; Tom Allard and Karen Lema, "'Shock and Awe" Has Failed in Philippines Drug War, Enforcement Chief Says', *Reuters*, 7 February 2020, sec. APAC, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-drugs-performance-exclusi-idUSKB-N2010IL>.

<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Miracle or Mirage? Gangs and Plunging Violence in El Salvador', Latin America Report (Brussels, 8 July 2020), 32.

<sup>72</sup> Moritz Schubert, 'To Engage or Not to Engage Haiti's Urban Armed Groups? Safe Access in Disaster-Stricken and Conflict-Affected Cities', *Environment and Urbanization* 29, no. 2 (October 2017): 425–442, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247817716398>. It is not clear how to deliver aid to those who need it the most without further strengthening predatory armed actors. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Haiti, this article contributes to the emerging debate on the engagement of non-state armed groups in the context of disaster-stricken and conflict-affected cities, by presenting new empirical evidence on how humanitarian and development actors negotiate safe access in Port-au-Prince's gang-ruled neighbourhoods in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. While some major development agencies have struggled to minimize the

unintended – yet potentially harmful – consequences of their activities for beneficiaries, the approach of the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio offers important lessons for more effective humanitarian response to urban crises in comparable contexts.”; container-title:”Environment and Urbanization”; DOI:”10.1177/0956247817716398”; ISSN:”0956-2478, 1746-0301”; issue:”2”; journalAbbreviation:”Environment and Urbanization”; language:”en”; page:”425-442”; source:”DOI.org (Crossref

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘El Salvador’s Politics of Perpetual Violence’, 20.

<sup>74</sup> John Bailey and Matthew M. Taylor, ‘Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico’, *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1, no. 2 (August 2009): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X0900100201>. dynamic markets, and public policies; governments adjust their behavior according to shifting perceptions of the benefits offered, threats posed, and strategies adopted by criminal groups. When governments attempt to control or repress their activities, criminal groups employ various tools and instruments that might be grouped into three categories: evasion, corruption, and confrontation. The paper draws on recent cases from Brazil and Mexico with respect to tactical and strategic choices by governments and criminal groups, seeking to address three broad questions. What factors disrupt the state-criminal group equilibrium? Under what circumstances do disruptions produce significant levels of violence (as opposed to evasion or corruption

<sup>75</sup> Tim Hall and Ray Hudson, ‘The Economic Geographies of Transnational Organised Crime’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 185.

<sup>76</sup> Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer, ‘Corruption and Transnational Organised Crime’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 476.

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Beare, ‘Corruption and Organized Crime: Lessons from History’, *Crime, Law and Social Change* 28, no. 2 (1 January 1997): 169.

<sup>78</sup> Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers*, 123.

<sup>79</sup> Whitlock, 313–315.

<sup>80</sup> Rebecca Golden-Timsar, ‘Amnesty and New Violence in The Niger Delta’, *Forbes*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/uhenergy/2018/03/20/amnesty-and-new-violence-in-the-niger-delta/>.

<sup>81</sup> James O Finckenaer and Yuri A Voronin, ‘The Threat of Russian Organized Crime’, Issues in International Crime (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, June 2001).

<sup>82</sup> Serguei Cheloukhine, Vitaliy Khan, and Nessibeli Kalkayeva, ‘Transnational Organized Crime and Corruption in Russia: Its Origin and Current Development’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 105–106.

<sup>83</sup> Nacho Carretero and Arturo Lezcano, ‘“A United Nations of Crime”: How Marbella Became a Magnet for Gangsters’, *The Guardian*, 20 May 2021, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/may/20/a-united-nations-of-how-marbella-became-a-magnet-for-gangsters>; Karen Greenaway, ‘How Emirati Law Enforcement Allows Kleptocrats and Organized Crime to Thrive’, in *Dubai’s Role in Facilitating Corruption and Global Illicit Financial Flows*, ed. Matthew T. Page and Jodi Vittori (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020), 67–78.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Andreas, ‘Symbiosis between Peace Operations and Illicit Business in Bosnia’, in *Peace Operations and Organized Crime: Enemies or Allies?* ed. James Cockayne and Adam Lupel, Cass Series on Peacekeeping (London: Taylor & Frances, 2011), 43.

<sup>85</sup> I am grateful to Tom Rodwell for informing our thinking on this point.

<sup>86</sup> Siria Gastelum Felix and Ian Tennant, ‘Community Resilience to Organized Crime: Building Back Better’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 489.

<sup>87</sup> Reitano, ‘Smugglers Inc: The Illicit Industry in Human Migration’, 213.

<sup>88</sup> Nick Grinstead, ‘The Khartoum Process: Shifting the Burden’, *Clingendael*, 22 February 2016, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/khartoum-process-shifting-burden>.

<sup>89</sup> Maguire, ‘Kenya’s “War on Poaching”’, 77.

<sup>90</sup> Felix and Tennant, ‘Community Resilience to Organized Crime: Building Back Better’, 493.

<sup>91</sup> Comitato Addiopizzo, ‘Who we are’, accessed 19 March 2022, <https://www.addiopizzo.org/index.php/who-we-are/>; Guillermo Vazquez, ‘Saying No to Extortion in Central America: Lessons Learnt from Italy’, *Global Initiative*, 13 July 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/saying-no-to-extortion/>.

<sup>92</sup> Lucia Bird and A Gomes, ‘Building Civil Society Resilience to Organized Crime in Guinea-Bissau’ (Global Initiative against Transnational Crime, March 2022).

<sup>93</sup> Felix and Tennant, ‘Community Resilience to Organized Crime: Building Back Better’, 498–500.

<sup>94</sup> Mats Berdal, *Building Peace after War*, Adelphi 407 (London; New York: Routledge, for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009), 127.

<sup>95</sup> Max Fisher and Amanda Taub, 'Building a Mini-State With Avocados and Guns', *The New York Times*, 18 January 2018, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/18/world/americas/mexico-drug-war-tancitaro.html>.

<sup>96</sup> By 2019, these militias—really a mafia organization—were said to control “roughly a quarter of the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan region,” or 45 percent of the city’s roughly one thousand *favelas*. ‘Mafias Run by Rogue Police Officers Are Terrorising Rio’, *The Economist*, 30 May 2019, <http://www.economist.com/the-americas/2019/05/30/mafias-run-by-rogue-police-officers-are-terrorising-rio>. See also Enrique Desmond Arias, ‘How Criminals Govern in Latin America and the Caribbean’, *Current History* 119, no. 814 (February 2020): 43–45.

<sup>97</sup> David J Spencer, *Colombia’s Paramilitaries: Criminal or Political Force?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Anja Shortland, ‘Treasure Mapped: Using Satellite Imagery to Track the Developmental Effects of Somali Piracy’, Africa Programme Paper (London: Chatham House, January 2012); Stig Jarle Hansen, *Piracy in the Greater Gulf of Aden: Myths, Misconceptions and Remedies* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> Maguire, ‘Kenya’s “War on Poaching”’, 78.

<sup>100</sup> Rademeyer, ‘An Unwinnable War: Rhino Poaching in the Kruger’, 54.

<sup>101</sup> Robert W. Komer, ‘Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam’ (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1 January 1972), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R967.html>. CA: RAND Corporation, 1 January 1972

<sup>102</sup> Marquette and Peiffer, ‘Corruption and Transnational Organised Crime’, 473.

<sup>103</sup> Jeremy McDermott, ‘Militarisation of the Drug War in Latin America: A Policy Cycle Set to Continue?’, in *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, ed. Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, and Sasha Jespersen (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 266.

<sup>104</sup> Pauline Metaal and Liza ten Velde, ‘Drugs and Violence in the Northern Triangle—Two Sides of the Same Coin?’, *The Broker*, 3 July 2014, <https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/drugs-and-violence-in-the-northern-triangle-d48/>. assumptions on cause and effect are frequently flawed or blurred. While 2014 may present new opportunities in the growing global debate on alternatives for the failed War on Drugs – for example, Guatemala’s initiative to discuss the outcome of an OAS-led study, which considers a series of options for drug policy reform,

at a meeting in Guatemala in September 2014, and the ongoing preparations for a Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS See also Douglas Farah, ‘The Maduro Regime’s Illicit Activities: A Threat To Democracy In Venezuela And Security In Latin America’ (Washington, D.C: Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council, August 2020).

<sup>105</sup> Iffat Idris, ‘Political Will and Combatting Serious Organised Crime’, SOC ACE Evidence Synthesis Paper (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2022), 17–18.

<sup>106</sup> Carmen Malena, ed., ‘Building Will for Participatory Governance: An Introduction’, in *From Political Won’t to Political Will: Building Support for Participatory Governance* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2009), 19. For adaptation to organized crime, see, Marquette and Peiffer, ‘Corruption and Transnational Organised Crime’.

<sup>107</sup> Idris, ‘Political Will and Combatting Serious Organised Crime’, 11.

<sup>108</sup> Graham Brooks, *Criminology of Corruption: Theoretical Approaches* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

<sup>109</sup> Marquette and Peiffer, ‘Corruption and Transnational Organised Crime’, 477.

<sup>110</sup> New instruments signed in this period include the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC, in 2000); the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000); the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000); Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (2001); United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC, in 2004).

<sup>111</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, as cited in William M. Blair, “President Draws Planning Moral,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1957, available at <[www.nytimes.com/1957/11/15/archives/president-draws-planning-moral-recalls-army-days-to-show-value-of.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1957/11/15/archives/president-draws-planning-moral-recalls-army-days-to-show-value-of.html)>.

<sup>112</sup> See for example the experience of the College of International Security Affairs (CISA), within the U.S. National Defense University, which (under the authority of the Regional Defense Fellowship Program) teaches senior practitioners from across the government in strategic assessment and planning for irregular challenges as part of a one-year accredited Master’s degree. See <https://cisa.ndu.edu/> for details. A key pedagogical framework crafted for this purpose can be found here: Ucko and Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*.