A Framework for Countering Organized Crime

Strategy, Planning, and the Lessons of
Irregular Warfare

David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks

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Executive Summary

States continue to struggle in their efforts to counter organized crime. Despite states having scored successes at the operational level, organized crime has proven too adaptable and too resilient to be seriously affected. Instead, ground has been lost politically, societally, and even territorially to armed gangs, cartels, and other illicit structures. The result is a steady erosion of the rule of law, of norms of sovereignty, of governance, and of human security.

This monograph is based on the urgent need for a more effective response to organized crime. Its key contributions are twofold. First, it applies an "irregular warfare" lens to the problem of organized crime. This lens helps situate the divergent criminal activity within its crucial political context. It frames "threat actors" not as isolated problems but as symptoms of a socioeconomic-political system that must be understood and addressed. Treating legitimacy as the strategic center of gravity, irregular warfare focuses attention on the political drivers of illicit behavior, the contested narratives among the actors involved, and the need for a broader response than typically employed.

Second, we propose an analytical framework, designed for irregular warfare challenges, to aid practitioners in their assessment of, and their response to, organized crime. This approach—the Framework for Analysis and Action—builds on an instructional method long used within the College of International Security Affairs at the U.S. National Defense University in Washington, DC, to prepare practitioners for insurgency, terrorism, and state-based subversion. It has proven utility, both in the classroom and in the field. Here, it is adapted specifically for organized crime, to guide the analysis and planning of those who are charged with responding to this challenge.

The Framework for Analysis and Action offers a sequence of prompts, informed by two decades of recent analytical experience with irregular warfare. It consists of two parts: the Strategic Estimate of the Situation (which maps the problem; explores its drivers, frames, and strategies; and critiques the current response) and the Course of Action (which uses the Strategic Estimate to design an appropriate strategy, with a theory of success, and an assessment of assumptions, legal authority, metrics, phasing, and risk mitigation). Based on a critical review

of current practice, we contend that existing processes for analysis and action are currently weak—to the detriment of strategic effectiveness. Though an analytical framework is no panacea for the current crisis of strategy, it is an indispensable starting point for all that must follow.

To assist application of our framework to the problem of organized crime, this monograph walks through each section of the adapted approach. Throughout, reference is made to cases of organized crime to demonstrate the insight thus gained. An abbreviated "user's guide" for the framework is included in Appendix A to facilitate its rapid employment.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The effort to counter organized crime is struggling. According to the 2021 Global Organized Crime Index, "the global illicit economy [has] simply continued along the upward trajectory it has followed over the past 20 years, posing an ever-increasing threat to security, development and justice—the pillars of democracy."[1] At present, more than four-fifths of the world's population live in countries with "high levels of criminality," and almost two-thirds live in countries with "low resilience to organized crime."[2] According to the advocacy group Global Financial Integrity, transnational criminal groups rake in between $1.6 trillion and $2.2 trillion per year.[3]

Though organized crime is often out of sight, it is also everywhere. It both preys upon and caters to human need, making it resilient and versatile. 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 people's desire or despair. Indeed, while organized crime is corrosive and exploitative, it is also empowering. For those excluded from the political economy, from patronage systems or elite bargains, organized crime can offer opportunity and possibly also protection. On aggregate, the associated activity provides an illicit form of governance, furnishing alternative services to a wide range of clients, whether the vulnerable and weak or a covetous elite. Reflecting the strength of this illicit order, those who stand in its way—individuals, institutions, even states—find themselves corrupted, co-opted, or violently eliminated.

The wide variety of forms assumed by organized crime, its clandestine nature, and its blending of creative and destructive effects present acute analytical and policy-related challenges. Faced with this complexity, efforts to assess and respond to the phenomenon often adopt a narrow focus on the scourge itself, paying inadequate attention to its social and political drivers and the functions it plays. Seeking to demonstrate resolve, yet uncertain of how to proceed, policymakers jump to narrow solutions to "deal with the problem," rather than query what might be most appropriate for the context at hand. Existing strategies for countering organized crime therefore tend toward the reactive and palliative, producing cycles of desperation that ultimately benefit those who feed on despair.

As with organized crime, our response to terrorism, especially following 9/11, has often been stymied by three factors: conceptual uncertainty of the problem at hand; an urge to address the challenge head-on without acknowledging its socio-economic-political context; and, therefore, unquestioned pursuit of approaches that miss the point, whose progress is difficult to measure, and that may even be counterproductive. In the case of counterterrorism, the concept of irregular warfare emerged as a corrective to prevailing practice. Reintroduced as a term by the Pentagon in 2006, *irregular warfare* was explored more fully in a 2007 Joint Operating Concept that defined it as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations."[4] This definition placed the terroristic violence within the essential context of a political struggle. For those paying attention, casting the problem in this manner encouraged a broader and more informed counter.

It is our contention that the lens of irregular warfare is helpful also to our understanding of organized crime. For the purposes of this monograph, *organized crime* is defined as any group with some degree of structure whose primary objective is profit and whose methods include illegal activity; the use or threat of violence; and the corruption of public officials. This definition captures the phenomenon's four key components: its collective action, its pecuniary objective, its predatory ways, and its corrupting and exploitative effects. These components allow organized crime to nest conceptually within irregular warfare. Much like terrorism and insurgency, organized crime has a clandestine component but survives because of the functions and tangible benefits it provides to populations with few other options. Though organized crime is not consciously political in its motivation, it is—like insurgency—deeply political in its origins, activities, and effects. Also, much like insurgency, organized crime is oppositional to the rule of law and feeds on the state's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Going further, organized crime and insurgency both expose deep cracks in an international system supposedly governed by benevolent state actors exercising sovereign control of their peoples and lands. Thus, much like our efforts to counter terrorism and insurgency, interventions to counter organized crime must also operate both under- and aboveground, must

counter a threat and address its drivers, and must proceed with far greater awareness of what constitutes success—and for whom.

The relevance of irregular warfare goes one step further. Traditionally, irregular warfare has been thought the preserve of *nonstate* armed groups, desperate to find a way forward against states and the resources they can harness. Particularly since 2018, however, the Pentagon has used "irregular warfare" to describe *state* use of subversion, manipulation, and other covert methods to build or erode power. As should be evident, state actors also face the dilemma of exerting themselves against conventionally superior foes. For the United States, the concern is principally with the Russian, Chinese, or Iranian use of proxies, interference, and other indirect methods that, while aggressive, remain below the threshold of outright war and are analytically difficult to discern and to counter.[5] An underresearched component of this approach is state sponsorship or use of organized criminal groups, which allows governments to impose costs, make money, and get things done, often with minimal attribution. Examples include, but are by no means limited to, the Chinese sponsorship of organized criminal groups in Taiwan, as well as Russia's use of European criminal groups to assassinate critics of the Kremlin.[6] The problem is such that "state involvement in criminality," in particular by authoritarian states, is now "the most pervasive force in driving organized crime."[7] Viewing organized crime through an irregular warfare lens helps to highlight this function and sheds light on the broader political context of the phenomenon.

Based on these commonalities, we propose a Framework for Analysis and Action, originally designed for irregular warfare, to assist practitioners engaged in understanding and countering organized crime. This framework finds its origins within the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) at the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, DC. CISA has been focused on irregular warfare since its establishment in 2002. To fulfill its mandate of producing strategists capable of countering irregular challenges, we devised, and have based our curriculum on, an analytical framework of assessment and action.[8] The framework builds on lessons—negative and positive—deduced from years of experience with stemming insurgency, illicit state behavior, and criminal groups operating in conflict environments. It has evolved over the years, via repeated testing and use

in classroom settings and beyond, to evaluate irregular problems and arrive at a viable response.

The framework consists of two parts: the Strategic Estimate of the Situation (which maps the problem; explores its drivers, frames, and methods; and critiques the current response) and the Course of Action (which uses the Strategic Estimate to design an appropriate strategy, guided by a theory of success). This monograph adapts the framework for organized-crime problem sets, to enable the *mapping* of relevant actors and the *crafting* of a viable response. Even so, its central purpose remains what it always was: to capture the bewildering aspects of irregular warfare—its ambiguity, unconventionality, and intangibility—so as to better mount a response.

Structure and Argument in Brief

This monograph is split into three parts. First, following chapter 1's introductory remarks, chapter 2 makes the case that efforts to counter insurgency and to counter organized crime have faced strikingly similar hurdles. The chapter lays out six major lessons from various irregular warfare experiences and relates these lessons to the field of countering organized crime. Based on these commonalities, the chapter argues that both types of experiences would benefit from a more political and systemic framing of the problem and a more strategic approach to the crafting of response, whence the need for better tools to encourage a different tack.

With the link between irregular warfare and organized crime established, the second part of the monograph introduces a framework that assists with the assessment of such challenges and the crafting of strategies of response. Chapter 3 justifies the utility of planning frameworks and explains the structure and rationale of the product that this volume presents. In short, the Framework for Analysis and Action is based on the nature of irregular warfare as a violent struggle for legitimacy. It incorporates and seeks to correct for the pitfalls discussed in chapter 2 by prompting analysts and planners to ask the right questions and seek the necessary answers. The chapter also explains how we have tweaked this irregular warfare framework to fit better to the world of organized crime; though there is vast commonality between these types of challenges, we have made several minor changes.

In the second part of the monograph, chapters 4 and 5 lay out, respectively, the two parts of the adapted framework: first, the Strategic Estimate of the Situation (or the assessment of the problem), and then, the Course of Action (or the plan for how to address it). These chapters demonstrate how the prompts of the framework—the questions it requests that practitioners ask—assist in integrating the lessons learned through experience and explored in chapter 2. These lessons speak to the need for a more political response, a focus on drivers and on narratives, and the need to map threats in a strategically holistic manner rather than focus on the criminal activity in isolation. In turn, prompts are presented for how to build a strategy based on such assessment, producing a plan that accounts for phasing, logic, resourcing, and sustainability. The ability to craft strategic products in this manner is crucial, even if our plans often require adaptation in the face of a fleeting and nebulous reality. Indeed, it is precisely this fog and friction that call for strategic literacy, as swift reaction and acute understanding will be a prerequisite for success.

In the third section of the monograph, chapter 6 performs a gap analysis, whereby we compare our framework to other leading toolkits available to practitioners working on organized crime. We realize that many (though not all) organizations already have planning processes to grapple with the problem of organized crime and that wholesale adoption of our framework may therefore be unnecessary and/or difficult. The purpose of this section is therefore to illustrate the added value of the Framework for Analysis and Action vis-à-vis other toolkits, so that it can complement existing working methods or inspire new ways of approaching the challenge. Based on our review of existing practice, we are confident and excited to contribute to the field.

A concluding chapter reflects on the potential and limitations of frameworks such as that presented here, and a final appendix provides a "user's guide" to our product that, as a synopsis of the whole, should facilitate adoption and use.

Chapter 2: Countering Terrorism, Insurgency, and Crime: Common Hurdles and Lessons

This monograph asserts that organized crime can be understood and addressed as a problem of irregular warfare. There are commonalities between various irregular outfits—insurgent groups, terrorists—and those of organized crime: both are collective actors who use violence and coercion among their methods and who have corrupting or outright destructive effects on society. Irregular warfare is also concerned with the fusion of licit and illicit power structures and can therefore shed light on the types of fractured, contested, and unpredictable environments where organized crime thrives.

More profoundly, the irregular warfare lens provides a corrective view of the practical problems seen in countering terrorism and insurgency—problems that are equally apparent in efforts to counter organized crime. In both settings, states have revealed a dearth of strategic thinking and know-how, leading to responses that do not work or are counterproductive. The CISA Framework for Analysis and Action integrates the lessons of irregular warfare to enable better assessment of and response to the relevant problem sets. It is because these same lessons are relevant to efforts to counter organized crime that we propose an adapted framework to aid practitioners engaged with this particular challenge. In both settings, the framework encourages a more comprehensive and politically informed assessment of the problem and of how to respond.

To explain and justify the relevance of the irregular warfare framework for organized crime, this chapter identifies six key irregular warfare lessons from recent operational experience and demonstrates their applicability to the alternative challenge at hand. Because the hurdles are the same, and the lessons very similar, we make the case that a corrective framework designed for irregular warfare challenges can be equally useful for efforts to understand and to build strategies to counter organized crime. The point is clearly not that adopting an irregular warfare lens for the problems either of insurgency or of organized crime will eliminate the complexity of response. Instead, we proceed on the notion that a better analytical starting point may avoid some of the most severe missteps seen in both settings and thus help produce more effective strategies.

Lesson 1: The Socioeconomic and Political Context

Terrorism and Insurgency. It became clear soon after the 9/11 attacks that the United States and many of its European allies had unlearned much of what 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 Wieviorka and others have argued, "terrorism is always a method" in challenging the existing order, but in some cases, it is but one of many methods within a broader strategy, while in others it is all-consuming and becomes the "logic" of the political project, subsuming all else.[9] We can term the former set of actors as *insurgents* and the latter *terrorists*. In the end, the labeling is secondary to the implications raised, particularly for the response.

Indeed, with *terrorism* (also once known as "pure terrorism"), armed politics is structurally divorced from the purported mass base in whose name action is undertaken. These groups have so isolated themselves that they have no social standing and can express themselves only via attacks, one after the other, with no socioeconomic or political follow-up or legitimacy gained. In such circumstances, the state can focus on the perpetrators themselves because these clandestine actors are the total of the movement. With *insurgency*, however, a focus on rooting out "the terrorists," to the exclusion of finding *political* solutions to sources of conflict, often leads to new cycles of violence that the operationally astute challenger will exploit to mobilize additional support.[10] With insurgency, it also becomes important to understand the functions that the group serves for its constituents and to design a response that addresses these aspects of its strategy along with its use of violence.

The American-led response to the 9/11 attacks struggled to distinguish between these two forms of terrorism. The so-called war on terror, some sophisticated efforts notwithstanding, did little to address the reasons for isolated yet significant pockets of support for al Qaeda or the factors that might spread such support further.[11] Al Qaeda was not a terrorist group: it was an insurgency that led with terrorism. As Lindholm and Zúquete convincingly argue, its self-proclaimed jihad exploited a transnational social movement within Islam and propelled its concerns onto the global stage, awakening, extending, and radicalizing

a preexisting network.[12] Yet not only was the war on terror negligent of al Qaeda's *focoist* insurgent approach to strategy, it was also conducted in a bullish manner that all but ensured the empowerment of al Qaeda's counterhegemonic ideology.[13]

This problematic approach to insurgency characterized early operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. forces were certainly capable of defeating the Taliban on the battlefield, but it proved far more difficult to address the continued instability in Afghanistan, never mind the geostrategic factors that sustained the Taliban's struggle. In Iraq, for several years following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. military treated the insurgency as if its members were both finite and few, as if enough operations to round up former regime "dead-enders" would surely do the job.[14] U.S. troops confined to large forward-operating bases launched discrete raids to "kill/capture" suspected insurgents, but gains made in this manner did nothing to change the political motivation for insurgency nor the opportunity for continued mobilization.[15] Ironically, the U.S. drone program has followed a similar logic, that "if only we can get enough of these bastards, we'll win the war."[16]

Missed in all these contexts were the political and social drivers of insurgency. The purpose of security forces must be to provide the shield behind which the government enacts the political action necessary to mobilize support and gain legitimacy, thereby marginalizing violent hardliners. This attempt at political action, all while bullets are flying, is also what makes counterinsurgency so demanding. In many cases, elites are more interested in retaining power and privilege than carrying out the political or social efforts deemed necessary for success. Even where there is political will, and the right steps have been identified, one cannot underestimate the challenges of sequencing, of balancing short- and long-term goals, of pushing change through a bureaucratic system, and of measuring progress appropriately—and yet these are often the steps needed to address entrenched rebellion and social strife. All of this is compounded in settings where the state is weak or never truly exercised sovereign control to begin with.

Organized Crime. As with challenges of irregular warfare, efforts to counter organized crime often neglect the socioeconomic and political context in which this phenomenon unfolds. Rather than being a stand-alone problem of illicit

behavior, organized criminal enterprises are enmeshed within social and political networks that must be acknowledged in analysis and in the overall response. A comprehensive response, one that seeks to address rather than displace the problem, must speak to its drivers, or roots, as well as its symptoms. Thus, it becomes necessary to query the social embeddedness of criminal actors or behavior. What drivers lead people to participate in or rely on crime? What is the role of the state in perpetuating this function?

Though these questions may appear commonsensical, they too seldom inform practice. Efforts to combat wildlife crime in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, generally advance the poachers as the problem to be suppressed and fail to consider the local embeddedness of this practice. To illustrate, in northern Kenya, poaching occurs within a context of "cattle rustling, road banditry, and inter-communal conflict," and therefore requires a broader and more political response.[17] For similar reasons, "commercial poaching" must be distinguished from "subsistence poaching," because while both threaten local fauna, each has its own drivers and dynamic.[18] Where poaching is perceived locally as a legitimate coping mechanism because of the state's failure to govern, a response targeting the activity in isolation risks further polarization, desperation, and—potentially—conflict.[19] Similarly, state efforts to counter corruption must also account for the social and political acceptance of such practices in contexts where the licit order is failing. If patrimonialism, nepotism, and corruption are simply the way to get things done, suppressing these practices risks displacement and chaos.[20]

Here and elsewhere, organized crime provides a safety valve for populations with few other options. Similarly, the cultivation and trade in narcotics—in Afghanistan, Peru, Colombia, for instance—reflects 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.[21] Absent viable alternatives, crop eradication is unlikely to affect this coping mechanism over the longer term. Indeed, it may only exacerbate vulnerability and thereby encourage exactly the type of criminal activity that it seeks to prevent.[22]

Likewise, the smuggling of people is rooted in profound global inequalities and intense insecurity in the origin countries. To crack down on the illicit service provided by smugglers, rather than address its demand, is to suppose that the journey to safety can be made more miserable than what is being fled. In the face of imminent danger and possibly death at home, even the marginal possibility of successful migration will remain the preferred option. In the meantime, the added pressures on the smuggling networks will force greater countermeasures and higher costs, compelling those still desperate for this service to do whatever it takes—crime, prostitution, or predation—to raise the necessary funds.[23] As but one example, the International Crisis Group demonstrates how a Nigerien law to curb illegal migration made the criminal activity more dangerous and more lucrative: "Smugglers avoid the main roads and use tracks across the desert to travel to Libya, leading to more deaths and more passengers abandoned somewhere in the sands. The cost of passage has also increased by as much as four times."[24]

Criminal gangs, too, provide functions that must be understood and accounted for in any response, namely employment, protection, and even a sense of belonging.[25] When the Rio-based gang Comando Vermelho was at its height, it blended coercion with co-option and provided job opportunities, some degree of government service, and even entertainment to the disadvantaged citizens of the city's favelas. As in many other slums, enforcement against the gangs has been perceived as an attack upon the community (not least because of its "collateral damage"), resulting in alienation and the lionization of the gang as local heroes.[26] Again, the social embeddedness of the crime matters greatly in terms of response, which is why Skaperdas recommends viewing criminal 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."[27]

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."[28] It must therefore be asked what it is about the social contract and existing political opportunity structure that allows organized crime to flourish. This is not an invitation to moral relativism. Instead, framing

organized crime as socially embedded should encourage a distinction between coping mechanisms and exploitation.

This inquiry must engage with two lines of interrogation. The first concerns the ways in which the illicit world connects with its licit counterpart, or how a state's own systems and institutions have become complicit within a criminalized incentive structure. The large sums involved, the threat of violence, and the weakness of government often turn the very institutions charged with response into the enabler of criminal enterprises. This situation not only challenges the supposedly bright line that ought to divide "cops" from "robbers," but highlights another way in which strategies of response must go beyond the criminal activity itself and consider also its drivers and roots.

Second, analysts must also consider a distinction between foot-soldiers, who in dysfunctional conditions can readily be replaced, and the organizers of criminal activity, who will be more difficult to reach and may even enjoy some level of protection by the state, but who also play a far more strategically meaningful role. In this context, embeddedness touches upon the transnational nature of illicit money flows, requiring a "mapping" of players and networks extending across borders. For example, when the Philippine government brutally cracked down on the drug users within its own country, affecting the availability of narcotics proved difficult 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. Former President Rodrigo Duterte's strategy of killing an ever-growing number of poor Filipino drug users, or even low-level operators, did not do the job.[29] Similarly, naval patrols in Southeast Asia can catch low-level pirates, but their bosses, investors, and fixers sit in the big cities of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore and can readily replace lost earners.[30] Many of the poachers arrested in South Africa are from the lowest rungs of an enterprise that also includes more evasive crime lords, who keep their distance to the action, benefit from political and business protection, and will not so easily be caught.[31]

The final point to make on this lesson is that addressing the roots, or drivers, of organized crime will typically be far more challenging than engaging with its symptoms. Acknowledging this reality presents policymakers with a dilemma.

Either they map out and ambitiously seek to address the totality of the problem, with the potential of fostering meaningful change, or they limit their objectives to the strictly palliative, with the strong likelihood of simply displacing or mutating the challenge. Perhaps the worst outcome is not to realize the systemic embeddedness of organized crime at all, and to pursue it tactically while expecting strategic results. This is often the situation.

Lesson 2: Militarization of Response

Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency was introduced as a corrective to the narrower counterterrorist lens of the war on terror, yet a review of its application in the 2000s and 2010s reveals the second major lesson of irregular warfare, namely the tendency to militarize even our "whole of government" endeavors. In Iraq and Afghanistan, counterinsurgency was executed in a way that, at best, shaped only *military* operations. The very label "counterinsurgency" was problematic, as it evoked associations with military campaigning rather than political action. Outside of the Pentagon (and even within the Pentagon, albeit for different reasons), there was minimal appetite and resources to carry the political center, which made the military efforts a "moon without a planet to orbit."[32]

The militarization of counterinsurgency deprived the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan of political content, leading to the political failure of mostly military "surges" in both theaters. In Iraq, despite improving security, the United States never truly addressed the sectarian nature of the Shiite officials it had anointed as the future leaders of the country.[33] This political contradiction undid the hard-won military gains of the surge and fueled schisms and violent conflict well beyond the departure of U.S. troops.[34] The jury is still out as to whether the latest mowing of the grass—the military dismantling of the counterstate established by the so-called Islamic State (IS)—will be politically sustained or have a more transient effect.[35]

In Afghanistan, no political plan emerged to address the conflict's regional dimension or to de-conflict the myriad contradictory Western aims.[36] Despite a strategy that hinged on establishing the legitimacy of the Kabul government, efforts to address its corruption and the abuses by its security forces never took root. 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 2 or 3 years to work, showcasing misguided faith in this concept as a quick, expeditionary 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 irregular challenges. There is a clear need for such forces in targeting predatory actors and in providing security for contested populations. The issue with counterinsurgency in practice, however, is that the former typically receives far more resources and attention than the latter, as strategies seek victory through tactical strikes rather than by changing conditions on the ground. Whatever its contribution, the deployment of this force should be linked with a viable political process that gives military activity strategic meaning. Such an approach may also call for military forces structured, equipped, and trained in new ways.[37]

Organized Crime. Much as with the irregular campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the struggle against organized crime typically takes on a militarized form. "Militarization," in this context, does not speak exclusively to the use of military forces, though this happens, but rather to the theory of victory at hand. Specifically, a militarized theory of victory relies on a purely suppressive logic, hoping thereby to increase costs on active criminals and deter those who might consider following in their footsteps or using their services. Be it in counterinsurgency or countercrime, unless these efforts also address the *reasons* behind the behavior, or the system of which it is a part, they typically confront the "hydra effect" of eliminating one target only to find another. Also, as the threat adapts, the response must give chase, leading to an escalating game of cat-and-mouse.[38]

Examples of this approach include antipoaching efforts, which often apply the search-and-destroy mentality seen in the war on terror, resulting in hunting expeditions to hunt down those who themselves hunt the animals. On the seas, well-intended expeditions to stop the killing of whales proceed by 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 this need is addressed, our countermeasures may make the crime more profitable, as those involved can demand higher prices because of the elevated risk.[39]

In a similar vein, efforts to stem illegal migration often address the collective *reaction* to hardship rather than the hardship itself and end up targeting those caught up in misery rather than those who benefit from it. One can see this approach in the deployment of warships to fight smugglers in the Mediterranean, the Australian effort to hold migrants in offshore detention centers, the deployment of Turkey's military on its beaches, and the mining of the Turkish-Syrian border. Unless the push factors for illegal migration are in some way addressed, efforts such as these can fall victim to the balloon effect,[40] prompting criminal networks to adapt, and charge more, to meet an undiminished demand.[41]

The same dynamic can be seen in various countergang operations in Central and South America. Operating from tightly packed slums where opportunity is lacking, the gangs use their local population as a source of labor, creating a symbiosis—but also a human shield to deter enforcement. When states do launch into these areas to pursue the gangs, the operation is hugely dislocating to the local community and ineffectual in weakening the criminal structures. In most cases, it either empowers the gangs by cementing their bonds with a beleaguered population or creates a power vacuum within which new gangs fight for control.[42] Yet these strategies are remarkably common, as can be seen with the so-called *mano duro* (firm hand) or *cero tolerancia* (zero tolerance) strategies adopted by Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, and El Salvador.[43]

The mention of El Salvador forces an important discussion, as its latest hardline policy against the powerful gangs operating in the country has in fact succeeded in significantly cutting the crime and homicide rates in the country. Other governments facing upticks in violent crime are therefore looking at the "Bukele model," named after El Salvador's authoritarian-leaning yet wildly popular president who introduced the change in approach.[44] That crime is down in El Salvador is incontestable, but before one draws conclusions about the strategic utility of this "militarized approach," three observations are necessary.

First, it cannot be denied that, at a certain point of intensity, massive levels of coercion will make it impossible or too painful for criminals to act. As Josef Stalin once put it, "Death solves all problems. No man, no problem."[45] And yet, for most states, borrowing strategic guidance from Stalin is not in their best interest or in line with their values. Bukele has overseen indiscriminate imprisonment, with 1 to 2 percent of the country's entire population locked up, reaching at times "the highest incarceration rate in the world."[46] He is also dismantling political checks and balances, fundamentally impairing the democracy hard won by El Salvador. Others will prefer a method that does not, in itself, harm the very society it is meant to protect.

Second, a deeper look at Bukele's approach reveals specific conditions for "success." Beyond the small size of the country and limited resources of the gangs—both important factors—the effectiveness of Bukele's approach relied also on the government's previous pacts with the gangs, which duped them into expecting another mild dose of repression rather than the far more aggressive crackdown that followed.[47] Bukele's unusual familiarity and access to key leaders means that, while sheer and indiscriminate coercion certainly featured as a major motif, the approach was broader and more sophisticated than meets the eye.

Third, as the socioeconomic conditions in El Salvador are, at best, slow to change, it is still an open question whether this particular strategy will prove more sustainable than other militarized approaches. At the very least, the incarceration of so many imposes tremendous financial burdens and costs the government legitimacy because of the many innocent citizens swept up in raids and mass arrests. Enforcement of this type *could* be framed as an unseemly yet defendable first phase of a longer-term consolidation, yet there are few signs at this point of such a transition. The question of El Salvador's future—in terms of criminality and human security—are therefore still in doubt.

Similar points can be made about the U.S. attempt to stem illegal migration across its southern border. Following pledges to solve the problem, recent policy has been characterized by doubling down on punitive actions, including the cancellation of immigration programs, intense pressure on Latin American governments, and the promotion of harsh treatment and deportation for migrants detained by

U.S. authorities. Adding further pressure, the effort has been literally militarized, with many Active-duty personnel deployed to patrol the border as part of Joint Task Force–Southern Border.

Response on this scale appears to have an effect, as the number of border crossings has dropped precipitously.[48] As in El Salvador, however, we have yet to witness how the approach will be sustained. Already, prior to the new measures, the strategy of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was one of "enforcement only," with deterrence promoted as the theory of success. Though not a military unit, CBP was even in 2024 the "largest police force in the world," accounting for 60,000 personnel and boasting a fleet of 240 planes, helicopters, and drones. Yet, as Erickson explains, this effort at deterrence "failed to address the complexity behind people's decision to move, struggled to measure success in relation to recidivism and reaped immeasurable human costs and daunting economic ones."[49] It also made the services provided by smugglers more lucrative.[50]

These factors would appear difficult to displace through further intensity. Many of the migrants who are opting not to enter the United States remain stranded south of the border. Facing low odds of gaining asylum, some will likely seek to furtively cross the border, making the lower number of observed border crossings an incomplete measure of success.[51] Others will adopt a "wait-and-see" approach that will require the surged border-control operations to be sustained indefinitely.[52]

Though the fate of current policy remains uncertain, it is easy to see why states adopt militarized approaches despite their poor track record over time. First, there is an unquestioned link between criminal behavior and traditional policing, which has the job of stopping and deterring crime. In criminology, deterrence requires the *credible* threat of *swift* and *severe* punishment, leading therefore to increasingly harsh strategies.[53] Second, in an unfolding crisis, there is an undeniable appeal to the speed with which security forces can be deployed to "deal with it." A more comprehensive response would imply a more protracted timeline. 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 a longer-term, less reactive, and more effective strategy. As such, what might have been intended as crisis response becomes the whole response.

Militarization is seldom effective, but it can also be harmful, as it encourages a warfighting lens that corrupts standards of law enforcement and due process, both for criminals and their clients. Following mounting incidences of abuse and corruption within CBP, the Barack Obama administration formed an Integrated Advisory Panel to professionalize the force. The body's interim and final reports spoke of a complex entity with uncertain standards that, despite progress, struggled with managing the power and resources it had been given. Indeed, stories from the southern border reveal the mass dehumanization of migrant populations, 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 devolves into the targeting, incarceration, or worse of entire populations.

Because these strategies produce the expectation of change, there is also a danger of spiraling costs and commitment if conditions remain the same. Already in fiscal year 2023, the United States was channeling more funds to "immigration enforcement agencies (more than $25.9 billion) than all other enforcement agencies combined, including the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration], ATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives], U.S. Marshals, and Secret Service."[54] Over time, the militarization of response becomes so entrenched as to become, perhaps, irreversible, not least if it leads organized crime to escalate in response.[55] Also fueling the approach is the fact that militarized strategies tend to poll well, even when they do not work, for they give the appearance of decisiveness (the same applies within the context of counterterrorism). In the Philippines, for example, a drug war that caused officially at least 6,000 deaths (and as many as 30,000, when death-squad figures are tallied), and which patently did not solve the drug problem in the country, nonetheless obtained approval ratings of 81.6 percent among the country's population.[56] In extremis, militarization creates a nation at war with itself.

The deep problem of militarization does not mean that states should eschew enforcement measures altogether. Take the example of gangs. While *mano duro* approaches have seldom worked, the attempt to address gang problems via negotiations or nonviolent measures has hardly fared better. In the latter approach, the state is forced to operate by the gang's rule, which severely limits what can

be achieved. As the International Crisis Group points out, bargaining with the gangs assumes, at least implicitly, that they are willing to "abandon extortion and other criminal practices, and eventually disarm and demobilize," and this is unlikely when the state is engaging from a position of weakness.[57] As for community violence reduction programs, which aim to provide employment and political inclusion, such initiatives face strategic and ethical hazards when attempted in gang-owned territory. In effect, the state must then choose between working with the gangs, even paying them off, and seeking to avoid them altogether—and thereby missing the most at-risk demographic.[58] It is in part for this reason that crime experts question the impact of violence prevention initiatives within contexts of chronic insecurity.[59]

The point, then, is not to reject enforcement but to integrate it within a broader strategy that addresses the push factors and pull factors of organized crime, as well as its manifestations. Much as with various irregular warfare missions, this requirement raises difficult questions regarding the type of force needed and alongside what other actors it must be deployed. This balancing act is what informs the traditional counterinsurgency principles of "minimum use of necessary force" (or applying only as much coercion as is needed) to achieve strategic objectives, and of maintaining "political primacy" (that is to say, ensuring that military operations support a viable political process). Even then, this also assumes that security forces, when deployed, adhere to strict rules of engagement, can properly define what level of force is correct, and understand their supporting role within the strategy, which further must be resourced with the necessary nonmilitary means. The absence of such aptitude and awareness on the part of the security forces, or of their civilian partners in the field, almost ensures that the coercive component will backfire or lack follow-up. In either case, the result will be more insecurity and illegitimacy, and the perceived need for more enforcement.

Lesson 3: Mirror-Imaging: State, Society, and Politics

Counterinsurgency: Ours and Theirs. A third irregular warfare lesson, from Afghanistan and Iraq but also elsewhere, lies in the tendency of intervening states to confuse their own interests and norms with those of the state where the conflict

is unfolding. Mirror-imaging takes many forms. Militarily, the United States and other outsiders have typically evinced insufficient understanding of the abilities and needs of the institutions they seek to support. Lacking in-depth awareness of local institutions and organizational culture, assistance instead defaults to the norms and practices of the intervening institution, which often are not appropriate for the setting at hand.[60] One problem, reflecting U.S. military culture, is the reliance on high-technology capabilities as silver bullets to irregular warfare challenges. Elsewhere, the U.S. military has provided operational advice based not on the requirements of the recipient force but on what constitutes military effectiveness for the United States. As Greentree notes, "It is hard to get around the fact that militaries can only attempt to transfer what they know."[61]

This military dimension is emblematic of a broader political problem. It simply is not clear that the interests and objectives fueling a Western intervention are matched by the local governments through which action is to be taken. Early in the occupation of Iraq, the United States presumed that both it and the fledgling Baghdad government were united in seeking a representative democracy, and yet the parties in charge were the same that were sponsoring radical Iran-backed militias.[62] Following the surge, it quickly became clear that the Maliki regime had no interest in using the security gains achieved to reconcile with the Sunni tribal leaders and political elite that the U.S. military had empowered.[63]

In Afghanistan, a large part of the problem for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the international community was the uncertainty of their own political aims and how to achieve them, with counterterrorist prerogatives often conflicting with, or eclipsing entirely, efforts to establish local institutions capable of sustaining peace and security.[64] On that basis, it was never clear which goals, if any, enjoyed support from Kabul. Certainly, Karzai's theft of the 2009 election and his government's close relation to organized crime suggested significant differences of opinion on two of the campaign's major fronts.[65] 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?).[66]

At the broadest level, this concerns not only divergent political interests but completely different conceptions of the state. Take Mali. For years, the West provided counterterrorism assistance to the government in Bamako in the belief that the political elite would move to spread "good governance" to the areas most affected by extremism, in the north of the country. Instead, observers found it extremely challenging to sway the "indifferent political elite in Mali," which was perceived as doing "the bare minimum . . . to invest in the violence-wracked north and central regions of the country."[67] The verdict speaks to an uncomfortable reality affecting most states facing insurgency. In Nigeria, most of the Sahel, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—and in Asia, in Pakistan, Thailand, Afghanistan, and the Philippines—instability drags on in part because the areas affected are not a core concern to the government. Third-party efforts at "state-building" do not often acknowledge this reality and instead assume a level of political ownership that may not obtain.

Mirror-Imaging in Countering Organized Crime. As with irregular warfare, efforts to counter organized crime often involve a better resourced state assisting one that is less able and more directly threatened. Taking this commonality one step further, in both contexts such relationships can do much good but also fall victim to mirror-imaging, whereby the intervening party confuses its own interests and norms with those of the party receiving help. This tendency can have counterproductive—or even disastrous—consequences.

As with counterinsurgency, a major root of the problem is that not all states are equally seized by the problem of organized crime. Reflecting the very weakness that triggers the attempts to help, some states have long accepted the need for various arrangements with organized criminal groups so that they and the state can both function. In defining this equilibrium, it is not lost on the government that the criminal group sometimes has the edge, be it in terms of "wealth, organization, communications," or "weaponry," all of which "can create qualitatively different bargaining relationships with regional or even national governments."[68] Given the dangers of confrontation, maintaining a stable pact with the enemy may seem like the better alternative. This is particularly the case in states where organized crime is estimated to bring in as much as 40 to 50 percent of the national income,[69] but

it occurs also in wealthy nations where white-collar crime appears to be accepted as a cost of doing business.[70]

Where third-party states miss the nature of such arrangements, their efforts are likely to disappoint. The role of corruption looms large and must be understood from the local perspective. As some scholars 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."[71] A necessary starting point is to interrogate local norms and the local political economy and to appraise what constitutes "societally approved of, or at least socially ignored, forms of corruption."[72] This does not mean abandoning law-enforcement efforts, but rather ensuring they have acknowledged the societal and political functions of that which they seek to thwart.

Afghanistan provides a stark illustration of mirror-imaging and its pernicious effects. As the West sought to counter the crippling problem of corruption in Afghanistan, it came to realize that the host-nation government viewed the issue very differently. It should be said that it was initially the United States that, for reasons of counterterrorism, had invited into the Afghan government the very warlords that would haunt its later state-building efforts. Still, in seeking to undo this damage and address the criminalization of the state, its partner in Kabul emerged as a major impediment. Key targets for countercorruption were effectively untouchable, such as Ahmed Wali Karzai, the president's half-brother.[73] Warlords whom the United States now worked to marginalize were invited back in by the Karzai regime. Stephen Hadley, President 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."[74]

The frustration in Afghanistan reflects not just the teething pains of a largely improvised experiment with "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 gangs in the country's oil-rich south rather than address their

largely legitimate grievances of neglect and abuse.[75] In Russia, write Finckenauer and Voronin, organized crime includes gangsters but also businesspeople and government officials;[76] it "has penetrated all layers of society and the economy."[77] In Dubai, and in Marbella, Spain, the local authorities are said to turn a blind eye to a booming organized-crime scene so as to avoid confrontation and to soak up the cashflow.[78] As Peter Andreas notes, conventional wisdom frames criminal enterprises as "an easy and convenient villain," yet such a lens can easily lead to "sloppy analysis and a false diagnosis." He continues: "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."[79]

The vast variety of ways in which states are involved in organized crime will forcefully challenge any external effort to address the drivers sustaining this problem. Indeed, there is typically deep institutional and political resistance on the part of the elite to precisely such action. The attempt to wish away or subvert such resistance is likely to be destabilizing, forcing those seeking change to balance carefully the preservation of order and the quest for justice. Any attempt to move from the former to the latter must appreciate that deeply conservative forces will mobilize to protect the institutions that legitimize and protect their privilege. Rather than engage with unfounded assumptions, the interests and incentives at play—within both the intervening and host government—must be carefully assessed.[80] This approach has also been termed a "political-economy" lens and is increasingly acknowledged as indispensable to any intervention.[81] Even then, the analytical, ethical, and strategic implications of such a lens remain considerable.

Lesson 4: Community Mobilization

State and Periphery in Counterinsurgency. Since insurgency typically erupts in contested and fragile political settings, it makes it even more difficult to find strong political foundations that might address the grievances fueling the problem. Wishing for a strong and functional state to emerge from the midst of such conflict can be overly aspirational and ignore historical patterns of politics. Therefore, in most cases, there is a need to think creatively on how to mobilize the people in support of a state that they may never have recognized as a legitimate authority.[82]

If, in these contexts, the Weberian ideal of the state is extremely weak, or even nonexistent, how can insurgency-threatened governments nonetheless exercise control over their territory and govern their people?

Some scholars suggest an alternative basis for order, one that acknowledges the contested authority of the state yet retains sufficient central oversight over people and land to avert conflict. A possible recourse lies in what Ken Menkhaus terms the "mediated state," one in which "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."[83] Others have called such arrangements "hybrid political orders" and lauded this lens as a pragmatic recognition of how many states function in reality, rather than in theory: by sharing power within the context of a highly decentralized entity still ostensibly led by the state government.[84]

These terms not only reflect the artificiality of the state in many of the countries threatened by insurgency, but also that in such contexts the attempted imposition of central governance can be dramatically counterproductive. In Somalia, a major reason for popular resistance to the strong state sought through various interventions is that, historically, that same state has acted as "a catalyst for criminality, violence, and communal tensions."[85] In Afghanistan, local communities also rejected the authority imposed upon them by the center, in part owing to vivid memories of abuse, injustice, and cruelty perpetrated by the state.[86] In post-war Iraq, the continued empowerment of an increasingly sectarian Shiite 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.[87] Here and elsewhere, "more state" is no recipe for more stability.

This insight runs counter to counterinsurgency theory, which tends to equate progress with the gradual expansion of governance to previously "ungoverned areas." This type of thinking can be dangerous. For one, while the theory emphasizes that government control spread like ink spots across paper, it does not evince much concern for what was on that paper before the ink reached it. In fact, "the analogy is critically flawed," as "there is really no societal equivalent to a

blank piece of paper."[88] Instead, each human locality teems with activity, intrigue, and politics.

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 fill the void by imposing the state. A more promising approach 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 meaningful 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.[89] In Mali, popular trust in traditional structures by far exceeds that placed in the police and national courts.[90] In post-conflict Timor-Leste, rural areas far away from the administrative reach of the state are instead governed through "customary forms of community organisation." 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."[91]

Combining top-down and bottom-up initiatives in this manner may be the best political model for several insurgency-threatened states. The burning question, of course, is what level of divergence 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 even supporting 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. Thus, while the mediated state provides a more realistic lens, it does not significantly simplify the task of achieving justice and peace.

State and Periphery in Countering Organized Crime. State-local relations pertain also to the countering of organized crime, particularly as many state governments are themselves enmeshed within the illicit political economy. In the face

of such a challenge, state-led attempts to address the criminality will often appear unpredictable or insufficient, leaving communities at the heart of the problem without protection. If states are unwilling or unable to engage more productively against organized crime, how can change be achieved? One response is to shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches and to work through the community rather than the state. This method relies on mobilizing those most affected by the problem and those with the greatest interest in a solution to build resistance and resilience at the local level.[92]

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."[93] 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 at hand. Hoping to address the top-down failures of the state with more top-down assistance—as was attempted with both Sudan and Eritrea—is to put the foxes in charge of the henhouse.[94] Absent unlikely reform, rewarding the state with capacity building and technical assistance is only going to compound the problem and make both donors and recipient governments complicit in continued criminality.

Conversely, Maguire identifies antipoaching initiatives in northern Kenya as an example of what can be achieved through the local level. In an area of scarce socioeconomic opportunity, minimal interest in conservation, and continued resource-based conflicts, criminal groups found a perfect environment in which to operate. Over time, however, community-based initiatives have challenged their grip. Through British and U.S. assistance, local-level conservancies gained assets to gather and share intelligence on poaching with the Kenya Wildlife Service, which was more trusted than the country's security agencies. Not only was this partnership informing antipoaching operations, but the conservancies also emphasized the need for local buy-in. Thus, community policing was undertaken by local rangers benefiting from local knowledge and support. Counterpoaching policies were also complemented with "socioeconomic development programmes and land-reform initiatives," providing clinics, schools, and mechanisms for resolving interethnic conflict. As Maguire explains, "These programmes have both

fomented alternative livelihoods to poaching, and reduced deterioration of range-lands and resource conflict."[95] Though this 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 a range of countergang efforts. In Chicago, as part of the so-called Cure Violence program, civil society leaders and community members have 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."[96] In 2004 in Palermo, Italy, student activists created the AddioPizzo campaign to encourage businesses and consumers to fight extortion by the Mafia. In addition to raising awareness, the organizers provided legal support to targeted businesses and educated for change, especially among the youth.[97] Informed by these types of programs, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is engaging in local resilience initiatives worldwide, aimed at identifying, organizing, engaging with, and empowering civil society to take on local challenges ignored or abetted by the state.[98]

These local-level initiatives can be productive, but they face the same obstacles as local security efforts in irregular warfare settings. Absent state buy-in, community-led efforts are often limited by a lack of coordination, a dearth of funds, and the extreme vulnerability of unarmed actors in the face of powerful criminal entities.[99] Also, because of the sheer informality of bottom-up initiatives, there is simply no guarantee that they will play to the progressive and community-oriented tune hoped for by international donors. As Mats Berdal notes, there is a tendency to view the "local level" as a refuge from politicking—as an "authentic response of 'civil society' to the predation, manipulation and violence of outsiders," and yet this lens can be deeply misleading.[100] In Tancítaro, Mexico, the local, homegrown response to predation by gangs was the formation of a militia, commanded by warlords who ruled violently and without accountability.[101] In Rio's favelas, a local response to gangs is the vigilante militia units, structured around ex-police, that provide some degree of security but also extort the local population, engage in

organized crime, and violently remove those standing in their way.[102] As indicated by these examples and others, the search for local responses to organized crime requires careful judgment as to which informal structures to support.

Even where the community is a viable partner, a further consideration obtains: the "balloon effect" and the ability of criminal actors to go elsewhere. Community empowerment can help thwart criminal infiltration, yet it will not address the elite elements of the enterprise, those reaping the highest rewards. 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.[103] 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 are promising, those higher up in the ivory-trafficking market remain untouched, adapt, and continue to act with widespread impunity.[104]

Lesson 5: Lack of Strategy

Strategy and Counterinsurgency. When Western militaries rediscovered counterinsurgency theory in the mid-2000s, it was in search of a solution to repeated setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now much maligned because of frustrations in both campaigns, expeditionary counterinsurgency doctrine was an attempt to familiarize the U.S. military and its allies with war "as it is" rather than "as imagined," bringing in the whole political and societal complexity of what was being attempted. As but one example, the so-called counterinsurgency principles emphasized the importance of achieving a nuanced political understanding of the campaign, of operating under unified command, of using intelligence to guide operations, of isolating insurgents from the population, of using the minimum amount of force necessary to achieve set objectives, and of assuring and maintaining the perceived legitimacy of the counterinsurgency effort in the eyes of the populace.[105] Though quotidian and perhaps too simplistic, such guidance differed importantly from the crude "kill/capture" approach that had driven earlier operations.

Still, while the rediscovery of counterinsurgency had promise, it did not deliver. In the end, principles and field manuals could increase awareness of dilemmas,

but they did not substitute for a lack of strategy. The problem expressed itself most clearly in Afghanistan, where—lacking a campaign plan that viably tied operational activity to a clear strategic objective—many military units instead let the necessarily broad principles of counterinsurgency guide their way.[106] The problem was not necessarily the absence of actual strategic goals but rather their multiplicity, contradictions, and lack of ordering.[107] The result was an attempt to apply operational directives all at once, but with scant attention to strategic direction or political context.

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)."[108] Plainly, a counterinsurgency field manual will be unable to address these difficult questions or to resolve the attendant trade-offs, though it may provide some guidance on how to think and engage with the modern battlefield.

Strategy and Countering Organized Crime. Much like insurgency, the problem of organized crime is also so widespread, involves so many players, and touches upon so many interests that countering it requires a strategy, informed by a clear assessment of the situation and a theory of success. In both contexts, that of irregular warfare and organized crime, an absence of strategy leads to reactive policies that go on despite no real signs of change. In terms that also describe the counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, Rademeyer describes the "war on poaching" as "an unwinnable war"—the same as could be said for the so-called war on drugs.[109] Despite widespread recognition of this fact, these wars drag on, much as was the case in Afghanistan, where "bureaucracy did its thing."[110]

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. Likewise, in countering organized crime and corruption, practitioners looking for strategy often come to rely "on 'best practice' tactics and solutions whether appropriate or not, or whether they are actually working."[111] The kingpin strategy in Mexico, for example, was clearly intended to reduce the

power of the drug lords by targeting them, but it did not question the consequences of creating a leadership void in an insecure environment in which criminality remained hugely lucrative.[112] 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 generated a violent competition for the spoils.[113]

The point here is that organized crime requires the same strategic process as other irregular warfare challenges. This process begins with a full assessment of the challenge, focused on the nature of the political problem, the contextual forces that sustain it, the contending narratives that motivate involvement and use of criminal networks, and the strategies these actors use to shape their environment, overwhelm opponents, and secure profit. A crucial final question concerns the role of the government response in addressing this problem, or in contributing to it, as may be the case.

This type of assessment—a Strategic Estimate—will encourage a more comprehensive identification and mapping of the problems raised by organized crime. As with the response to other irregular warfare challenges, such a product would also help inform a more effective response, one that acknowledges 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. As a result, the crafting of strategy 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. Policymakers and strategists must consider very carefully what it is that they seek to achieve and what progress will mean. Questions must explore whether the purpose of an intervention is to halt the crime itself (say, human smuggling) or to target its more violent and abusive enablers. Where criminal activity is being targeted, strategy must account for how to address the local desire for the services provided, be it basic governance in the favelas, a livelihood through poaching or drug cultivation, or an imperative to migrate from an active conflict zone.

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—the 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 needed. As will be argued in chapter 6, through a gap analysis comparing the Framework for Analysis and Action with comparable planning products, there is a dearth of guidance on what it means to "do strategy"—or what *strategy* even means. Too often, practitioners fall back on reactive measures or preexisting toolkits to address the symptoms of the problem. When such actions are married to inappropriate or self-serving metrics, the response can be a highly destructive yet self-reinforcing cycle of failure. The trendlines of organized crime's growth and proliferation, on a global basis, forcefully underline the need to do better.

Lesson 6: The Black Box of Political Will

Counterinsurgency and Resolve. If the art of strategy offers a way out of darkness—a method for effective response—its countervailing force is the lack of political will for precisely such action. Political will is the ball and chain of any discussion of irregular warfare. How good are concepts, theory, and best practices if the government that is to act prefers to go in a different direction? Against such calculations of interest, there appears to be little that can be done, and so the conflict festers and grows—all while the state loses legitimacy and coherence. In other cases, external powers seek to address the issue of political will by removing the politician in charge (think of Diem in South Vietnam). This, too, is an approach steeped in risk.

Political will, goes the saying, eats strategy for breakfast. Only a handful of the 47 countries that deployed troops to Afghanistan authorized their forces 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 of 500 to 600 soldiers was responsible for stabilizing 4 provinces and a combined population of roughly 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? The search for better practice and more enlightened approaches appears, then, simply to chase the shadow of a larger problem.

Political will is crucial, but its role in analysis and prescription can become paralyzing. First, how does one measure political will? In the absence of some gauge, the main sign of its absence will be the lack of progress, yet such analysis quickly becomes circular: failed operations reflect inadequate will whereas successful ones do not. Political will then becomes a catch-all and purely retrospective argument that is both impossible to disprove but also analytically meaningless. Second, political will is not a static variable. It fluctuates according to events on the ground, domestic developments, electoral interests, and understandings of foreign affairs. 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."[114]

Thus, as well as acknowledge political will, those concerned with making a positive change must also work hard to shift opinion accordingly. Specifically, it would seem necessary to focus analysis on *why* states engage in various types of irregular campaigns, how they perceive their adversaries, and the balance of interests that determines both commitment and approach. The task of altering such prioritization is daunting, yet the challenge can be mitigated by fostering greater awareness of what inaction will yield and of the practice and strategies that have shown promise in other settings. Even then, whatever strategy is formulated must account for the political will at hand or explain how it will be augmented as part of the plan.

Resolve and Countering Organized Crime. Much as with counterinsurgency, the political will to counter organized crime is sometimes lacking. Not only is organized crime deeply embedded socially, so that interventions are likely to cause extensive "collateral damage," but many governments are enmeshed with the phenomenon, be it via occasional, individual bribes; institutional corruption; or outright state complicity.[115] Unfortunately, political will is also deemed an indispensable driver of state action. Thus, much as with irregular warfare, we confront

the same fundamental obstacle: how to galvanize governments to act and, when they do, to do so in the most effective and strategically appropriate manner.

First, political will is not a static variable. It cannot become, as it oftentimes does, a self-fulfilling excuse for not trying. A better approach is to dissect exactly what has shaped the prevailing interest in 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 that doing so is necessary.[116] It is a breakdown that hints also at potential levers for how political will can be built up—or destroyed. Rather than stop the discussion at the point of political *want*, progress can be achieved by illustrating the range of opportunity (*can*) and inspiring higher levels of motivation (*must*).

Starting with the latter—the *must*—there is potential in creating "public pressure and citizen engagement, organisational rules and regulations, and a personal sense of civic duty."[117] From the bottom up, avenues of communication must be opened that allow the victims of organized crime to express their grievances to the political leaders charged with response. Particularly as concerns corruption, which typically is where the state comes in, there is merit in adopting a "victim perspective," not least because corruption can easily be mistaken as a "victimless" crime.[118] As Marquette and Peiffer argue, by demonstrating how corruption diminishes democracy and by emphasizing "the downstream violence that may occur in chains of activities that corruption facilitates," it might be possible to generate the well-placed allies needed to start a movement.[119]

Meanwhile, from top-down, the international community can play a valuable role in prescribing behavior and reinforcing norms, though enforcement will clearly remain a challenge. In a 4-year period starting in 2000, the international community passed a flurry of measures to address transnational crime and corruption.[120] These have since been complemented by more agency-specific guidelines and conventions. The activity is useful and helps shape norms, and yet, much as with the United Nations' (UN) sprawling architecture for counterterrorism, 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 by 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*. Indeed, donors must be able to determine whether the lack of political will stems from a dearth of motivation or simply a lack of capacity. In settings where questions of political *must* have been or are being resolved, progress may be attainable through security cooperation and the building of partnership capacity. Still, as discussed, this is an area where the intent of assisting states can easily be subverted through mirror-imaging or an inadequate understanding of the local political and social interests. Effective engagement may require candid agreement on what are truly common goals (rather than just on those pushed by external actors) and then a creative mix of carrots and sticks to ensure progress. Much as in various efforts to build capacity for irregular warfare, it is also critical that the engagement be far more than episodic, go beyond enforcement agencies, and be tracked carefully in terms of outcomes. Indeed, to push against the tendency to militarize the response to organized crime, those providing assistance must similarly demilitarize their guidance and advice.

Conclusion

Political violence and crime are both scourges of society. Both attack the rule of law and are 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 characteristics, and the difficulty of achieving sustainable progress. Within the world of counterterrorism, an irregular warfare lens helps point to the often-neglected character of the problem, focusing the attention of analysts and practitioners alike on the struggle for legitimacy underlying the violent clash. As this chapter has argued, a similar lens can have utility also for reinterrogating the problem of organized crime.

An irregular warfare lens applies to organized crime in three related ways. First, certain criminal actors resemble irregular warfare ones, in particular insurgents and rebel factions, in that they are embedded within and sustained by a

particular political and societal context, one that must also be addressed for action against the group to be strategically meaningful. An overwhelming focus on the challenge, be it violence or crime, that neglects questions of context risks misinterpreting the nature of the problem. Second, criminal actors diversify their approach and adopt formidable strategies to ensure protection, sustainability, and profit. In this manner, they are akin to various irregular groups that—in addition to carrying out armed action—also govern, communicate, and conduct outreach to solidify their position. An effective response must account for all this activity. Third, organized crime is itself a key vector for various states seeking influence and access in target states. As states sponsor and use these groups, responding to the latter must necessarily account also for the former.

Based on these commonalities (and others), this chapter has enumerated the lessons gained in two decades of engagement in irregular warfare, referencing Afghanistan in particular, and applied these to the practice of countering organized crime. There is a tendency, in both fields, to militarize the response, or to let it be governed by a purely suppressive logic. Thus, the social, political, and economic functions of organized crime are obscured. In both contexts, mirror-imaging subverts the efforts of donor states wanting to help those at the frontlines of instability, and in both cases, this extends from the technical to the ontological, with implications for how we understand the state. There is, in both cases, a need to mobilize bottom-up networks and work alongside communities as crucial partners, particularly where national governments are absent or uninterested in intervening. Indeed, in both cases, there is a need to engage far 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, that for strategy. Rather than fall back on principles, best practices, and conventional wisdom, there is a need for far greater understanding of what constitutes strategic thinking and how to apply it. In the three subsequent chapters, we will use the thematic commonalities between irregular warfare and countering organized crime to present a framework of analysis and action that guides practitioners through a Strategic Estimate and Course of Action. This framework builds on the above

lessons from irregular warfare, to include counterinsurgency. It is a resource for both academics and policymakers and is proposed as a valuable tool precisely to sharpen strategic assessment and response.

Chapter 3: Introducing the Irregular Warfare Lens and the Framework for Analysis and Action

The discussion in the last chapter highlights the need for more comprehensive assessment of terrorism and insurgency and better proficiency at strategy development. It also noted that state efforts to counter organized crime point to a strikingly similar set of lessons. The precise setting of these lessons differs, but policy actors and researchers, it seems, are victim to the same analytical tendencies.

In the realm of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, the introduction of an irregular warfare lens helps focus attention on the political and social context of collective violence. Awareness of such context, and the need to understand the system that is driving and enabling the problem, produces greater sensitivity to the requirements of strategy. Because the hurdles in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency are comparable to those found in countering organized crime, a similar irregular warfare lens can also be helpful in crafting strategy against gangs, cartels, and other illicit structures.

In making such a case, this chapter engages with three major points. First, it explains the value of the irregular warfare lens in understanding not only problems of political violence and subversion but also challenges of organized crime. Second, it illustrates how the CISA Framework for Assessment and Action responds to the nature and character of irregular warfare and therefore seeks to correct for the analytical and practical hurdles discussed in the previous chapter. Third, the chapter lays out the alterations made to the framework to adapt it to problems of organized crime. This section also discusses the utility and limitations of analytical frameworks in general. A step-by-step walk-through of the adapted framework follows in chapters 4 and 5.

The Irregular Warfare Lens

The U.S. Department of Defense for many years offered a fairly lucid definition of irregular warfare as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations."[121] It added that irregular warfare "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."[122] In contrast to the "regular wars," wherein states win through military means, and which occupy most of the Pentagon's attention, irregular warfare sees actors adopt more indirect and diverse approaches so as to offset their conventional inferiority. A successful irregular challenge thus displaces the conflict from the military field, where the state is strong, and forces it instead to respond in ways where it often struggles, via political and informational channels, all within a contested and unpredictable security environment.

The challenge is clear, and yet the real contribution of irregular warfare is that it posits these confrontations as contests for legitimacy, wherein violence merely supports a political struggle. This is a central point that is often lost in analysis (and, indeed, has been lost in the Pentagon's reworked definition of irregular warfare). The phenomenon does not primarily denote an asymmetry in military approaches (conventional versus guerrilla) or in legal status (state versus nonstate), but rather a struggle defined by its objective: "to undermine and erode an adversary's power, influence, and will to exercise political authority over a civilian population."[123] As the struggle for legitimacy is won or lost, opportunities for effective action swell or shrink, determining thereby the flow of the conflict and creating new political realities along the way. As implied, the minimum requirement is not to build but rather to erode legitimacy, a far easier task but one with potentially debilitating consequences. This reality drives home that legitimacy is not quantitative. As with all relationships in irregular warfare, it is the correlation of tangible and intangible forces that drives the outcome.

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 benefactor and provider, and its enemies as the main or only threats, wishes away the very heart of the problem: a lack of government legitimacy, split loyalties among the population, and contested governance among a range of actors. Legitimacy is subjective, fluid, contextual, and contested. Nothing can be taken for granted.

Second, legitimacy in irregular warfare is not a popularity contest. If legitimacy denotes recognition of authority and willingness to obey, this can quite clearly be achieved through the coercion of a civilian population. Indeed, those who decide

who lives or dies can usually muster the cooperation they need.[124] Over time, such compliance can even generate a sense of legitimacy, or an acceptance of the rule of the games which—at the very least—are predictable and well understood. Still, this type of control, or what may be termed "negative legitimacy," is commonly fragile and difficult to sustain. Thus, more potent actors seek to blend coercion with some degree of co-option, so that resistance to the project is reduced or turned into support. At no point, however, is legitimacy merely about "being liked." It will also require a self-interested calculation that loyalty to the system will pay off. This is, indeed, what is meant by winning both hearts *and* minds.

The Three Components of Irregular Warfare. In studying the nature of irregular warfare, three main characteristics stand out, as they explain the inherent ambiguity of the approach and its appeal to a wide range of actors. As will be explained, they also help explain the structure of the Framework for Analysis and Action.

First, irregular warfare blends disparate lines of effort to engage in the contest for legitimacy. It compensates for weakness in one area—typically, raw military might—by bringing other efforts into play. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, insurgency has blended terrorism and other forms of violence with a range of nonmilitary efforts: governance, service delivery, mobilization, and legitimation. Among insurgents, the approach was perhaps best conceptualized, and also executed, by the Vietnamese and their "war of interlocking."[125] What occurs in the realm of violence is critical, but it gains meaning through its symbiotic relation with other efforts: what the actor is doing politically, through alliances and nonviolence (also known as political warfare), and by internationalizing the struggle.[126] These lines of effort must therefore be interrogated and countered as doggedly as the more high-profile use of violence.

The second facet of irregular warfare is its exploitation of social and political contradictions to delegitimize the adversary and gain leverage. At least since the American Revolution—but more saliently because of the post–World War II wars of decolonialization and their abundant literature—insurgency has been understood as rebellion executed with awareness of the structural or systemic issues at stake. The challenger targets the pressure points of society, using key grievances

and issue areas, to mobilize an armed political challenge to the legitimacy of the ruling authorities. It is in this manner that terrorist groups become successful insurgents. IS exploited Sunni-Shiite rivalries in Iraq to rally a popular base and pry society apart, much as the Taliban was able to capitalize on the incompetence and injustices of central governance in Afghanistan.

Third, because of irregular warfare's emphasis on mobilization, narratives are crucial. They not only describe and explain reality but also achieve buy-in for political projects or shroud the nature of actions taken. Writing in 2006, Lawrence Freedman recognized the growing strategic salience of narratives, describing them as "designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events."[127] Revolutionaries throughout time have understood that insurgency needs a good story to survive. As sociologist and political scientist David E. Apter has put it, "People do not commit political violence without discourse."[128] In preparing for the 1917 revolution, Vladimir Lenin saw "systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation" as "the pressing task of the moment."[129] Hitler famously weaponized the radio and used state propaganda to radicalize an entire nation. On the Viet Minh revolutionary war, General Vo Nguyen Giap noted that "the most essential and important task was to make propaganda among the masses and organise them."[130] Osama bin Laden picked up on the theme, arguing that "the media war" is "one of the strongest methods . . . [reaching] 90 percent of the total preparation for the battles"; Ayman al-Zawahiri, more modestly, saw "more than half of this battle" as "taking place in the battlefield of the media."[131] IS—always seeking to outdo—has claimed the power of narratives can "be more potent than atomic bombs."[132]

An Irregular Warfare Analytical Framework: Origins and Utility

Most organizations that engage in programmatic activities have some type of method to unpack the challenge at hand and elaborate a response. The utility of such tools is that they guide assessment and practitioners to structure and convey their analytical ideas. They are often based on accumulated institutional experience and the study of a particular problem. Their content reflects the requirements found to matter in such settings and pushes practitioners through prompts or

steps that force consideration of these same features. Frameworks such as the one presented here are therefore not new, nor in short supply. And yet, these tools can also be contentious—particularly among academics, who view them as artificially imposing template solutions on sui generis and complex problem sets.

Ultimately, the utility of frameworks and planning tools depends largely on how and why they are used. Of course, no framework will remove the challenge of dealing with complex tasks. Their value lies instead in asking the right questions, those found through experience to be relevant, so that practitioners—both unseasoned and veteran—are encouraged to think through aspects of their work that might otherwise be missed. In other words, analytical frameworks help flesh out and sequence analysis in a way that allows the systematic identification and study of what matters. Without such assistance, it is all too common for organizations to fall back on preexisting repertoires (or standard operating procedures), particularly in times of high stress or shrinking time horizons. Elsewhere, analytical complexity yields circular and paralyzing polemics as to which part of the problem to privilege: its causes or its symptoms, the adversary or our strategy, the ideology or its resonance. A comprehensive framework should allow the analyst to consider all these questions in turn, enabling therefore a comprehensive mapping of the problem and a suitable foundation for the crafting of a tailored response.

This leads to a second key function of planning frameworks. Though the content of a strategy is key, a related challenge lies in *communicating* the product. Indeed, the purpose of a planning tool is not just to generate good ideas as an end in themselves, or simply to admire the problem, but to use the insight generated to inform collective planning and action. This typically requires a common vocabulary and understanding. It requires a common picture of the strategic intent and rationale, and of how subsidiary tasks nest within broader efforts. Similarly, a framework should help practitioners convey issues of prioritization and trade-offs, the phasing of efforts, and how precisely the proposed inputs are linked with sought-after outcomes (also known as the theory of success). By asking practitioners to consider these and other questions, a framework can help distinguish a strategy from a list of objectives.

Given the utility of planning tools and frameworks, there is no shortage of such products, some more intricate than others. As elaborated in chapter 6, which presents a cross-comparison of various such tools, the Framework for Analysis and Action is the only one designed for the nature and challenges of irregular warfare. At NDU's CISA in Washington, DC, it was our mission to assist practitioners at the frontlines of various irregular warfare struggles to understand the challenge at hand and to contribute with a proposed solution. This has typically required officers and officials to unpick the full breadth and depth of a political problem, to map the variegated adversarial strategy being employed, and assess the societal contradictions giving it strength. It is typically a tall order, and one that calls for strategic literacy.

To assist, Thomas A. Marks used his practical and analytical background with People's War to create a framework of analysis that could be used in the classroom. Originally a rough draft and then a series of articles, the framework evolved over time into what has now been presented in more extensive form. It has continued to evolve, yet the basic analytical foundation remains the same. The focus throughout was on the struggle for legitimacy. This can hardly surprise, given that irregular contestation invariably emerges from a challenge to the authority—the right to rule, thus power—of the existing order.

The Framework for Analysis and Action takes the three facets of irregular warfare as its inspiration (see figure 1). Because irregular warfare relates to the exploitation of grievances, hopes, and aspirations, the Roots section interrogates the structural conditions that are being used to empower challenge to the existing order. Because irregular warfare is about the weaponization of narrative, a Frame and Narrative section asks how the threat group assesses and presents the world, and how its framing is resonating with contested audiences. Because irregular warfare blends various lines of effort to generate power, a Threat Strategy section maps the approach to political change in its entirety—objectives, methods, and resources, all driven by a theory of victory or success. At this point, the nature of the challenge or problem will be clear, which leads to consideration of just how response is being implemented and to what effect (see chapter 4 for details).

Figure 1. Original Framework for Analysis and Action

1. STRATEGIC ESTIMATE
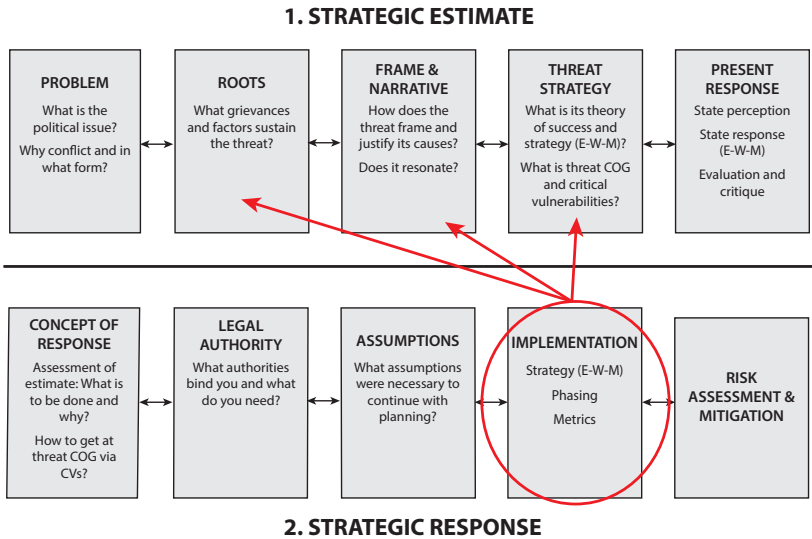
Key: E-W-M: ends-ways-means; COG: center of gravity; CVs: critical vulnerabilities.

Note: Figure shows the Strategic Estimate (assessment) in relation to the Course of Action (proposed strategy).

Source: David A. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2022).

In responding to these prompts, the analyst builds a Strategic Estimate of the Situation, as depicted graphically in the top row of figure 1. The Pentagon defines an estimate as "an analysis of a foreign situation, development, or trend that identifies its major elements, interprets the significance, and appraises the future possibilities and the prospective results of the various actions that might be taken."[133] This part of the framework is strictly diagnostic, not prescriptive, and yet it occupies a significant portion of the whole. Its depth and intricacy are deliberate, as understanding the challenge is a prerequisite for an effective response. In this manner, the framework operates on the principle ascribed, apocryphally, to Albert Einstein, that if given an hour to solve a problem, he would spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions. The essential foundation for strategy is understanding the problem.

Only when the situation is thoroughly diagnosed does the analysis proceed to the second half of the framework, the Course of Action, which seeks to counter the problem investigated in the Estimate. With the Strategic Estimate as a blueprint, the framework helps produce a strategy that addresses the problem within its context, balancing actions to counter the threat with those intended to remove its roots, or nourishment. In designing this response, the framework leans heavily on the military decisionmaking process (also known by the abbreviation MDMP) and its particular focus on operational design and campaign architecture. These conceptual tools compel identification of a theory of success, of ends, ways, and means (objectives, methods, and resources), and of relevant metrics, or of how progress may be measured. Assessments of legal authority, planning assumptions, and risk and mitigation are also indispensable (yet often missed) components of this decisionmaking process. Crucial throughout (and reflected by the three red arrows in the graphic above) is that the planned strategy responds to the analysis uncovered and distilled through the first half of the framework.

Adapting an Irregular Warfare Framework for Organized Crime

In the several decades after 9/11, the concept of irregular warfare gained renewed vitality. Practitioners engaged in countering violent extremism and radicalization came to realize that terrorism has context—and that context matters. Indeed, as a phenomenon, terrorism—substate actors using or threatening violence against civilian targets for the purpose of political communication—can take on entirely new significance depending on the group's social and political standing, the sophistication of its strategy beyond the "senseless" attacks, and—most fundamentally—its legitimacy, or mobilizing potential. The idea of irregular warfare sought to capture these dynamics. The term was intended to help move beyond the narrow confines of a "war on terror" and force consideration of the "struggle for legitimacy" underlying the violence.

If our responses to insurgency and to organized crime face similar challenges, and if the above framework was designed to overcome these within the context of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, how can it be adapted and applied to contexts of organized crime? In applying an irregular warfare lens to organized

crime, the major objection is typically that organized crime is driven by a different objective and is therefore distinct. Whereas states and insurgents have explicit political motivation, organized crime seeks profit. All the same, actors involved in organized crime are deeply political in their effect, if not in their ideology. Their strategies rely on shaping the surrounding political landscape (through corruption, the erosion of institutions, and the insistence on impunity) so as to enable maximum profits. Their goal is to alter behavior in line with their business model, creating in that manner a political alternative to the laws and norms proposed by the state. In doing so, the organized criminal element is, in effect, engaging in "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations."[134]

The conceptual overlap goes further. In 1992, Abadinsky laid out an influential list of attributes to describe organized criminal groups. He suggested that they are nonideological, hierarchical, and monopolistic; have limited or exclusive membership; operate in perpetuity, use illegal violence and bribery; demonstrate specialization or a division of labor; and are governed by explicit rules and regulations.[135] Though certainly ideological, insurgent groups share the rest of these characteristics. It could even be said that a criminal organization operates by its own political creed, even ideology, which justifies and gives meaning to the illicit pursuit, furnishes a sense of belonging, and attracts new members to the cause. Moreover, both criminal organizations and insurgent groups operate aboveground and clandestinely, all at once, using either side of the law to extend their power. Their challenge to the writ of the state results in an alternative, or illicit, order that displaces the formal rule of law and determines "who gets what, and when"—the very essence of politics.[136]

In these ways, terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime share a common foundation in irregular warfare. This becomes clearer still if we return to the three major facets of irregular warfare discussed above. First, much as insurgents will combine various lines of effort to offset their conventional military weakness, so is a blended approach a distinguishing feature of criminal enterprises. Beyond their actual criminal activity, these organizations will also seek to reinforce their business model and eliminate likely sources of resistance through a variety of

other efforts, including mobilization, recruitment, subversion, alliance-making, and even information operations. As seen in the previous chapter, a common misstep in responding to such strategies is to focus on the criminal behavior in isolation and thereby miss the supporting efforts that make the criminal problem intractable or self-replicating.

Second, much as insurgents will exploit grievances in society to build strength, or sap that of the state, so will criminal actors make strategic use of the political and social contradictions where they operate. It is because of the inadequacy of governance, or of legal avenues of grievance mediation, that people turn to organized crime, seeking therein an alternative structure of opportunity. Corruption, inequality, desperation, injustice, alienation—these are what criminal organizations use to set up shop and entrench themselves. The messaging and ideology may be less concerned with eradicating the system or proposing a new revolutionary blueprint, but the role of structural contradictions in driving the threat group is nonetheless largely the same. Once the organization becomes a going concern, it is an alternative society, albeit with different justification and rules, different standards of legitimacy.

Third, much as insurgents use storylines and project their ideological worldview, so do criminal actors, albeit perhaps less directly than their insurgent brethren. Even so, while a criminal organization will rarely present manifestos or even produce media, it communicates intensely on a "need to know" basis. Any criminal organization engaging with a clientele and potential sources of opposition needs believable narratives as to why its service are worthwhile and why resistance is not. Through framing, it creates a separate ontology, which implies not just coercion or extortion, but presenting a "correct" interpretation of objective realities—as seen by the challenger—to normalize deviance, delegitimize the system, and facilitate the business model. To counter such action requires both credibility and resonance, but these are also the main targets of adversarial information campaigns and are difficult to regain once lost.

In Clausewitzian terms, legitimacy is the "center of gravity" in irregular warfare—it is the "focal point of force and movement, upon which the larger whole depends."[137]. This finding stems from the political essence of irregular warfare and

its grounding in politics and in the ability to control or co-opt contested populations. Similarly, in organized crime, the battle for control and co-options speaks powerfully to the "beliefs and attitudes of the affected actors regarding the normative status of a rule, government, political system or governance regime."[138] This in effect is the definition of legitimacy, or "the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society."[139]

If organized criminal actors share key traits with insurgents, it follows that there are also commonalities in how to respond. In invoking counterinsurgency theory as a crime-fighting tool, a crucial caveat is immediately needed, given the military connotations of this term. The point is not to militarize further the response to organized crime, a response that already tends to be overwhelmingly suppressive in its logic. Instead, it is important to recall that *counterinsurgency in its theory is not a military but a political activity*.[140] The light that counterinsurgency theory can shine on the problem of organized crime is to cast the phenomenon as fueled by specific political and social drivers which must, alongside the criminal group itself, be addressed, perhaps as the primary focus. In a very 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.

Given the significant overlap, the Framework for Analysis and Action can be an effective tool in assessing challenges of organized crime, unpicking thereby the components of this problem that are frequently missed in practice. However, it does require some tweaking in vocabulary along with a few notes on usage (see figure 2).

First, the state's relation to organized criminal groups is often distinct from its relation to terrorist and insurgent entities. Whereas insurgency implies antagonism between the state and its adversary, state actors are often themselves involved in the problem of organized crime. The issue is primarily one of greed and corruption, whereby criminal influences pervade state structures and make them complicit in the illicit activity. The relationship can go deeper still, with states using criminal networks to access votes, compete against other states, or to do their dirty work. The very mention of "conflict" in the framework therefore requires care, as the assumption of a confrontation does not necessarily hold when describing organized

Figure 2. Adapted Framework for Analysis and Action, Optimized for Organized Crime Problem Sets

1. STRATEGIC ESTIMATE
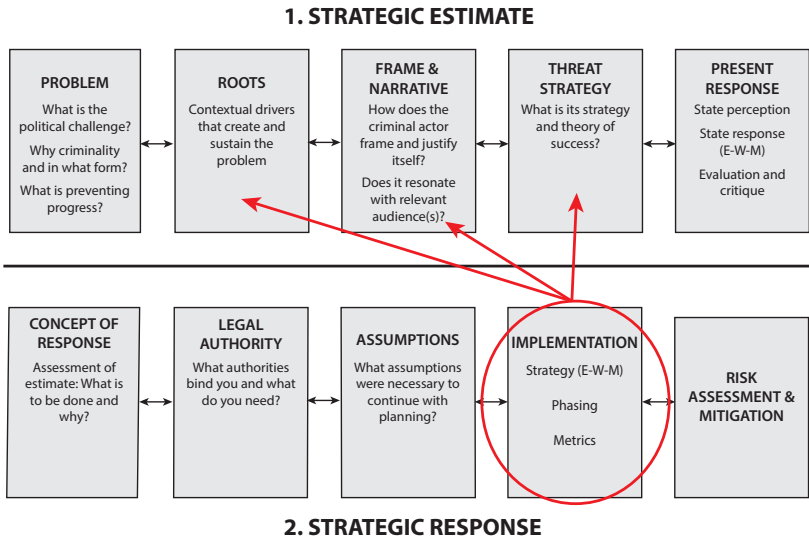
Note: As in its original form, the Strategic Estimate (assessment) is shown in relation to the Course of Action (proposed strategy).

crime. Instead, it becomes necessary to track the *interplay of systems* rather than assume a duel of two opposed actors.

This consideration is important but not insurmountable. Though the framework targets a threat to the state and thereby implies conflict, it does not presuppose that the problem is wholly external to the government—or even cohesive. It does assume an actor is behaving in threatening ways—to interests, values, or order—but it is up to the analyst to account for where it is located, what motivates it, how it operates, and what structure it has assumed. Within the mapping of threat strategy and the assessment of government response, there is ample opportunity to dissect unexpected complicity between licit and illicit actors, or the failure of the government to resist crime's corrupting influence.

Second, organized crime does not always present a cohesive group that can be analyzed or addressed in isolation. As Criminal Intelligence Service Canada explains, "In many cases, the strategic threats that concern criminal intelligence are not specific entities at all, but rather criminal *phenomena*, such as new criminal

applications of technology, or the expansion of an illicit commodity."[141] The lack of an identifiable threat actor does complicate the application of a framework directed primarily at assessing and countering a particular movement. The framework will be less helpful where policymakers are focused on diffuse actors, patterns of behavior, or systemic trends. In many cases, however, a threat group or network is palpably present, or enables the criminal activity, and so is a necessary target for the response. Even in the absence of such a cohesive entity, there is merit in determining precisely what drives the problematic behavior, what functions it serves, and how it is justified, thereby to identify a suitable theory of success for how it may be more effectively countered.

A third obstacle concerns the application of the framework's military terminology to civilian contexts. Beyond the rather basic and certainly remediable point that civilians are often unfamiliar with military terminology, the more serious objection concerns the perceived securitization of how we think of and frame crime. As noted in the previous chapter, organized crime already lends itself to a militarization of response, as governments seek seemingly quick and decisive victories over complex problems. The fear is that by applying military terminology to nonmilitary problems, this bad habit will be reinforced.

On this point, it should be stated that nothing in this framework encourages a militarized or heavy-handed approach to the problem. The language of "threat" and focus on "defeating" its strategy do point to an *adversarial logic*, but this orientation is only appropriate given the harm and predation of organized crime (presumably the very reason for assessing the problem at all). In seeking to confront this harm, the framework does not privilege one response over another. That is the task of the analyst. If anything, the framework encourages a more comprehensive tack, in that it compels interrogation of what fuels the problem and of the threat's sociopolitical legitimacy. Reflecting on these questions should discourage merely palliative or narrowly suppressive approaches, but ultimately the framework only serves analysis, it does not define it.

Left to resolve, then, is the lack of civilian familiarity with the lexicon and tools of military planning. Such familiarity can be helpful because military doctrine presents a well-honed process for developing strategic assessments and

courses of action, one with no real equivalent within the civilian world (a point further underlined in the chapter 6 analytical review of other planning tools). The framework seeks to provide this process to a broader audience. Meanwhile, it also broadens the military's approach in two ways: by elevating the focus from operational matters to the strategic level, or where matters of national policy are set; and (accordingly) by incorporating more than just military concerns, reflecting the political nature of the challenge. Thus, whereas the terminology leans on a military lexicon, and requires some familiarity therewith, there is nothing inherently military about the tool or the analysis it yields.

This last point does speak to a fundamental principle at play whenever planning tools and frameworks such as ours are to be used. A framework enables interrogation of problem sets. It forces attention to the aspects that must be considered. What it cannot do is predetermine the content or arguments generated through its prompts. With this being the case, the quality of the resulting product is still dependent on the skill and acumen of the analyst. It is still the analyst who must weave together the relevant data, make the case, and draw appropriate conclusions. The imagery of weaving is apt, because a related danger in using frameworks lies in rushing through prompts as one would a checklist, jotting down easy answers to complete the process. Instead, the purpose of a framework is to respond to the prompts fully, to unlock a process of intellectual development, so as to craft a strategic, creative, and critical product.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the rationale for a framework to assist assessment and the development of strategies. Never a panacea for complex problems, these tools can nonetheless be invaluable in assisting and structuring analysis and in crafting strategy. They provide practitioners with a tool and common terminology to apply in assessing and responding to evolving problems. They also provide an aide-mémoire to help walk through the necessary steps involved in planning. Finally, they may also promote intellectual discipline, in that various prompts must be considered, even interrogated, prior to coming up with solutions. In the absence of such a forcing mechanism, organizations typically persist with whatever

is most comfortable or least disruptive, resulting in strategies that are either ineffective or, even, deeply counterproductive.

The CISA Framework for Analysis and Action provides these functions and applies them specifically to problems of irregular warfare. Because these types of challenges typically blend political, informational, and other lines of effort as part of the overall approach, the framework asks that analysis map the entire strategy, thereby to inform a more comprehensive response. Because irregular threats and adversaries exploit grievances and societal contradictions to mobilize and build strength, the framework asks analysts to identify the drivers of the problem and how they relate to the struggle for legitimacy at the root of irregular struggles. And because irregular warfare is so centrally driven by framing and narrative, the framework asks analysts to identify the competing storylines at the heart of the struggle and to query their resonance, and with whom. Ultimately, the framework asks crucial questions about the contending claims to legitimacy to construct—in the second half of the framework—a response that addresses this fundamental arbiter of power and influence.

Adapting this framework to organized crime helps to uncover this phenomenon's irregular warfare character. Far from purely a greed-driven illicit behavior, organized crime speaks to political fracture, systemic societal contradictions, and a struggle of legitimacy between the authorities and their challengers. By adapting the Framework for Analysis and Action somewhat, it can serve as a deeply helpful tool to explore and address these dynamics of organized crime problems. Based on this underpinning, the following two chapters explain the Framework for Analysis and Action as adapted to organized crime. An appendix provides a "user's guide" that lends itself to quicker application.

Chapter 4: The Strategic Estimate of the Situation

To French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, strategy was fundamentally about applying knowledge to life; hence his key question, *De quoi s'agit-il?*, or "What is it all about?"[142] More often, the strategic process begins not with a question but with a preconceived answer, resulting in interventions that are "blind to context, and politics in particular."[143] This approach is counterproductive but regrettably common, reflecting institutional reliance on standard operating procedure and the rush to find "solutions."[144]

The Framework for Analysis and Action seeks to avoid this pitfall, which is why it devotes its first half to developing a Strategic Estimate of the Situation. Within military terminology, an estimate is an assessment of a problem that allows for and informs planning. The "situation," in turn, is simply the set of circumstances that are to be assessed. In all cases, the estimate unpacks the problem, places it in political context, and maps the strategies of its various players, including the state. The point is to begin by identifying relevant opportunities and obstacles and then to use such knowledge to design a better way.

Conducting a Strategic Estimate can be time-consuming and difficult, but it is also indispensable, particularly when the "situation" is ambiguous and complex, as is the case with most irregular challenges. Analysis of terrorism is readily politicized: witness the United Nations' inability to even define the term save in several of its relevant instruments. On organized crime, Skaperdas suggests "perhaps the hardest aspect of the struggle . . . before even one begins to talk about the engineering of the problem, is *assessing reality*."[145] In both contexts, analytical clarity confronts the clandestine nature of the struggle, its entrenchment within a complex political economy, and the normative biases that subvert understanding.

The Strategic Estimate breaks down these complex problems into five components, represented in figure 3 as boxes to inspire and justify the response proposed through the framework's second half. Specifically, the Strategic Estimate defines the problem, its societal and political drivers, its expression, and its functions, along with the role of the present response in shaping it. The remainder of this chapter explains how.

Figure 3. Strategic Estimate Section of Framework, Adapted for Organized Crime Challenges

PROBLEM	**ROOTS**	**FRAME & NARRATIVE**	**THREAT STRATEGY**	**PRESENT RESPONSE**
What is the political challenge?	Contextual drivers that create and sustain the problem	How does the criminal actor frame and justify itself?	What is its strategy and theory of success?	State perception
Why criminality and in what form?				State response (E-W-M)
What is preventing progress?		Does it resonate with relevant audience(s)?		Evaluation and critique

Problem Statement

The problem statement seeks to capture, concisely and precisely, the essence of the challenge at hand. This summation of a complex and threatening situation into a brief problem statement is important, not only to aid communication, but—most fundamentally—because the distillation of knowledge implies a strategic exercise of prioritization. What is it that truly matters, why, and to whom?

Identifying the problem can seem difficult, as the answer is so subjective. It may relate to the crime, or to deeper issues fostering criminality as a symptom, or to the reasons why the state is unable or unwilling to respond. Is illegal migration the problem, or is it the economic disparity fueling this phenomenon, or the revenue collected by predatory smugglers? Is the problem the existence of gangs, their use of violence, their trading in drugs, or their corruption of officials? Or is it the state's loss of control? How the problem is framed will inform perceptions of what strategy is needed and how success is defined. As such, crafting the problem statement should be conducted carefully, precisely, and with full awareness of the implications at hand.

Practitioners also tend to engage with problem identification in a very siloed way or in a manner driven by position and mission. In other words, the analyst may be tasked with only a facet of the problem (border counter, counternarcotics, or countercorruption) and the response will not go beyond this mandate. The bureaucratic segmentation of analysis is itself a problem because criminality, in its methods and effects, seldom fits within the siloes thus created.

The Framework for Analysis and Action seeks to address this challenge by encouraging the emplacement of problematic behavior (be it terrorism or criminal activity) within its social and political context, to highlight in turn the need

for cross-cutting actions by way of response. Through the boxes that follow the problem statement, the analyst is asked to identify specifically the drivers of the problem, the contending narrative of legitimation, and the broader functions of crime in society, as well as the role of the response in shaping the problem. The intent of this analytical journey is to challenge the analyst's preexisting biases and assumptions, to foster a more comprehensive assessment of the threat, and to point towards more strategic engagement. It follows that while it is placed first, the problem statement cannot be completed until the other components of the Strategic Estimate have been interrogated. This first box is the synopsis rather than a starting point for analysis.

Roots

A key lesson from past practice is that the sociopolitical embeddedness of organized crime—to wit, its structural drivers and legitimizing function—is central to understanding the persistence of the phenomenon. This type of perspective, also known as a political economy lens,[146] speaks to the "roots" of the problem, or the forces that perpetuate or enable harmful behavior and that will probably require redress as part of any effective response.

Maguire proposes this type of analysis for poaching and ivory trafficking in Kenya. The "key drivers" that sustain this criminal behavior, he suggests, "broadly constitute the endemic corruption of Kenyan politics, the ethnically fragmented nature of the Kenyan polity and society, high levels of socioeconomic marginalization and the prevalence of small arms."[147] Unless somehow addressed, these factors are likely to perpetuate the problem, regardless of any palliative remedy. Similarly, the roots of drug trafficking in Rio de Janeiro can be seen in the socioeconomic exclusion of the favelas, the internalized helplessness of the local population, extensive government corruption, and abusive security operations.[148] Enforcement activity that does not address these factors will struggle to stem the flow of new recruits into drug-trafficking gangs.

Identifying the roots of a problem requires considerable effort, yet it is central to the crafting of strategy. The challenge lies in identifying which roots are analytically meaningful, neither downplaying nor overstating their effect. Because

crime is often about enrichment, it is for example tempting to reduce root causes to a discussion either of greed or of poverty. Yet while deprivation may lead to desperation, and thereby to crime, clearly not all poor people are criminals, and many criminals are not poor. Similarly, while greed is a common *motivation*, it is activated by perceived *opportunity*, which forces more careful analysis. Indeed, arriving at specific answers requires identifying the *intervening variables*, such as demographic details, geographic location, or socioeconomic opportunity, that vary the effect of structural realities across populations. This approach demands consideration of both the push and pull factors for criminal involvement, which may include perceptions of impunity, a dearth of licit options, or outside sponsorship of the criminal activity. Such dissection is crucial to avoid mistargeted interventions.

Social movement theory provides a useful lexicon for the task. It proposes three analytical lenses, the relationship of which helps determine the role of context (*macro*) in fueling individual participation (*micro*) in collective efforts at change (*meso*). The better this relationship is understood, the easier it is to discern societal embeddedness, and the more precisely root causes can be targeted. This also means acknowledging that motivation for criminal behavior will vary across the network or organization, with leaders and followers responding to different cues. The key here is to understand these nuances, to identify the drivers, in order to design a workable response.

If identifying roots is challenging, addressing them is harder still. We will return to this topic in our discussion of response, but two points already bear noting. First, the purpose of the "roots" analysis is to inform the response. The greater clarity and precision in our diagnosis, the less likely it is that our interventions will be mistargeted. The mindset should drive analysis in this part of the framework. Second, because resolving entrenched societal problems is usually complex, the response may aim to foster resilience rather than remove the driver itself. This may mean creating alternative mechanisms for coping with structural realities, rather than expecting the latter to be resolved. Severing the bonds between criminal networks and their clients, providing possibilities for self-sustainment and protection away from the criminal enterprise, or restoring faith in the licit system as opposed

to its illicit counterparts will all help address the effects of root causes, even if the latter remain in place. Either way, none of this is easy.

Frames and Narratives

This section helps identify the storyline used to legitimize criminal behavior, or how those involved view their actions. Understanding such justification is important, as it can help with building convincing counternarratives or alternative visions that might channel decisionmaking.

Social movement theory again provides a valuable method via its work on *framing*, or the process of attributing meaning to events.[149] The metaphor of a frame is apposite, as the stories we tell also concentrate our minds on a singular aspect of reality while excluding the rest, producing a curated impression for a particular effect. Put very simply, the threat does not see the world as we do; nor do its clients. To help understand the distinction, social movement theory proposes three frames or lenses through which reality is viewed: the diagnostic explains what is wrong and (most critically) who is to blame; the prognostic pushes for a solution or way out; and the motivational encourages personal participation in this solution despite risk and sacrifice. Each plays a key role in changing perception and behavior.

In the case of criminal groups, the diagnostic frame most commonly focuses on the lack of legitimate options. Gangs, for example, typically present a primitive ideology of societal exclusion and marginalization.[150] Blame is placed on the government and system, which are cast as uncaring and corrupt. This lens sets up a prognostic frame that posits crime as just, as necessary, or as excused by the failures of the system. The motivational frame, meantime, compels the involvement of others in this criminal enterprise, perhaps by emphasizing solidarity with a constructed "in group," a cause bigger than oneself, and the great benefits that come with participation. Gang colors, signs, and other shibboleths are used to sustain participation even in the face of risk.[151] A sense of honor, power, and strength is mobilized to foment a robust sense of belonging between the individual and the group.

Though the exact messages and areas of emphasis will differ, all political narratives are informed by these three frames. Even where the narrative has not been made explicit—in a manifesto, or even more informally—it exists, as an implicit rationale for action. Through ethnographic research into the unlicensed sale and usage of tramadol in Lagos, for example, Klantschnig and Dele-Adedeji unearthed a narrative of desperation stemming from the inadequacy of medical care and the scarcity of well-paying jobs, along with a distinction between "moral medical and immoral recreational use." If these were the diagnostic and prognostic frames sustaining the trade—both for sellers and users—the motivational can be found in the "inter-personal relationships based on trust" that have become central to "deciding who would sell and buy from whom."[152] As another example, Kelly demonstrates how human smuggling in Agadez, Niger, is supported by a narrative of limited opportunity, long-standing tradition, and the positive economic externalities of the trade on the businesses dotted around the trafficking routes.[153]

By deconstructing narratives such as these, or the storylines of organized crime, we can understand how the collective actor of concern links structure with agency and justifies its own transgressions. We can then assess which component, or components, appear to resonate most, or "sell," among contested audiences, whether through ethnographic research, polling, or big-data analysis of social media trends. Of course, such analysis also requires identifying which audiences are of greatest concern. From then on, the response can engage more precisely with the struggle for legitimacy that lies at the heart of irregular warfare.

Threat Strategy

From the prognosis ("what is to be done?") comes the threat strategy. Mapping the threat strategy is essential to understanding the adversary, what it is attempting to achieve, and how. It also serves as a blueprint for the response that is to follow, as it can then be keyed to the identified strengths and weaknesses of the strategy it is targeting. The question as concerns organized crime is whether we can speak of these actors as pursuing a strategy. The term implies intentionality and design, and it may be argued that, in contrast with ideological or political

actors, criminal groups lack a concrete plan or objective, much less a desired end-state. It is a fair point but does not undermine the methodology.

Even if it is not clear or articulated, and even if it is not terribly effective, all collective entities follow a plan. It is simply the how and why of their operations. Criminal actors may have no political objective, but they do seek profit and that presumes an approach or business model. The approach may not be advertised, but in this respect, criminal outfits are akin to other irregular or clandestine actors. All seek a predictable context that is supportive of illicit activity, which nearly always requires influencing and subverting the law of the land. An ideologically driven actor may desire a change to the status quo, whereas a criminal entity seeks only to sustain a hospitable business environment. Both, though, must act to ensure their preferred set of circumstances are realized and sustained. In either case, the challenge lies in surveying the totality of actions taken and to deduce from the whole the underlying strategy, which in turn can inform how to design a response.

Mapping a strategy requires methodology. The Framework for Analysis and Action leans on the tools of the U.S. military approach, which defines strategy as the relationship between ends, ways, and means, or how resources are used to attain goals over time.[154] It is a helpful model, particularly if elevated from its typically narrow military application to consider the range of activity at the strategic level.

Beginning with the ends, or objectives, the question may seem self-evident for criminal groups, which are literally defined by their illicit pursuit of profit. And yet, there is reason to dig deeper. A group such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) certainly sought profit, but this goal existed, best evidence demonstrates, to power an ideological project, which complicated for many the assessment of actual strategic objectives. For poaching networks in Kenya and elsewhere, are the criminal actors driven by raw profiteering or a search for subsistence?[155] If corruption is the crime, is it used to generate profit, to subvert institutions, or as an accepted, if technically illegal, way to get things done?[156] Clearly, for criminal groups, the objectives vary, even if profit will typically be an important part of the whole.

For the ways, or methods, the first step is to query the overall *strategic approach*. What is the strategy and how does it work? Is it localized or transnational,

violent or nonviolent, clandestine or overt? As but one example of possible variance, Cockayne and Pfister distinguish among criminal groups that are "predatory," in that they "prey upon the resources of authority structures, in open conflict with them"; or "parasitic," in that a group preys but in a sustainable manner; or "symbiotic," in that they "coexist with existing authority structures," either through overlaps or outright complicity.[157] The wording will vary, but a crucial part is determining the actor's theory of success, or how it aims, over time, to achieve its goals.[158] Such an assessment can in turn reveal how to engage.[159]

The next step is to map out the strategy in greater detail. While law enforcement will generally focus on the criminal behavior, the latter is often supported or enabled by, or in additional ways related to, other activities whose role as part of the whole must be understood. Where does the criminal enterprise find its workforce? How does it shape the environment? How does it cultivate and use allies and partners? How do coercion or corruption contribute to the strategy? Mapping the strategy helps answer these questions.

Mapping a threat group's strategy involves accounting for its various actions, which can be daunting and overwhelm analysis. The framework uses specific prompts to help locate and order relevant information. These are based on the study of past irregular conflicts and the scholarship of Thomas A. Marks in particular.[160] In a selection of works, Marks proposes that an insurgent strategy involves *five* possible components. To mobilize people and resources *politically* into an alternative to the existing order, find the issues to which they will rally. Simultaneously, win over domestic *allies* who will support the cause on tactical issues even if they hesitate to do so strategically. Use *violence* as appropriate to the situation to enable these two fundamentally political activities. Use *nonviolence*, such as subversion, propaganda, offers of negotiations, or inducements, to make violence more effective. And *internationalize* the struggle, making it difficult to contain or terminate within national borders.

These components inspire five questions that must be asked of any irregular warfare challenger. Adapted to the context of organized crime, they read:

◆ What, if anything, is the threat doing *politically* to bring about its desired objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *enablers* within the subject space to reach its objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *violence* to serve its objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *nonviolence* to serve its objectives?

◆ How, and with what effect, is the threat *internationalizing* its approach?

When interrogated, these prompts help identify relevant activity (beyond just the criminal behavior). The next step is to organize the resulting data in a way that helps analysis of strategy. Given the breadth of uncovered activity, it becomes important to group, or "nest," the data, so that actions are placed within their logical category. The field of military design is helpful, given its defined levels of analysis: tactical activity exists within operational approaches, and operational art (composed of operational advances) contributes to the strategic purpose. Distinguishing between these levels allows for a mapping of the strategy, so that its structure and content can inform the design of the response.

Mapping can be done bottom-up (from the tactical to the strategic) or top-down (the other way around). Either way, tactical activity (or the specific example of actions taken) is grouped within conceptual *campaigns*, or bundles of activity, based on a common intent or character. Related conceptual campaigns, in turn, constitute a *line of effort* (LOE), a major pillar of the strategy with its own purpose (indeed, more often portrayed as pillars, of Greek or Roman design). Each LOE will achieve an Interim Objective, with these feeding into accomplishment of the strategic objective, which is a desired endstate. Finally, campaigns are operationalized through application of means. The resulting synthesis of actions is displayed in figure 4.

As an example, various violent tactics (suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, shootings) might be grouped within a conceptual *campaign of terrorism*. That campaign may then feature alongside other violent campaigns ("guerrilla warfare" and/or "mobile warfare"), each of which has a specific character and purpose, and each of which can be disaggregated to reveal its operational particulars

Figure 4. Logical Relationship Among Ends, Ways, Campaigns, and Means

END: Desired endstate
WAYS: Strategic approach; theory of success

LOE 1

Campaign 1 · Campaign 2 · Campaign 3 → **Interim Objectives**

Means · Means · Means

LOE 2

Campaign 1 · Campaign 2 · Campaign 3 → **Interim Objectives**

Means · Means · Means
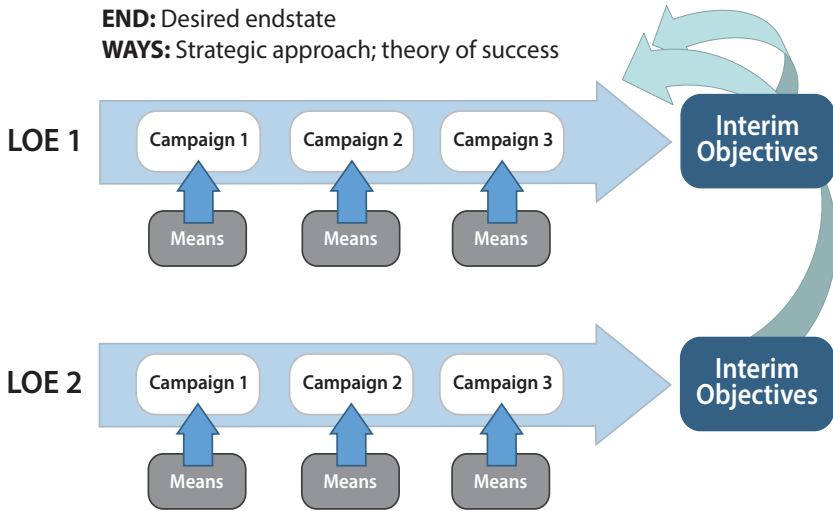
(what is normally displayed in any security operations center). Actions, in turn, can be carried out only by means, individuals and organizations that are tasked with execution. The alignment of various violent campaigns sharing common attributes will produce one Violence LOE, which ties together all that the group is doing violently and explains its strategic rationale (for example, to dominate the human and geographic spaces necessary to achieve the group's criminal end).

As another example, the Political LOE would seek to build the alternative to the existing power structure. To do this would require campaigns of *building* the alternative and *holding/governing* what has been built, both offensively and defensively. In turn, both the building and governing campaigns would necessarily be composed of subcampaigns, devoted for example to the mobilization of manpower and money. It and other subcampaigns could, in turn, be evaluated and displayed in whatever detail is required. Of signal importance, of course, will be the means: who and what operationalizes the actions.

The method relies on "nesting," or the grouping and placement of activity within its relevant category. The result is a graphical map that can be assessed from the bird's-eye view (the lines of effort, demonstrating the strategic pillars and their

objectives), from the operational perspective of conceptual campaigns (the main components of each LOE, frequently compared to a string of pearls or beads, with their attendant means), or more tactically yet, but with a fuller understanding of how particulars relate to the bigger picture. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of this method down to the "operational art" or "campaign architecture" level, using as the example a generic insurgency group (*subcampaigns* could in theory be used to order further the tactical content of each campaign). Though this diagram does not feature the *means* used to enable the strategy, these would logically populate each effort and should be identified, as doing so can help determine areas of resource strength and weakness and how the actor has specialized assets for particular tasks.

Figure 5. Standard Insurgent Strategy, Mapped as Lines of Effort and Campaigns
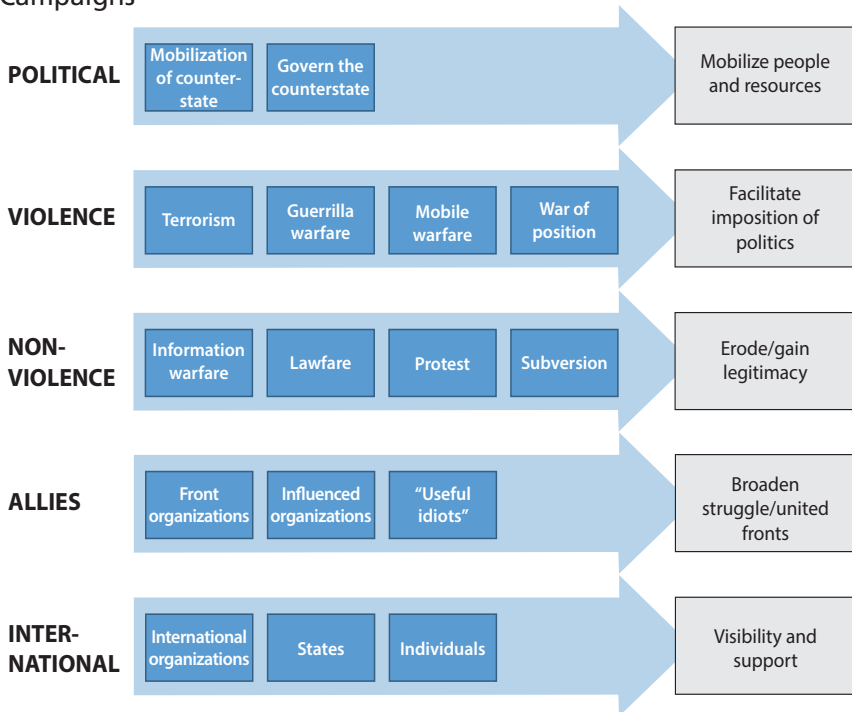
Figure 6 applies this method in preliminary form to a criminal organization, namely the Brazilian gang Comando Vermelho. The mapping is based on the organization's strategy in the late 2010s, when it dominated Rio de Janeiro's favelas. Means are omitted but could be delimited drawing on the organization's structure and individuals (to include, for example, chain of command).

At this time, the government response to the gang focused nearly exclusively on its drug trafficking, but as revealed by applying the method above, Comando Vermelho's strategy was more complex. Certainly, it trafficked drugs, but that was but one conceptual campaign of what the analyst concerned termed a Sustenance LOE. And while the state focused on "violence," the mapping of what was termed a Coercion LOE added considerable depth to the assessment. Further, campaigns on the Political LOE and International LOE revealed a far more intricate approach than merely "drug trafficking" or "violence." Beyond all else, the totality of the assessment revealed an effort to gain legitimacy as the critical enabler.[161] It was this totality of the strategy that made it so difficult, even futile, to address the drug trafficking in isolation.[162]

Figure 6. Mapping the Operational Art of Comando Vermelho, ca. 2017
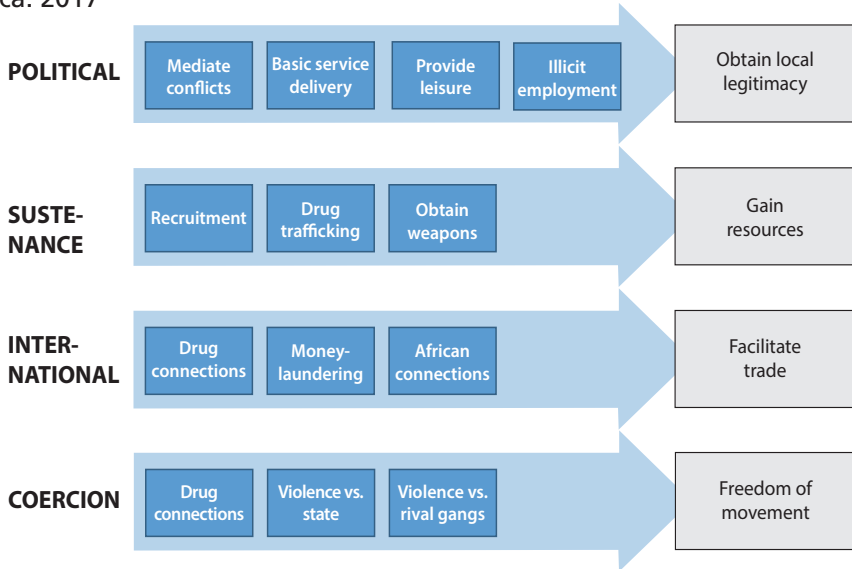
As indicated by figure 6, the names of the LOEs and of the constituent campaigns will vary depending on the case. Regardless, when a blueprint has been achieved, the next step is to assess the strategy for its strengths and weaknesses. In military doctrine, this type of assessment involves the determination of a *center of gravity*, or of a central source of cohesion and power without which the entire strategy would collapse.[163] Given the sociopolitical nature of irregular warfare, it seldom offers up a physical target that, if struck, will generate a decisive blow. Instead, it is necessary to query the intangible dimensions of the situation to give meaningful direction to the strategy that will follow.

As irregular warfare is a struggle for legitimacy, it is here that one finds the center of gravity at the strategic level. Legitimacy, in this context, determines the perception of might and right and shapes the degree of acquiescence or outright support for purported power structures.[164] Be it phrased in terms of *common interests*, *united fronts*, *trust*, *support*, or *credibility*, what matters is the right to lead and the normative power to shape behavior over time. With legitimacy, there is strong potential for mobilization, of people, allies, support, and momentum. Without legitimacy, the cost of doing business is dramatically increased, as are the efforts required to consolidate new political realities.

Legitimacy matters to criminal enterprises, as they must coerce or compel individuals to cooperate. Even where the criminal groups are purely coercive, they succeed because of a lack of state legitimacy, because the state's normative influence and power are too weak. Left in the middle are relevant populations and actors, who calculate based on interests and affinity and act accordingly. If a response can affect these calculations and achieve sustained influence, it will win the struggle of legitimacy and enable success—yet this is of course far easier said than done.

Because affecting legitimacy is difficult (it may require enhancing the state's relationship with its own people), inroads must be developed gradually to finally gain access. To this end, it is helpful to query the mapped strategy for "critical vulnerabilities"—gaps in the armor through which the beating heart of the problem can be struck. As defined in U.S. military doctrine, a *critical vulnerability* is a component "deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects."[165] Many targets are important but not vulnerable,

while some are vulnerable but not important. The task lies in finding the overlap to produce an initial attack that may start to affect matters of legitimacy.

The Strategic Estimate can help in this effort. Looking at the roots of the problem (the drivers of mobilization), the frame and narrative (the threat's worldview), and the threat strategy (its operationalization of ends, ways, and means), we can discern the weak points and poor connections in the approach. These may be mismatches between frames and strategy (what is said versus what is done), between roots and strategy (what fuels legitimacy versus the threat's mediation of grievances), or between components of the threat strategy itself (misalignments of objectives, approach, and resources). These, then, are the vulnerabilities that initial efforts can strike to build a better strategic position for subsequent action.

Present Response

Having dissected the problem, we turn to a critique of the present response. A dispassionate assessment of current practice is necessary to identify what is already being tried, why, and whether it is working. Only on this basis can a better response be proposed. It should be immediately clear that the first and foremost query is to discern whether the state is getting to the heart of the matter: legitimacy and the critical vulnerabilities. Often, the state is addressing symptoms and neglecting the reasons why they reappear.

In assessing the present response, a basic question is which actor and response the analysis should focus on. The answer depends on who is using the tool and why. Since organized crime is typically a transnational challenge, countering it will require a range of actors to act, ideally with some degree of coordination. It is therefore highly unlikely that whatever response is being assessed will be the total of the strategy or unfold in isolation. Instead, the key will be to assess the relevant actor's contribution to the whole, so that the same actor can improve its response—not just in attacking the problem but also in working better with others.

This analysis involves three steps. First, what is this actor's *perception* of the problem and of its own purpose in responding to it? What is the lens through which the issue is tackled, and is it seen as a priority? Second, what is the *strategy* currently being attempted? A key concern is identifying, even if it is unstated, the

current "theory of success," or the hypothesis informing the efforts: how are the actions taken intended to bring about desired outcomes? This context helps explain the strategy, not as a list of efforts, but as an approach undergirded by logic—even if it is faulty.

The third and most challenging step involves critiquing the response. Is the perception correct? Is the response neglecting (or overestimating) the peril at hand? What within the response is working and what are its weaknesses? Are there key roots, or parts of the threat strategy, that are being missed? Do we understand what motivates the criminality and those who rely on its functions? If the response is not making evident progress, does this shortcoming relate to a lack of political interests, of necessary resources, of strategic miscalculations, or the right approach applied on too small a scale? Where do legitimacy and critical vulnerabilities stand in these calculations? Are they being addressed?

In explaining a response's lack of success, analysis should consider the key variables of political will (motivation) and capacity (means interpreted as opportunity). Limitations in either, or in both, must be acknowledged before bold new strategies are proffered. A lack of competence or of interest need not be fatal, but specific measures will be required to address either shortfall. In other words, it may be necessary to "heal thyself" before seeking new ways of attacking the problem head-on. The question, then, is exactly why the actor charged with response is pursuing a strategy that is evidently not working. On that basis, can we do better?

Chapter 5: The Strategic Response

The second half of the Framework for Analysis and Action uses the Strategic Estimate of the Situation to create a Strategic Response. In a world where the term "strategy" is frequently misused, the utility of this framework lies in ensuring that the proposed response is indeed *strategic*—that is to say, that it is viable, has considered trade-offs and sequencing, and is governed by a theory of success that ties planned inputs to desired outcomes. The key lies again in the prompts, which encourage the elaboration of clearly defined objectives along with a concept of how to get there. Along the way, this second half of the framework also forces the strategist to identify assumptions made, to ascertain legal and analytical constraints, and to determine the risks and metrics of what is being proposed. Of course, the fundamental task of strategic thinking still lies with the analyst. The framework offers prompts and a roadmap, not the actual content.

The Course of Action half of the framework, like the Strategic Estimate, is based on the military decisionmaking process (MDMP), which is codified in an official process to guide planning and development of courses of action. Though most institutions have a planning method of some type, the MDMP is by some margin the most detailed and operational. (For a comparative analysis of different planning products, see chapter 6.) This advantage stems in part from the superior resources bestowed upon the military, which allow it to create bespoke entities and processes for planning. Equally so, it reflects the military's mandate to overcome unfamiliar threats in high-stakes environments. The military's toolkit therefore provides a solid blueprint, but it must be adapted for irregular warfare, so that its operational tools may be applied at the strategic level, where matters of policy are set, and account for the nonmilitary nature of the challenge.

Much like the Strategic Estimate, the Strategic Response comprises five focus areas, represented in figure 7 as boxes. The first—*concept of response*—outlines the new proposed strategy, demonstrating the break with current practice, as assessed in the Estimate. The second concerns the *legal authority* underpinning or required for the proposed response. The third clarifies any *assumptions* that were necessary to allow planning into an uncertain future. The fourth box details the envisaged *implementation* of the strategy across time and space and how its success may be

Figure 7. Strategic Estimate and Interaction With Course of Action, Adapted to Organized Crime

1. STRATEGIC ESTIMATE

PROBLEM	**ROOTS**	**FRAME & NARRATIVE**	**THREAT STRATEGY**	**PRESENT RESPONSE**
What is the political challenge? Why criminality and and in what form? What is preventing progress?	Contextual drivers that create and sustain the problem	How does the criminal actor frame and justify itself? Does it resonate with relevant audience(s)?	What is its strategy and theory of success?	State perception State response (E-W-M) Evaluation and critique

CONCEPT OF RESPONSE	**LEGAL AUTHORITY**	**ASSUMPTIONS**	**IMPLEMENTATION**	**RISK ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION**
Assessment of estimate: What is to be done and why?	What authorities bind you and what do you need?	What assumptions were necessary to continue with planning?	Strategy (E-W-M) Phasing Metrics	

2. STRATEGIC RESPONSE

measured. And the fifth box considers the *risks* created by the strategy and their possible mitigation. The remainder of this section goes through these boxes, adapting them to the context of organized crime.

Concept of Response

The concept of response provides a *brief synopsis* of the recommended course of action. Using the Strategic Estimate's critique of the present response as a pivot, this box conveys the change in direction and, in broad terms, its implications. The key is to advance the new strategy's *theory of success*; that is, how the recommended approach is intended to attain the desired conditions.[166] What constitutes a good theory of success will always be subjective, though it should be supported by the analysis in the Strategic Estimate. It might be possible, for example, to demonstrate why the proposed response addresses more effectively (than the present response) the roots, the frames and narrative, and/or the threat strategy. Justification might also relate to the targeting of legitimacy, plausibly through the exploitation of identified critical vulnerabilities. What remains essential is to communicate

the overriding logic for the response: why is it not only better but the best way forward given the context at hand?[167]

To provide some context, it is possible to distinguish conceptually between a militarized approach to combating organized crime, which seeks to address the problem through swift suppression, and a rule-of-law approach, which may also be termed suppressive but operates through the criminal justice system rather than through blunt force. Each makes certain suppositions as to what approach will be most suitable in producing a desired outcome. Alongside such strategies lie a different theory of success altogether, focusing on nonpunitive, nonprosecutorial inputs to build resilience, create alternative livelihoods, and address the drivers of crime rather than its incidence.[168] On the basis of the Strategic Estimate—and thus the identified roots, narratives, and threat strategies—analysts will need to arrive at the theory of success most appropriate for the problem at hand.

As a relatively positive example, the nations involved in patrolling the Gulf of Guinea have over time emphasized the need to blend inputs to account for the complexity of the problem. Thus, their Strategic Response involves not just naval 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."[169] Piracy declined significantly in the region, though the requirements for addressing deep-seated structural grievances are significant. Indeed, studies suggest the persistence of onshore challenges and that the reduction in piracy has fueled increases in other forms of criminality, "[currently] perceived [to] yield more profit at less risk than offshore activities."[170] Therein lies a powerful lesson in unintended consequences and risk management (more on this later).

The strategy adopted by the Contact Group on Piracy of the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) provides another relevant illustration of a workable theory of success. Here, too, the concept of response went beyond purely military inputs. Along with maritime interdiction and the hardening of likely targets, the effort focused also

on "the financial networks behind the individual groups of Somali pirates . . . the masterminds, or kingpins, and the funders."[171] These efforts dramatically cut piracy in the region, hitherto a hotspot for maritime criminality. Curiously, capacity building in Somalia, or efforts to address on-shore push factors, were limited and focused mainly on juridical assets, such as the detention of captured pirates. As it happened, the flow of funds associated with such assistance proved sufficient to reduce obstruction and spoiling among affected communities, much as the building of prisons helped solve the "so-called 'catch-and-release' problem that had marred previous counterpiracy efforts."[172] This strategy has largely worked, at least in stemming piracy, though it is worth noting that as Somalia's socioeconomic standards remain unchanged, those on the margins have typically migrated to different categories of crimes, including in this instance, the selling of fishing licenses, smuggling, and the khat trade.[173]

To be clear, the most strategic response is not the one with the loftiest ideals or greatest ambition, but rather the one that can most viably attain its objectives at acceptable risk. In making the case, a powerful constraint will often be found in the actor's determination of interest, as communicated in its official documents, as implicit in its policies, or as determined and presented by the analyst; and in "political will," not just of the actor charged with response but of all the implementing parties on which it will rely. Where political will is lacking, and this is often the case, the strategy must engage with the potential ways in which it can be affected, and by whom.

If the path towards progress appears bleak, the task at hand may be more realistically broached via incremental steps. Thus, *phasing* can be seen as a helpful ally when setting out a concept of response and justifying its theory of success. Breaking the Strategic Response into a sequence allows for gradual yet meaningful progress toward an objective that, in the short term, may seem implausible. Of course, the journey across phases is seldom linear, and it is up to the analyst to balance convincingly the pragmatic imperatives of the short term with longer-term ideals. Indeed, trade-offs lie at the heart of strategy, and a good concept of response should demonstrate familiarity with this reality.

Legal Authority

For most licit actors, strategy must be based on legal authority. Acting within the rule of law engenders the legitimacy so critical for irregular warfare, be it for international or domestic audiences. The need to resolve legal ambiguities is also particularly pressing within irregular warfare, given the tendency of these challenges to blur legal lines, employ ambiguity as a weapon, and cover their tracks. It may be tempting to mirror such disrespect for the rule of law, but doing so will undermine legitimacy. Conversely, establishing and communicating a clear legal case can be a force multiplier, even when (or especially when) engaging against a threat that deliberately rejects this same set of constraints.

Organized crime raises legal difficulties that can subvert the state's Strategic Response. These may relate to the transnational nature of the problem and the difficulty of coordinating cross-border authorities.[174] For example, maritime interdiction—be it of trafficking, smuggling, or piracy—must untangle the legal constraints that apply in territorial seas, on the high seas, and ashore, possibly in loosely governed or fragmented states.[175] Elsewhere, governments require legal guidance to target armed gangs operating among civilian populations, to engage effectively without trampling on the rights of the community. When the level of violence is high, what are the appropriate rules of engagement to balance force protection with population security?

In circumstances where the rule of law has broken down amidst armed conflict, one must identify whether humanitarian international law or human rights law is the more appropriate legal framework, and how these might be combined. If the criminal entity can fight off the state or imperils the local population, the state response may need to escalate from peacetime law enforcement to military action, hence to displace the threat and enable the resumption of governance. This type of escalation raises ethical as well as legal dilemmas relating to the use of force, institutional authorities, and the legal status of one's adversary.

Colombia's struggle against the FARC provides a helpful illustration. When the government in Bogotá, having regained the strategic initiative, ramped up operations against the FARC in 2002, it legislated a way of flexibly scaling its legal authorities to the threat, thereby allowing it to switch between international

humanitarian law (or the Law of Armed Conflict) and human rights law depending on the operation. Through judicial review of the threat, the state would distinguish between "operations during hostile scenarios" and "operations to maintain security." During the latter, peacetime law enforcement prevailed, making the use of force a last resort. Throughout the former, the state could respond forcefully to a well-armed and dangerous adversary—yet even then, the rules of engagement privileged demobilization and capture.[176] Any switch in legal authorities would also be independently reviewed before and after the act.

Colombia's innovation demonstrates that, for a response to be effective, the laws might need to change. Criminal organizations are adaptive and actively exploit legal loopholes to avoid sanction. As seen in illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, legal "forum-shopping" can paralyze the response.[177] The state can react to such setbacks by updating its legislation, be it to catch up with evolutions in cybercrime, impose tougher sanctions as deterrence, enact emergency measures in response to crisis, or resolve issues of extraterritorial jurisdiction. A key example of such innovation, used by the U.S. Government against the Mafia, is RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) legislation, which allows for broader and more severe punishment of crimes based on their belonging to a common conspiracy. Another example is the many multilateral initiatives that exist in Africa to seek better coverage against crimes that otherwise exploit transnational linkages to evade law enforcement.[178]

Though updates to law are sometimes needed, the key is to adapt without undermining the government's perceived legitimacy. Just because enforcement can be ruled legal does not mean that it will be seen as legitimate. In that sense, writing one's own laws is like printing one's own money, another government prerogative. Both may appear to be easy solutions but can rapidly backfire. Establishing legal authority, therefore, is an area requiring great care and scrutiny.

Assumptions

The crafting of strategy is about forecasting, as the analyst suggests actions to be taken and their likely effect. Hence, "planning" is unavoidably based on assumptions, to bridge gaps in knowledge or control for unknowable variables.

Assumptions are necessary but also filled with risk. The only way to mitigate this risk is to ensure that assumptions are used responsibly and that they are clearly communicated. It should be evident that if the assumptions prove false, the strategy will require review.

Accounting for assumptions can be challenging. First, making explicit assumptions about the future grants the planner the tantalizing power of deciding how events will unfold, at least on paper. This liberty can be abused, even unwittingly, to predict developments simply because they help the proposed strategy. To guard against this tendency, assumptions should relate to uncertainties *beyond the plan's anticipated outcomes*, but which would have a bearing on its execution. The purpose is not to assume that the plan will succeed, either in whole or in part, but to make explicit the context wherein it will be implemented.

Even where assumptions relate to the plan's environment rather than its inputs and outcomes, great care is still required. Because assumptions are inherent to everything we do and plan to do, an immediate danger lies in identifying too many assumptions, which quickly becomes counterproductive. The purpose is not to list every unknown factor (an endless task) but rather to identify and communicate the key gaps in knowledge that had to be bridged for planning to continue. This allows planners to track whether such assumptions remain valid. Still, analytical parsimony of this type is complicated within multiagency planning efforts, as each actor brings its own assumptions to the table, stemming from its culture, frames, and interests. More profoundly, in each case the assumptions made may also mask poor thinking or presuppose an unlikely setting for the strategy.

In the face of these challenges, three conditions can prove helpful. First, assumptions must be *valid*; that is, the presumption about the future must be reasonable given available evidence. Validity can be assessed via research or "red-teaming," the art of critically evaluating a strategy (sometimes by "playing the enemy"). Often, external review is indispensable.[179] Second, assumptions should be *important*; that is, their negation must significantly affect the strategy.[180] For every assumption made, the bearing on the plan should be obvious. Third, an assumption should be *necessary*; that is, it should resolve a significant gap in knowledge and thereby allow planning to proceed. As is clear, the *necessity* of an assumption exists

in tension with its *validity*. An assumption that is unquestionably valid might not be necessary, and an assumption is necessary when we do not know exactly what is valid.

Given the pitfalls involved, the goal is to end up with as few assumptions as possible but as many as needed. Striking this balance is inevitably subjective. Still, the point is to identify whatever assumptions have been made, be they explicit (those communicated to aid in planning) or implicit (those that sneaked their way into the process), to test them rigorously based on evidence, and to render them clearly. At that point, assumptions candidly delimit the future setting in which the strategy may work. On this basis, some thought may also go to the consequences of an assumption being proved wrong—this is the process of identifying risk, to which we will return.

Implementation

This section provides the breakdown of the Strategic Response. It covers the *objectives* to be reached, the *strategic approach* adopted, the *strategic art* and *campaign architecture* employed, the *means* required, the main *phases of the plan*, and the *metrics* to gauge progress and sequence transitions. Enveloping and informing these components is the theory of success, or the big idea as to why the proposed strategy will work.

This significant section raises two questions: one of substance and one of style. First, what content goes into a Strategic Response; and second, how can a complex plan be made intelligible to others? We deal with each question in turn.

Using the Strategic Estimate of the Situation to Craft a Strategic Response. Interrogation of the Strategic Estimate and knowledge of comparable cases can help determine what the Strategic Response must address. The Strategic Estimate mapped the threat strategy to inform the priorities and content of the counterstrategy. If an adversary is engaging in a campaign of corruption to facilitate a criminal enterprise, a campaign of countercorruption may be required. This much is clear. Yet by identifying the specific subcampaigns of this conceptual campaign—organized perhaps by target or by method (specificity rests with the analyst)—the precise priorities of the response are revealed. Similarly, the other

lines of effort (LOEs) and campaigns of the threat strategy should be used to design the response, thereby negating the intended effects of these actions.

Put this way, it all seems obvious, yet (as indicated in chapter 2) responses to irregular threats often overlook critical components of their adversary's strategy, typically because of a near-exclusive focus on the adversary's use of violence (in the case of terrorism and insurgency) and of criminality (in the case of organized crime). In contrast, the holistic mapping of the threat strategy encourages a multifaceted response and, by extension, identifies the means necessary for its execution. At the same time, it is insufficient merely to mirror-image the opponent's approach, or to let its strategic design dictate the terms of engagement. Instead, the response must at some point impose its own logic and purpose to achieve the necessary change. Put in simple terms, what is it one is fighting for? This informs and drives the theory of success that should guide its unfolding.

The other components of the Strategic Estimate can help make the case. One important aspect will be to address the roots of the problem. This is arguably the most complex and politically sensitive component of the Strategic Response, as it seeks to reform the *structures* of power, change conditions on the ground, and rewire social contracts. In many cases, the drivers of criminality are deeply entrenched, so alleviating them will require time and effort and probably be destabilizing, creating new winners and losers. There is also the question as to whether meaningful change is even possible.

To return to Colombia, the factors that fuel drug trafficking in that country relate to the limited governance and development in the parts of the country where coca is grown. Both the counterinsurgency campaign against FARC and the subsequent peace process sought, in different ways, to address this root of conflict by spreading the government to the periphery. As has become clear, this is a very difficult undertaking. At least 95 percent of the country's population lives in the sierra region in the west, where the country's major cities are located. Only 5 percent inhabits the savanna and the Amazon region, which are underdeveloped and difficult to access and where, not coincidentally, criminality makes its base areas.[181] Given the incentives of electoral democracy and limitations on resources, there are compelling reasons for any government to focus on the developed majority rather

than the more isolated minority. Meanwhile, however, given the lack of alternative livelihoods, the profits of the drug trade, and the power of local gangs, there are compelling reasons for the rural population to turn to coca cultivation. Undoing this political-economic order—certainly a root of the problem—is anything but simple.[182]

These difficulties are typical and point to the need for humility and creativity in addressing roots. One principle may be to focus less on resolving social and political contradictions and to work instead towards fostering greater resilience. Though serious grievances will likely remain, resilience implies an ability to prevent their maturation into desperation, criminality, and violence. The question then becomes not a matter of solving the socioeconomic problems at hand but creating systemic channels that are perceived as adequate in improving the situation over time. Even with this lower bar of ambition, however, achieving progress remains challenging.

Addressing the frames and narratives (assuming a multiplicity of relevant actors) implies reducing the acceptance of crime or of the services that criminal organizations provide. This effort strikes at the heart of the struggle for legitimacy that defines irregular warfare. Rhetoric alone is unlikely to sway in the absence of action. Even so, it is helpful to understand the worldview of those whose behavior the Strategic Response seeks to change. The Strategic Estimate's analysis of framing can provide some guidance, as does the key point that leadership is not manpower. It is leadership that diagnoses and through prognosis conceptualizes the way forward. Followers sign on to the project for myriad reasons. Thus, there invariably exists the opportunity to create division within the criminal project. It may be, for example, that seams emerge between the three different frames—the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational—that can be exploited. It is also worth returning to the assessment of frame resonance to help target information campaigns and public diplomacy.

Similarly, the final box of the Strategic Estimate, the critique of the present response, is also crucial to the construction of a revised response. This section of the Estimate demanded that the analyst assess whether the current strategy of response is working and where shortfalls emerge. This assessment will also have
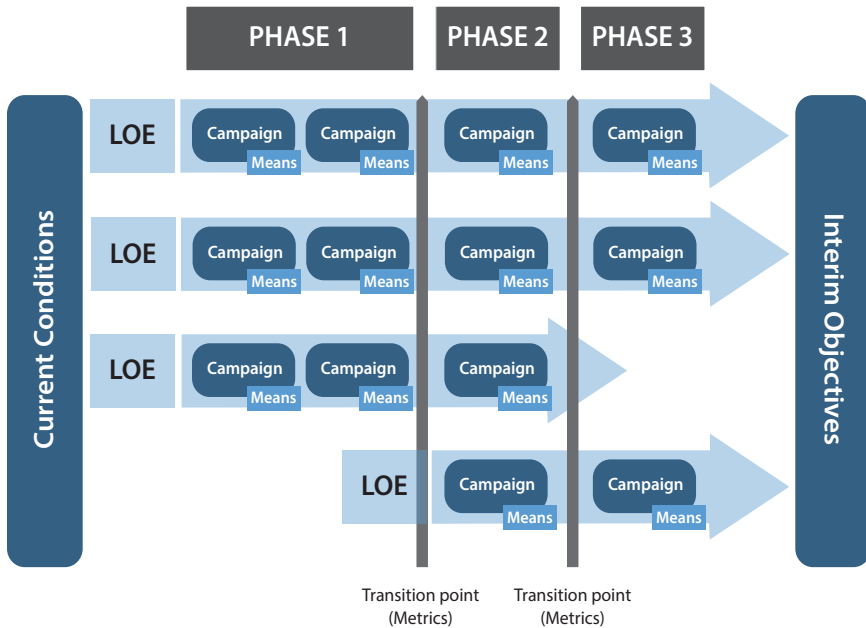
identified the reasons for shortcomings, be they inadequate political will or re-sources, and thereby point to upstream priority areas that must be addressed if more ambitious action is to be taken. It may for example be necessary to work on altering conceptions of interest, an admittedly daunting task, by fostering greater awareness of what inaction will yield and of what can be achieved through a more effective approach.[183]

Mapping and Presenting the Response to Threat Strategy. Beyond good ideas, it is necessary to present the strategy of counter clearly, not least when it is complex and involves multiple actors interacting over time. The search for clarity requires structure. To this end, we return to the terminology of operational design, adapted for the strategic level. We have already encountered the framework of ends, ways, means, to which we can now add "phasing" and "metrics" (or measures of effec-tiveness). Each of these components requires explanation (see below). It should be immediately emphasized, however, that all these components must be integrated. The strategy should come together as one unified product, with respective compo-nents informed by one another and the strategy's overall logic. Figure 8 provides a graphical representation of how the different components relate to one another.

The *ends* of the strategy are the objectives or conditions being sought. These must be carefully articulated, or the strategy will lack direction. Importantly, the ambition of the strategy is scoped by the planner, based on available means, time, political will, or other limiting factors as well as the need for positive change. Thus, the desired objectives might be to manage or contain rather than solve a problem, or even just to set up a more enabling context for follow-on action. The *ways* and *means* are treated together, because without means there are no ways; and means should only be employed to execute ways, not tasked as is the norm (for example, telling security forces to deal with crime, rather than constructing a strategy and then determining who and what will implement its parts).

The first step is to state, as in the concept of response, the overall *strategic approach* and its theory of success. The Implementation section of the framework takes this vision further, explaining the operationalization of strategic intent, or the "how" of the plan. The plan must provide a compelling sequencing of action to demonstrate its accumulation towards identified ends. A helpful way to visualize

Figure 8. Sample Integrated Strategy, Representing Strategic Art, Campaign Architecture, Phasing, Transition Points, and Measures of Effectiveness

| | PHASE 1 | PHASE 2 | PHASE 3 |

Current Conditions

LOE — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means)

LOE — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means)

LOE — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means)

LOE — Campaign (Means) — Campaign (Means)

Interim Objectives

Transition point (Metrics)   Transition point (Metrics)

this journey is to work backwards from desired objectives, via the interim conditions that they presume, until the envisaged set of circumstances is attainable from the line of departure. This mental exercise will generate an incremental roadmap that translates into phases and their content: What must be done now to set up the requirements for success later? It follows that rather than reacting to the present conditions, the key lies in doing so in a way that enables a subsequent step, that in itself is a precursor to the next step, with ultimate goals guiding the action.

This approach puts a heavy premium on the role of *phasing*, which if used judiciously can help prioritize and set the goals to be achieved over time. Separate phases could, for example, address different elements of the Strategic Estimate (roots, frames, and threat strategy) or be used to first "stop the bleeding" before more enduring actions are considered. Clearly, the more phases, the higher the level of abstraction, and of risk, and so planners should extend the strategy no further

than necessary. The phasing must, for example, acknowledge the likely effects of each step along the way and the reactions of other actors.

Within each phase, the plan should be able to present the broad strategic intent and how it translates, via nesting, into operational campaigns and tactical actions. Each phase will have its own LOEs, thereby producing over time a map of the strategy that can be grasped both at the macro level, to discern its overall logic and shape, and at the micro level, to reveal operational and tactical detail and their relation to the whole. It is vital throughout to recall the strategic purpose of actions taken.

Metrics are essential both in determining when transition points between phases have been reached and to gauge the success of the Strategic Response as a whole. Even so, the question of metrics is challenging, as irregular warfare concerns intangible aspects such as legitimacy, governance, support, and influence. The task is compounded by what many practitioners see as a fetishization of metrics, leading to the counting of whatever can be counted. The common practices in countering organized crime, of measuring arrests or seizures made, conviction rates, money confiscated, or investigations launched, can badly mislead, in that they say little about whether the problem is being addressed and whether matters are improving.

To do better, it is helpful to distinguish between *measures of performance* and *measures of effectiveness*. Measures of performance evaluate what is being done to address a problem, or the inputs. If more naval patrols are to stop smuggling, measures of performance gauge whether the patrols were carried out as intended. These institutional self-assessments can be important but do not concern the effect of actions taken.

Measures of effectiveness, in contrast, assess strategic outcomes. The purpose of our actions is not the effort put in, or even the output thereof, but the *outcome* as it relates to the identified problem. David Kilcullen makes this distinction in his discussion of roadbuilding in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. He notes that "what has made this program successful is not the road per se. . . . [It is that] people have used the *process of the road's construction*, especially the close engagement with district and tribal leaders this entails, as a framework around which to organize a

full-spectrum strategy."[184] If the teams building the road provided the input, and the road was the output of their effort, the outcome was a political shift in allegiances and a reconfiguration of legitimacy.

Measuring cognitive and political effects is difficult. A major review describes it as "quite hard if not impossible" to get right. Various challenges immediately surface, including the intangibles at the heart of the matter, the paucity of reliable data, institutional disagreement over criteria, the reproducibility of data-gathering methods across time and space, and the political pressure to demonstrate success.[185] Given the added resistance to anecdotal evidence, many resort instead to the "illusion of science"—color-coded graphs, stoplights, arrows pointing up or down (or sideways)—to mask a lack of knowledge, of published standards, or of any real consensus on what success should look like.[186] Since metrics are nonetheless indispensable to knowing whether or not progress is being made, this is a conversation that requires more care and honesty. Successes have been recorded by getting "inside the loop" of the threat's own assessment of progress and difficulties.[187]

Despite the complexity of the strategy and the difficulty of communicating it, the most important condition remains the basic but profound idea of what will generate success. No amount of terminology or mechanical cramming will substitute for it. The need to retain a clear focus on what matters is precisely the reason for nesting, so that all details provided are linked to the bigger picture. Everything must flow from this central idea, lest style suffocate substance.

Risk and Risk Mitigation

A change in Strategic Response implies not only new opportunities but also new risks, and these should be communicated. Doing so can be intense. To at least one analyst, despite the growth of various "risk frameworks" and other methodologies, risk assessment remains too often "ill-defined and misleading."[188]

Though it may oversimplify, risk can be understood as that which can go wrong due to the change in strategy. This category can be further divided into two types: the plan's likely *points of failure*, due to a lack of capability or capacity; and

the *risk of unintended consequences*, or those that flow from the strategy's successful execution.

In countering organized crime, risks of failure are easy enough to foresee. Do we have enough means, are they sufficiently capable to execute the ways to which they are assigned, and has adequate coordination internally and externally been achieved to produce the desired effect? Risks of success require a more strategic awareness, to identify the plan's unanticipated second-order effects. Reitano details, for example, the perverse outcomes of costly enforcement to curb immigration: "[T]he more challenging a border becomes to cross, the more militarized the levels of enforcement, the more necessary a smuggler becomes and the more risk-accepting, professional and corrupt that smuggler will need to be to perform his function successfully."[189] Going further, what is the cost of ever-stricter and even dehumanizing enforcement mechanisms to the very values in whose name we seek to counter criminal activity?[190] Do these enforcement mechanisms create a bigger and more professional adversary, mounting costs, and misery for many, and—if so—what have they achieved to counterbalance these outcomes?

If risks are identified, be they moral, strategic, or just operational, what to do? So long as the strategy is still being built, the obvious recourse is to modify it to ensure that the risks are avoided. This guidance appears obvious, yet it highlights the nonlinear nature of strategy-making. As the plan is produced, each component must continuously relate to the others, with balancing and adjustments continuing throughout until one cohesive final product is achieved.

Still, no matter how much tinkering, risk is unavoidable. At some undefinable point, it is no longer possible to tweak, and the risks left unaddressed must then be communicated as part of the final product. U.S. military doctrine refers to these as "residual risks": those that remain when the unnecessary or unacceptable risks have been eliminated.[191] The test for these risks is whether they are less significant than those created by staying the course or not acting at all. There is no objective way in which to measure such advantage. Nonetheless, this is a situation where some consideration is better than none, not to "prevent bad outcomes" altogether, but to "ensure that leaders make strategic judgments with eyes wide open to possible consequences."[192]

If "residual risks" are deemed acceptable, the next step is to consider how they might be mitigated. Plans for mitigation can be fully fledged branch plans with their own logic, sequencing, and prioritization, or they could be far simpler, pointing to measures that might reduce the gravity of the risks should they materialize. Regardless, efforts at risk mitigation would typically go beyond what is already in the strategy, as their aim is to address the costs of its proposed actions, be it a breakdown in the plan or the consequences of it succeeding. In that sense, risk mitigation will need to supplement (rather than just repeat) the measures already in the strategy. They may be regarded as emergency measures, to be identified and used only if the strategy misfires.

Chapter 6: A Comparative Evaluation of the Framework for Analysis and Action

This monograph presents a framework for analysis and for crafting strategies to address problems of organized crime. As discussed in chapter 3, such frameworks are not uncommon among practitioners. Most organizations with an operational mandate provide some form of process to guide its work. This type of instruction is particularly important for agencies engaged with complex political and security problems such as state fragility, violence, and criminality, as addressing these contexts can prove challenging, even counterintuitive. These agencies rely on planning tools to transfer knowledge and apply lessons learned.

The ready existence of several tools and frameworks raises two challenging questions. First, one might ask whether the continued struggles in this type of work truly relate to a lack of methodological guidance or stem instead from inadequate political will in following the approaches and best practices already available. What difference then would one additional framework hope to engender? The line of questioning is fair, as there is clearly only so much that a framework, ours included, can do to counteract entrenched elite apathy.

Still, political will is not static. The type of strategic analysis enabled by our framework is meant to identify possibilities for progress and craft strategy accordingly. This ability to create opportunity through assessment is one way to mobilize action, including from a reluctant elite. Key in making the difference is the ability to formulate and present a strategy that is acceptable and that realistically charts a path from the here and now to a better tomorrow.

Second, given the existence of so many planning frameworks for countering organized crime, or at least for addressing related challenges, it may be asked how our product differs from the rest. Bluntly put, what is its added value? This chapter engages with this question via a comparative analysis involving 15 other products. The assessment reveals the relative advantages of the framework presented in this monograph. It thereby indicates the parts of our framework that are the most innovative additions to planning and the crafting of strategy, and which may therefore be productively added to other institutional tools or approaches.

In broad terms, there are two key strengths to our framework. First, it links a thorough assessment of the situation to the crafting of strategy. Remarkably, most other toolkits focus on only one of these two tasks, typically the former. Second, in discussing strategy, our framework places great emphasis on its theory of success, prioritization, sequencing, and admixture of ends, ways, and means. In our combined experience teaching and consulting on strategic planning, we have discerned a general lack of familiarity with this approach to analysis and design. Even where our framework will not entirely supplant or replace a method already in use, it may nonetheless help fill this void in how to approach the process of strategic analysis and planning. In this effort, and as this chapter bears out, our framework comprises a set of key advantages.

Of Tools and Toolkits

The comparative evaluation in this chapter is based on a range of planning frameworks, some more formal than others:

◆ Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC), *Strategic Early Warning for Criminal Intelligence Theoretical Framework and Sentinel Methodology* (Ottawa, Canada: CISC, 2007).[193]

◆ Scott H. Decker, *Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2008).[194]

◆ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance*, Development Assistance Committee Guidelines and Reference Series (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011).[195]

◆ John P. Sullivan and Alain Bauer, eds., *Terrorism Early Warning: 10 Years of Achievement in Fighting Terrorism and Crime, Terrorism Early Warning Group* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 2008).[196]

◆ United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, "Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability: Guidance Note," September 2024.[197]

◆ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Organized Crime Strategy Toolkit for Developing High-Impact Strategies* (Vienna: UN, 2021).[198]

◆ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, *Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, n.d.).[199]

◆ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "CDCS Guidance: Country Development Cooperation Strategy," version 3, n.d.[200]

◆ USAID, *Conflict Assessment Framework—Version 2.0* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2012)[201] and USAID, *Conflict Assessment Framework Application Guide* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2012).[202]

◆ USAID, *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles Into Practice*, USAID Policy (Washington, DC: USAID, 2011).[203]

◆ USAID, *Fragile States Strategy*, PD-ACA-999 (Washington, DC: USAID, 2005).[204]

◆ USAID, *Project Design Guidance* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2011).[205]

◆ USAID, *Security Sector Governance and Justice Indicators Guide* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2019).[206]

◆ USAID, *Theories and Indicators of Change Briefing Paper: Concepts and Primers for Conflict Management and Mitigation* (Washington, DC: USAID, March 2013).[207]

◆ UN Development Group (UNDG), *The United Nations Development Assistance Framework* (New York: UNDG, 2017).[208]

In arriving at this list of products, we sought out those planning tools that deal either directly or obliquely with countering organized crime, which led us to include also frameworks for stabilization, development, and capacity-building more broadly. These frameworks and planning tools differ in their objective and scope, but all seek to assist policymakers and practitioners in making sense of their work and enable more successful interventions.

We compared the various toolkits based on 12 criteria: 5 relating to the assessment, 5 to the construction of a strategy of response, and 2 general criteria relating to overall method. The first 10 criteria query whether the tool examined

provides adequate guidance for a user to complete the analytical functions provided by the Framework for Assessment and Action. These criteria are based on the lessons identified in chapter 2 and seek to address the common pitfalls in countering organized crime. The final two criteria, devoted to method, ask in a more all-encompassing manner whether the tool guides the user through a process to weave together these various tasks into, respectively, a comprehensive analysis and a comprehensive course of action. The criteria are listed by group in the table below.

While testing the planning tools based on the functions provided in the Framework for Assessment and Action, we also sought to identify functions provided in other products that are not included in our own approach. The additional functions identified include:

◆ institution-specific technical guidance

◆ the inclusion of multiple frameworks

◆ a simultaneous mapping of several relevant actors

◆ the identification of "indicators" relating to the problem.

Table. Criteria for Comparative Assessment of Planning Tools

	Assessment	Course of Action	Integration
Does the framework include . . .	A problem statement?	A concept of response, or general idea of the strategy?	A step-by-step guide for how to produce an analytical assessment?
	An identification and analysis of roots or drivers?	A determination of relevant law and how it weighs upon the solution?	A step-by-step guide for how to craft a strategy of response?
	An assessment of framing or different worldviews?	An identification of risks and possible mitigation measures?	
	A method to map and assess the threat strategy?	A querying of assumptions both necessary and implicit?	
	An evaluation of the present response to the problem?	A method to craft strategy, along with consideration of metrics?	

Main Findings

The planning tools reviewed as part of our assessment converge around four common focus areas: understanding the problem, identifying its drivers, deciding upon a concept of response, and setting out metrics and measures of progress. Beyond these commonalities, the frameworks represent different strengths and weaknesses, but in general they share six lacunae.

Drivers and Roots. Though they nearly all note the importance of drivers, or roots, in understanding the problem, the frameworks very seldom provide sufficient guidance in how such drivers can be identified analytically. Such assessment is deceivingly complicated, as it brings together questions of structure, agency, and contingency. The analyst is effectively asked to account for how, in a specific context, certain forces are driving key members of the population (but not others) to engage in a particular behavior. As explained earlier in the monograph, the three lenses of *macro*, *micro*, and *meso* (the context, the individual, and the collective response—in this instance, organized crime) must be accounted for, not just separately but in their relation to one another.[209]

This requirement is important, as it guards against overinterpretation of structural factors. Specifically, in considering the relation between *macro*, *micro* and *meso*, the analyst is driven to consider not just environmental cues for criminality or violence, but also why these cues do not have varied effects on different people. This leads to a closer examination of any intervening variable between context and behavior, which may help to explain why some react to their environment differently and what the true drivers of the problem may be. A rushed analysis will misinterpret the roots of the problem and yield a potentially wasteful or even deeply counterproductive response.

Frame Analysis. In the frameworks evaluated in this assessment, there was virtually no consideration of frame analysis. Framing is crucial to how groups and individuals make sense of their world and therefore also to their behavior. Various international relations thinkers have commented on the importance of "strategic empathy," or how valuable it can be to understand your adversary's perspective.[210] This lesson is applicable also to organized crime. Indeed, as our review of practice suggested (see chapter 2), the failure to understand why individuals are drawn to

organized crime will typically generate strategies that fail to address its appeal, and therefore also its persistence. All too often, government interventions are guilty of mirror-imaging, or the inability to account for vastly differing views of the same environment.

Though some of the assessed frameworks allude to the importance of perspective, none provide a method for assessing the perceptions and beliefs of relevant populations. Our framework advances such guidance as one of the five crucial areas of the Strategic Estimate, giving it high priority both in our assessment of the problem and in the crafting of response. We lean on social movement theory, which provides a comprehensive method for disaggregating worldviews into three different lenses—the diagnostic, the prognostic, and the motivational. We also ask analysts to identify the critical audiences for any framing, and how each of these receives the message. In a world wherein narrative and storylines are of increasing strategic importance, such assessment can prove invaluable.

Critique of Present Government Response. Curiously, though the frameworks being assessed all seek to bring about more effective outcomes, very few of them evince any concern with why the present situation is as it is. Of the 15 frameworks included in our review, only 4 alluded at all to the need to explore the reasons for past failures prior to launching new programs and initiatives. This lacuna seems puzzling, or perhaps it can be explained by the political sensitivity within government about admitting shortcomings and critiquing its own work.

In our framework, the critique of the present government response is, again, one of the five major categories of the strategic assessment. While ostensibly focused on the threat group, the Strategic Estimate is equally concerned with the *relation* between the threat and the state and how the activities of each have produced a conflict cycle. It is therefore insufficient to speak of the threat as "the problem," as its ability to survive, operate and even grow relates to the inadequacy of response. The fifth and final box of our Strategic Estimate emphasizes this point by asking analysts to critique the present government response, much as our Roots analysis queries the effect of past interventions in sustaining or perpetuating the problem.

A key factor in this type of assessment concerns the government perception of the problem at hand, particularly the battle for legitimacy. Given the centrality of

political will and resolve in countering organized crime, it is of utmost importance not to assume that governments will strive toward the optimal and most promising strategy. Instead, it should be asked how disparate governments perceive the problem of organized crime, whether they prioritize it, or—even worse—are complicit with it. To say the least, pitching a strategy that is blind to such variation would be a very hopeful endeavor.

Mapping of Strategies, Theirs and Ours. A major contribution of our framework lies in its emphasis on mapping, which helps visualize the threat actor's social and political embeddedness as well as the full extent of its strategy. Based in part on the military's methodology for operational design and in part on past case studies of irregular warfare, our framework queries what an organized crime group is doing, not just to generate profit, but also politically, societally, informationally, and otherwise. It then provides a method for how to present this information graphically to establish the strategic utility of specific actions in relation to broader lines of effort, and the relation of such lines of effort to the strategic objectives at hand.

This ordering exercise is missing in all but one of the other frameworks reviewed for this chapter (the UN Office on Drugs and Crime framework). The products are not blind to the need to understand how the criminal group operates or what its main business practices are, but there is very seldom a systematic review of its strategy, encompassing an assessment of its various efforts and how they relate to one another. In a similar vein, there is also no push to identify the strengths or weaknesses in this strategy, which means the Strategic Response will likely miss exploitable opportunities or ideas for how to proceed. In contrast, the Framework for Analysis and Action asks specifically for the location of critical vulnerabilities to affect the center of gravity, which in irregular warfare is typically framed as an expression of legitimacy—that is to say, influence, sway, and mobilizing potential.

In most of the reviewed products, the absence of mapping undermines also the guidance for how to construct a Strategic Response. Instead of designing a strategy that advances conceptually and sequentially toward a desired objective, most frameworks remain at the level of principle or best practice. The best argument for avoiding a more comprehensive approach is that, in practice, planning

across phases must confront the unpredictability and fluidity of complex problems and that plans therefore end up being, as Dwight Eisenhower put it, worthless. The second part of Ike's quotation is, however, key: "plans are worthless, but planning is everything." Planning implies an ability to prioritize, phase, and sequence, and to repeat this process when reality moves in unexpected directions. This is the skill that our framework imparts, albeit with full awareness that the approach to most problems must be nonlinear.

Guidance for the Construction of an Assessment and Response. All the products that we reviewed for this analysis sought in some way to aid planning and/or the formulation of response. Despite this intent, only three of the products provided a step-by-step guide for the construction of a strategic assessment. In other words, despite seeking to build the capacity of practitioners to analyze and assess, most frameworks are vague on how their content can be used. In effect, these products assume that readers will be inspired by the framework's content and develop their own approaches to reflect its insights. Such an approach is hopeful, not least when practitioners are asked, as they frequently are, to confront a fast-moving and unpredictable situation. In such circumstances, it can be invaluable to have trained new skills and to have a manual to walk practitioners through a steady process.

If guided instruction on producing an assessment is lacking, the situation is far worse for the formulation of strategy. Once again, only the UN Office on Drugs and Crime framework provides a step-by-step process for building a response. Most other products either do not include guidance on how to construct a strategy or are overly broad in their instruction of how this is to be achieved. As the strategy is the reason for the entire exercise—all frameworks implicitly or explicitly seek improved outcomes—this lacuna is, again, puzzling.

This last weakness speaks to a generally poor understanding of strategy. Though invocations of strategy and of strategic thinking are common, there are few institutions that prize education specifically in how to understand and craft strategy. In this sense, the Framework for Analysis and Action benefits from its basis in Western military thinking, which (notwithstanding the significant errors of implementation) represents a methodology for strategic development. At pres-

ent, there simply is no civilian equivalent to the focus on strategy within Western war colleges. Products divorced from this understanding of strategy often lack the essential ingredients that make a plan usable.

Conclusion

While there is no shortage of planning frameworks, the CISA Framework for Analysis and Action presents a few key advantages on other publicly available planning methodologies. The CISA Framework is the only one designed specifically to address the deliberate ambiguity of irregular warfare and to ensure we capture its essence and address its main components. It is also the only publicly available framework to put equal focus on both assessment and response. It includes detailed instruction and guidance for the identification of drivers, or the factors that should be addressed to arrive at a more comprehensive strategy. It also provides a method for mapping the threat group strategy along with the state's response, which ensures that the product can be used to inform task organization and planning.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

What motivated our study was the realization that efforts to counter organized crime shared many of the challenges seen also in the world of counterterrorism, particularly since the 9/11 attacks. Much as with the response to organized crime, the so-called war on terror was stymied by three factors: conceptual uncertainty of the problem, oftentimes cloaking political divergences; an urge to address the scourge without acknowledging its social and political context; and thus pursuit of strategies that went wide of the mark, the progress of which was difficult to measure, and which often times proved counterproductive.

Irregular warfare emerged as a corrective lens in that it placed terrorism within its essential *political* context and as a component of a struggle of *legitimacy*. This normally meant restoring the primacy of ideological rebellion, or insurgency, wherein terrorism is invariably a method (albeit used to various degrees). This same shift in lens application is appropriate to consideration of countering organized crime. Our past work identified six lessons: the tendencies, in both fields, to (1) neglect the sociopolitical drivers of the problem; (2) militarize our response (or to rely on a purely suppressive logic); (3) neglect political differences among supposed partners; (4) underinvest in community mobilization; (5) proceed without a clear sense of strategy; and (6) wish away questions of political will.[211] The Framework for Analysis and Action proposed in this report helps to correct for these errors.

A particular message of our framework concerns the need to contextualize analysis to shift from a tactical to a strategic response. This can hardly be identified as revolutionary, yet the consistency with which the opposite is done remains little short of breathtaking. Only by interrogating organized crime as a system can its drivers and pressure points be identified. Of urgency, then, is the need to avoid focus upon symptoms and to avoid mirror-imaging. This latter point has become increasingly urgent as the intangible world has all but swallowed the tangible.

For organized crime, then, the contribution of this Framework for Analysis and Action is to enable a strategic *mapping* of the problem. The strategies thus created respond not just to the problem of criminality but to the context that enables this phenomenon. Based as it is on the Strategic Estimate, the Course of Action

is guided by identified opportunities and vulnerabilities and further supported by relevant metrics to track progress (or the lack thereof). This emphasis on testing what works is crucial for countercrime activities, which can—and too often, have—become self-justifying and logically circular.

We propose this framework to encourage greater strategic competence in sectors where the term *strategy* is often a synonym for a wish list or a collection of slogans. Such competence implies an ability to discern the political problem underpinning criminality, its drivers, narratives, and expression, and to tailor a response that uses such analysis to propose a theory for how to proceed. Based on such analysis, strategic competence denotes the skill set necessary to craft strategy—one that unfolds across time and place, builds progress, and can demonstrably achieve set objectives. In this manner, the framework is proposed to extend a "campaigning mindset" to a broader set of institutions than the military, because these institutions—more than the military—are those required for an effective response.

A word of caution is in order as we close. The explosion of organized crime has generated an abundance of literature, much of it useful, yet a good bit of it incorrectly identifying "the problem"—the first step in the framework. The FARC, to which the text refers several times, serves to illustrate. Prior to 9/11, American actors, focused on the so-called war on drugs, predictably sought to label the FARC a narco-cartel; that is, a criminal entity that—though it might engage in ideological discourse to some extent—was motivated by profit. Internal evidence from within the movement did not support this assessment. The FARC, its extensive criminality notwithstanding, remained throughout a political project, albeit one with certain units and personalities which "got dirty," which the FARC worked to control. It can readily be seen that framing the challenge as one of criminality as opposed to violent politics funded largely through criminality would have produced an incorrect strategy.

This tendency seems particularly pronounced today in areas such as Latin America, where traditional ideological actors have become increasingly enmeshed in criminality to the extent that their essence is not only debated but skews analytical processes. The FARC's successor as a national security threat in Colombia—Ejército de Liberación Nacional or National Liberation Army

(ELN)—is a pertinent case. Its increasing involvement in a wide variety of illegal activities in both Colombia and Venezuela naturally leads to analytical contestation of its identity: organized crime with some politics thrown in or political project with a robust criminal funding profile? To proceed from an assumption of the former, however, particularly absent the evidence demanded by a proper estimate of the situation, is to court strategic distortion. Use of the framework is intended to ensure that this does not occur.

Appendix: User's Guide: The Framework for Analysis and Action

This synopsis of the Framework for Analysis and Action assists in the production of a Strategic Estimate and Course of Action to counter organized crime. For elaboration and explanation of the framework, please see:

◆ David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks, *Countering Organised Crime as Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Strategic Analysis and Action*, SOC ACE [Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence] Research Programme Research Paper No. 19 (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2023).[212]

◆ David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2022).[213]

In using this framework, recall:

◆ This is not a checklist to be approached linearly in a rushed manner. The purpose is to ask questions that often are of concern and to generate critical strategic thinking. It is still up to the user to engage in the necessary fact-finding, analysis, and deduction.

◆ *Never include anything in your final product just because the guidance asked you to consider it.* Use the framework and the associated terminology to interrogate your case; know (and demonstrate in your argumentation) why what you include is relevant and necessary to the case.

Strategic Estimate of the Situation

Problem. In two to three paragraphs, distill the nature of the problem that motivates your Strategic Estimate. Reflect on the following questions, but save details for later:

◆ What is the political nature of the problem being faced?

◆ What is the name and nature of the actor(s) representing a threat? Is it violent, nonviolent, clandestine or overt, transnational, state-supported or state-sponsored, or a combination thereof?

◆ Provide the information necessary (and only that information) to explain the current situation.

Figure A1. The Strategic Estimate, Strategic Response, and Their Interaction, as Adapted to Organized Crime

1. STRATEGIC ESTIMATE

PROBLEM	ROOTS	FRAME & NARRATIVE	THREAT STRATEGY	PRESENT RESPONSE
What is the political challenge? Why criminality and in what form? What is preventing progress?	What contextual drivers sustain the problem?	How does the criminal actor frame and justify itself? Does it resonate with relevant audience(s)?	What is its strategy and theory of success?	State perception State response (E-W-M) Evaluation and critique

CONCEPT OF RESPONSE	LEGAL AUTHORITY	ASSUMPTIONS	IMPLEMENTATION	RISK ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION
Assessment of estimate: What is to be done and why? How to get at threat COG via CVs?	What authorities bind you and what do you need?	What assumptions were necessary to continue with planning?	Strategy (E-W-M) Phasing Metrics	

2. STRATEGIC RESPONSE

◆ Demonstrate the direction of the situation based on current trends: who is benefiting, who is hurting, and why does it matter?

◆ Why is this problem proving so difficult to counter? Why is a change in policy needed?

A map of areas discussed can be helpful.

Note: The problem statement is the distillation of the analysis encompassed by the entire Strategic Estimate of the Situation. As such, it cannot be finalized before the rest of the estimate is completed.

Roots. The "Roots" section is concerned with the factors that sustain the threat and allow it to operate, even thrive. What drivers give the threat a conducive environment and may require resolution for the problem to be successfully addressed?

Analysis should interrogate how *macro* factors (context, structure) lead certain individuals in society (*micro*) to embrace criminal organizations (*meso*), either as participants or benefactors. Each facet must be interrogated, not linearly but in an integrated manner. Specifically:

◆ *Macro*: What are the contextual factors that enable the threat, allowing it to amass support? Typical examples include entrenched inequity, poor governance,

corruption, geographical isolation, lack of opportunity, abusive state behavior, or unresolved historical legacies, but the list is far from exhaustive.

◆ *Micro*: Assuming these drivers are relevant, why do they compel some but not others to support or engage in criminality? Can we determine what groupings or individuals are more likely to be driven to this end? Why them? Why not others?

◆ *Meso*: How does the criminal actor help mediate the drivers of participation and engagement? What are its functions sociopolitically? Why are these functions not available through licit systems and networks?

The hard-nosed purpose of the roots analysis is to identify dispassionately which factors and flows are nourishing the threat, so that they may be addressed as part of a comprehensive response. Remember this intent and *do not get lost in the details*.

Frame and Narrative. Identify and analyze the threat's:

◆ diagnostic frame (how it views the problem and apportions blame)
◆ prognostic frame (how it justifies its solution and use of criminality)
◆ motivational frame (how it motivates participation and support).

For each, establish the *narrative*, or the storyline as related by the threat itself. Seek not to describe but to illustrate with primary data. To the degree warranted, explain the threat's use of *frame alignment* to achieve resonance with other actors.

Evaluate the *resonance* of the framing structure among the *relevant or contested audiences*. Which are these? Use relevant data to support this evaluation.

Threat Strategy (Ends, Ways, Means)

Ends. What are the goals of the threat? Do they go beyond the illicit search for profit and entail also political or ideological agendas?

Ways. What is the threat's strategic approach? How does it seek to get what it wants (what is its *theory of success*)? Is the approach violent, nonviolent, confrontational, or clandestine, or something else? Is there a distinct "schedule" that the threat associates with its plan?

Now the strategy should be *mapped* to facilitate construction of an appropriate counter (see figure A2). We do this by identifying *lines of effort*, *concep-*

Figure A2. The Logical Relationship Among Ends, Ways, Campaigns, and Means

END: Desired endstate
WAYS: Strategic approach; theory of success

LOE 1 — Campaign 1 — Campaign 2 — Campaign 3 → Interim Objectives

Means — Means — Means

LOE 2 — Campaign 1 — Campaign 2 — Campaign 3 → Interim Objectives
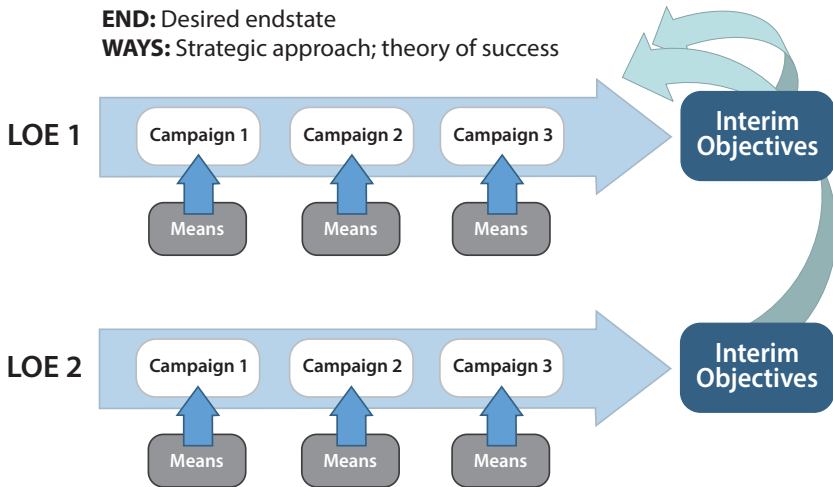
Means — Means — Means

tual campaigns (bundles of activity), and—as appropriate—*subcampaigns*. Means should be specified whereby campaign architecture is operationalized. The greater the detail (normally in appendices), the more useful is the product. In your analysis, always render explicit the relation of operational activity and strategic objectives (often via interim objectives).

To map the strategy, begin by interrogating the actions undertaken by the criminal actor. The following questions can be helpful in identifying the full range of the strategy:

◆ What, if anything, is the threat doing *politically* to bring about its desired objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *enablers* within the subject space to reach its objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *violence* to serve its objectives?

◆ How, and why, is the threat using *nonviolence* to serve its objectives?

◆ How, and with what effect, is the threat *internationalizing* its approach?

Interrogation of these questions yields evidence of action, which can be grouped—based on a common intent or nature—into conceptual campaigns. Two or more campaigns united in strategic direction and intent form an LOE. These LOEs should be labeled based on their character (for example, violent LOE, international LOE, and so on). However labeled, each LOE has an *interim strategic objective*—a *purpose*—that contributes to the threat's goal.

Means. It is important to note that the ends-ways-means construct is best conceptualized in symbiotic fashion—*its components do not constitute a sequential list*. The question of means should therefore accompany the mapping of ways above. Account to the degree possible for the specialized assets deployed to operationalize the strategy. A separate discussion of means may also be appropriate to indicate holdings, structures, bases, command and control structures, and so forth. Diagrams and maps can be important here.

Based on this mapping exercise, what is the role played by legitimacy, the strategic center of gravity?

To identify ways of addressing the center of gravity, determine the threat's *critical vulnerabilities*. A critical vulnerability is a component of the threat strategy that is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack, creating a significant effect. It may relate to mismatches between frames and strategy (what is said versus what is done), to gaps between roots and threat strategy (what drives participation versus the threat's ability to mediate these drivers), or to tensions within any component of the Strategic Estimate.

Present Response.

Note: This is a critique of the *current* response to the problem you are analyzing. Focus on the response of the actor for which you are proposing a strategy, acknowledging that its actions will often contribute to a broader effort. Be guided by the simple charge: Who is prevailing in the struggle for legitimacy and whom does it involve?

◆ Perception: How do we frame the threat and/or problem? How do we view our progress in addressing it? How do we describe our reason for countering it?

◆ Response: What is the current strategy? What is the theory of success?

◆ Critique: Is our perception accurate—of the threat, its progress, and our response? Are we making progress: what is working and what is not? Does the response address the symptoms of the problem or the problem itself? Is it appropriately addressing the roots of the conflict, the frame and narratives, and/or the threat strategy? As applicable, is it affecting the center of gravity by exploiting the critical vulnerabilities?

As part of this analysis, account for the role of *political will* and *capacity* (motivation and opportunity) in determining the present response.

Note: The two most common errors in this section are:

◆ Merely listing programs. It is the interaction of the two contenders that is at issue.

◆ Confusing a past response for the present phase that currently matters. How to delimit the *present phase* is case-specific, but it implies continuity with today's key dynamics.

The Strategic Response

In crafting your strategy:

◆ Make full use of the Strategic Estimate as the empirical foundation for the course of action.

◆ Bear in mind that this process is never linear. Each component of this framework must in be sync with the rest, until all are balanced and integrated into one cohesive whole.

Concept of Response.

◆ Summarize your recommended response to the problem assessed in your Strategic Estimate. Illustrate *how* and *why* your plan differs from the present response analyzed in the Strategic Estimate. The point is to be succinct.

◆ Capture your strategy in two to four paragraphs. One way of crafting your response is by addressing the way legitimacy (the *center of gravity*) has been approached or ignored in the present response. This naturally will lead to consideration of the threat's *critical vulnerabilities*. The response should then be driven

by a theory of success and/or the position that you want to attain and how (the ends-ways-means construct). The strategic approach and theory of success must be grounded in *reason and evidence*, drawn from your Strategic Estimate.

◆ Demonstrate why your proposed Strategic Response is superior to the present one, not only for addressing the problem but also *strategically*, in relation to broader interests.

Legal Authority. Your plan should adhere to proper *legal authorities*. Ensuring that you have a legal basis requires interrogation of your planned action and consideration of legal ambiguities and challenges (these could arise from questions of sovereignty, use of force, constitutional constraints, or treaty law). If force is used, is it based on *international humanitarian law* (the Law of Armed Conflict) or *the rule of law* (a law-enforcement approach)—or some hybrid of these?

◆ Are the necessary international and domestic authorities in place for those actions that require legal clarification? If legal authorities are vague or lacking, can you implement temporary or new measures? Are changes in legislation necessary?

◆ Be aware that legal considerations can be formal—the rule of law—or informal, relating to cultural, social, and religious factors that will constrain your response.

◆ Do not use this section to list all laws that relate to your case. Restrict the analysis to the specific red flags that might prompt legal review and need clarification.

Assumptions. Assumptions are used to fill gaps in required information or facts that are needed to continue planning. Your assumptions may relate to areas of continuity or change and delineate an environment in which your proposed course of action is relevant.

What assumptions did you *have to make* to allow for planning into the future? State and explain these assumptions. Bear in mind:

◆ Planning assumptions should be *valid* (supported by evidence), *important* (relevant to your plan), and *necessary* (address an area where uncertainty is disabling).

◆ As assumptions relate to key areas of *uncertainty*, aim to include as few assumptions as appropriate to enable planning. As far as possible, the Strategic Estimate should be used to provide the evidentiary basis for the strategy.

◆ Assumptions should relate to *variables beyond the scope* of your own response. Do not assume that desired conditions will apply if they do not already do so; do not assume problematic circumstances will change unless evidence suggests this is likely.

Implementation. This is the actual setting forth of the concept of response. *As appropriate to your case*, detail how your proposed strategy responds to the Strategic Estimate. Consider these steps:

◆ Identify your strategic objectives (ends).

◆ Identify your strategic approach (the overall *nature* of response, its key *phases* and/or *LOEs*, along with main *means* involved)—that is, *ways*, operationalized by *means*.

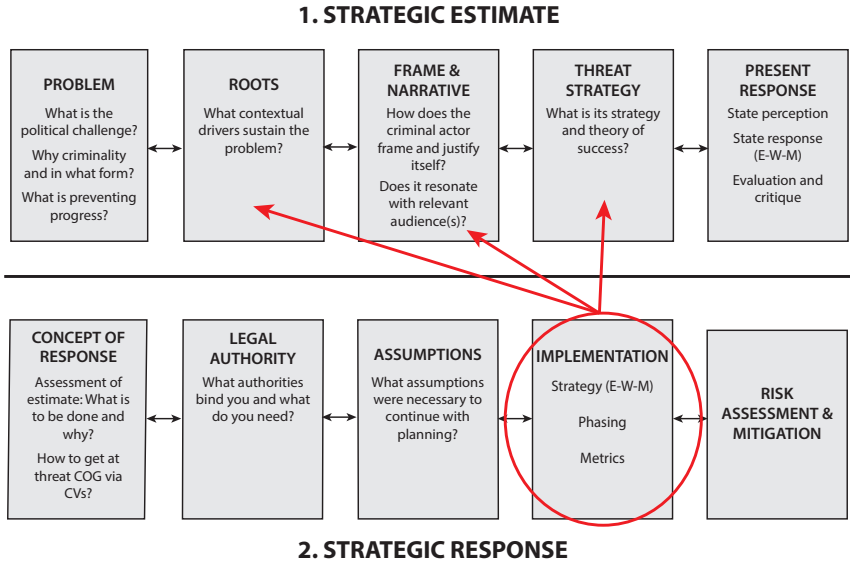◆ Explain your theory of success.

This introduction to your strategy will allow you to get into further detail. In presenting the strategy, do not think of its constituent elements as separate but rather integrate them as one product that takes us from present to desired conditions via the necessary LOEs, metrics, phases, and means (see figure A3).

The LOEs will likely differ across the phases of the plan so that each builds on progress made until desired objectives are reached. Different phases will be appropriate in addressing different elements of the Strategic Estimate—roots; frame and narrative; and threat strategy. Your response may have phases that are sequential and/or concurrent. They may be time- and/or conditions-based.

A promising way to arrive at a phasing construct is to work backwards from desired conditions to the incremental objectives necessary to reach this goal. Through tracing the strategy from the desired conditions back to the present ones, necessary actions and their sequence become clearer.

In *resourcing your plan*, you must provide the details of what assets are tasked to accomplish your LOEs and their campaigns. If the required means are not in

Figure A3. Sample Integrated Strategy, Representing Strategic Art, Campaign Architecture, Phasing, Decision Points, and Measures of Effectiveness

1. STRATEGIC ESTIMATE

PROBLEM	ROOTS	FRAME & NARRATIVE	THREAT STRATEGY	PRESENT RESPONSE
What is the political challenge? Why criminality and in what form? What is preventing progress?	What contextual drivers sustain the problem?	How does the criminal actor frame and justify itself? Does it resonate with relevant audience(s)?	What is its strategy and theory of success?	State perception State response (E-W-M) Evaluation and critique

CONCEPT OF RESPONSE	LEGAL AUTHORITY	ASSUMPTIONS	IMPLEMENTATION	RISK ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION
Assessment of estimate: What is to be done and why? How to get at threat COG via CVs?	What authorities bind you and what do you need?	What assumptions were necessary to continue with planning?	Strategy (E-W-M) Phasing Metrics	

2. STRATEGIC RESPONSE

place, they must be developed (and this must be acknowledged in your phasing structure).

What are the *metrics* by which you will assess the success of your plan and/or the shift between its critical phases? Consider the best indicators, or how best to capture the data necessary for these metrics, bearing in mind that they can be *tangible* (concrete) and *intangible* (abstract, such as perceptions, influence, and trust). Focus on the *outcomes* desired by the plan rather than the *inputs* or their direct *output*.

Ensure that your response, as presented, appears *feasible* (it is a response that can be executed); *reasonable* (it is rational and logical); *acceptable* (within the bounds of relevant law and to the court of public opinion—both domestically and internationally); and *sustainable* (the results achieved will be consolidated rather than reversed). These conditions are not a list of conditions to be checked off one

by one, but crucial considerations to guide you throughout your planning and design.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation. Risk is the probability of failure in achieving an objective at an acceptable cost. Some of the questions to consider include:

◆ Where are the greatest risks of failure?

◆ What is the risk of executing the strategy to your other interests?

◆ For each risk identified, consider first whether changes to your response would resolve this vulnerability. Edit the response as necessary to arrive at unavoidable, acceptable *residual risks*. For these, develop options for mitigation. If these risks are realized, what *alternative measures* could be taken to reduce their magnitude and damage?

Notes

[1] Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, *Global Organized Crime Index 2021* (Vienna: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, September 2021), 8, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GITOC-Global-Organized-Crime-Index-2021.pdf.

[2] Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, *Global Organized Crime Index 2023* (Vienna: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, September 2023, 11, 21, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Global-organized-crime-index-2023-web-compressed-compressed.pdf.

[3] Channing May, "Transnational Crime and the Developing World" (Washington, DC: Global Financial Integrity, March 2017), xi, https://gfintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Transnational_Crime-final.pdf.

[4] See Joint Operating Concept, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, Version 1.0 (Washington, DC, The Joint Staff, September 11, 2007), 1, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA496061. Though the U.S. Department of Defense has since reformulated this definition, the above version remains, by far, the most helpful elucidation, as it defines irregular warfare according to its essence (the struggle for legitimacy), rather than *how* or *by whom* that struggle might unfold. The methods of irregular warfare are contingent on strategy and the correlation of forces, and actors of any type may be involved. What remains constant is a theory of victory that sees legitimacy as foundational to political power, mobilization, and survivability. In its eagerness to stretch irregular warfare to new realities, the Pentagon has all but lost sight of this etiological foundation. See David H. Ucko and Thomas A. Marks, "Redefining Irregular Warfare: Legitimacy, Coercion, and Power," *Modern War Institute*, October 18, 2022, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/redefining-irregular-warfare-legitimacy-coercion-and-power/.

[5] As the "irregular warfare annex" to the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy recognized, "Our competitors have operationalized clandestine criminal activity and predatory economic behavior as components of their own approach to irregular warfare." See U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy" (Arlington, VA, 2020), 5, https://media.defense.gov/2020/oct/02/2002510472/-1/-1/0/irregular-warfare-annex-to-the-national-defense-strategy-summary.pdf.

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[148] Claudio Ramos da Cruz and David H. Ucko, "Beyond the *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*: Countering Comando Vermelho's Criminal Insurgency," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2018), 39–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1404772.

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156 Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, *Everyday Corruption and the State*; Walton, "Is All Corruption Dysfunctional?"

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[169] Ian Ralby, "Approaches to Piracy, Armed Robbery at Sea, and Other Maritime Crime in West and Central Africa," in Reitano et al., *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, 140.

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[172] Peter Viggo Jakobsen and Troels Burchall Henningsen, "Success Defying All Expectations: How and Why Limited Use of Force Helped to End Somali Piracy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 47, no. 2 (June 21, 2023, 12, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2227356. See also Anja Shortland, "Dangers of Success: The Economics of Somali Piracy," in Reitano et al., *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, 178.

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[175] Peter Roberts, "The Militarisation of Migration: From Triton to Sofia: Assessing the Credibility of the EU's Naval Interventions Against Migrant Smuggling in the Mediterranean," in Reitano et al., *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime*, 226.

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[209] It is perhaps useful to highlight that even considering *macro*, *micro*, and *meso* in such order deviates from the norm, which almost universally simply considers context (*macro*), organization (*meso*), and individual (*micro*). It should be clear this is not of greatest utility to practitioners. For further treatment, see Thomas A. Marks, "Combating 'Terrorism': A Strategic Warfighting Perspective," in *The Fragility of Order: Essays in Honour of K.P.S. Gill*, ed. Ajai Sahni (New Delhi: Kautilya Books and The Institute for Conflict Management, 2019), 99–128.

[210] Within a broad academic literature devoted to empathy, it can be helpfully defined as "imagining or simulating another's experience and perspective, to better understand them. Empathy, in this sense, is rational and cognitive . . . a tool for understanding the way another person thinks, feels, or perceives. It enables us to comprehend another's mindset, driving emotions, or outlook, without requiring us to share the other's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, or, indeed, approve of them." See Matt Waldman, "Strategic Empathy," New America Foundation, April 2014, 2, https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/4350-strategic-empathy-2/Waldman%20Strategic%20Empathy_2.3caa1c3d706143f1a8cae6a7d2ce70c7.pdf.

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About the Authors

Dr. David H. Ucko is the Head of Net Assessment at North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Headquarters in Brussels. In this capacity, he is responsible for leading the assessments of strategically relevant asymmetries and in briefing these products to NATO's political and military leadership. Prior to joining NATO, Dr. Ucko was a Professor in the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, where he taught irregular warfare and strategy to international military and civilian practitioners. Dr. Ucko has published widely on war-to-peace transition, strategy, and conflict analysis. His most recent books are *The Insurgent's Dilemma: A Struggle to Prevail* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2022) and, with Thomas A. Marks, *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action*, 2nd ed. (NDU Press, 2022). His publications also include several other works and peer-reviewed articles on political violence, strategy, and irregular warfare. Dr. Ucko has previously worked for various academic and think-tank institutions, including the Department of War Studies at King's College London, the RAND Corporation in Washington, DC, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies in both in Washington, DC, and in London. He obtained his Ph.D. in the Department of War Studies in 2007.

Dr. Thomas A. Marks is Distinguished Professor and MG Edward G. Lansdale Chair of Irregular Warfighting Strategy in CISA. He assumed his present rank and position on July 1, 2016, after 12 years as the founding chair of the War and Conflict Studies Department and professor of terrorism at CISA. He was asked to occupy these positions following the attacks of September 11 because of his extensive academic and field experience concerning irregular warfare strategy and operations.