

## Chapter 6

# Designing Pan-Atlantic and International Anti-Crime Cooperation

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Large-scale illicit economies and intense organized crime have received intense attention from governments and international organizations since the end of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War brought a permissive strategic environment that allowed many states to focus on a broader menu of interests in their foreign policy agendas, such as the fight against drug trafficking and production. The post-Cold War reduction of international aid to countries formerly in the midst of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union exposed the great fragility and institutional underdevelopment of many of these states, a deficiency perhaps exacerbated by globalization. At the same time, the international community spotlighted criminal and belligerent actors of significant power, who were previously hidden in the shadows of Cold War politics, especially when their activities were associated with the emergence of new areas of intensely violent organized crime or trafficking-related corruption.

The focus on organized crime, illicit economies, and the multiple threats they pose to states and societies intensified after September 11, 2001, when it became obvious that belligerent groups, as the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, derive multiple benefits from participating in illicit economies, such as the drug trade, including extensive financial profits. In addition to expanding the resources of terrorist and belligerent groups, the persistence and growth of illegal economies also have been complicating post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction efforts in countries that have emerged from civil wars—be they Cambodia or Haiti.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive exploration of the role of illicit economies and organized crime in conflict mitigation and post-conflict reconstruction, see James Cockayne and Adam Lupel, eds., *Peace Operations and Organized Crime: Enemies or Allies* (New York: Routledge: 2011).

Increasingly, the United Nations Security Council has highlighted organized crime, such as drug trafficking, as an issue requiring the coordinated focus of various United Nations bodies and of the Secretary General.<sup>2</sup> The escalation of violence in Central America, where weak states have been overwhelmed by the intensity of organized crime; the emergence of drug smuggling in West Africa, which contributes to the region's cauldron of other illegal economies and poor governance; and the deep penetration of illegal economies into the political and economic life of Afghanistan and Pakistan have captured policy attention.

Yet many external policy interventions to combat organized crime and illicit economies often have not been very effective. Paradoxically, at times they have turned out to be counterproductive with respect to other objectives, such as mitigating violent conflict, fostering good governance, and promoting human rights. And even with respect to their principal direct objectives, such as weakening criminal groups and their linkages to terrorist organizations, the external interventions have at times been counterproductive.

This is because although illicit economies pose multiple threats to states, their effects on societies are often highly complex. Indeed, large populations around the world in areas with inadequate or problematic state presence, great poverty, and social and political marginalization continue to be dependent on illicit economies, including the drug trade, for economic survival and the satisfaction of other socio-economic needs. For many, participation in informal economies, if not outright illegal ones, is the only way to satisfy their basic human-security needs and provide any chance of their social advancement, even as they continue to exist in a trap of insecurity, criminality, and marginalization.

In terms of designing an effective policy response and appropriate external assistance, it is important to stop thinking about crime solely as aberrant social activity to be suppressed, but instead to think of crime as competition in state-making. In areas of state weakness and underprovision of public goods, the effective state strategy toward organized crime is thus not merely one of suppression of crime

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<sup>2</sup>See, for example, United Nations Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, S/PRST/2010/4, February 24, 2010 and S/PRST/2009/32, December 8, 2009.

through law enforcement. An appropriate response is a multifaceted state-building effort that seeks to strengthen the bonds between the state and marginalized communities dependent on or vulnerable to participation in the drug trade and other illicit economies for reasons of economic survival and physical insecurity. The goal of anti-organized crime efforts should not only be to suppress narrowly the symptoms of illegality and state-weakness, such as illicit crops or smuggling, but also, and more fundamentally, to reduce the threat that the drug trade poses to national security and make it a lesser public safety problem that does not threaten the state or the society at large.

Moreover, external policy assistance design must reflect the fact that it is unrealistic to expect that outside policy interventions can eradicate most organized crime and illicit economies in a particular place or, for that matter, most drug trade in that place. Prioritizing policies to mitigate the most dangerous forms of criminality is important, as is designing policies consistent with the absorptive capacity of the target state. Policy interventions to reduce organized crime and to suppress any emergent crime-terror nexus can only be effective if there is a genuine commitment and participation by recipient governments and sufficient buy-in from local communities.

### **The Threats Illicit Economies Pose**

Large-scale illicit economies generate multiple threats to states. They can threaten the state *politically* by providing an avenue for criminal organizations and corrupt politicians to enter the political space, undermining the democratic process. These actors, who enjoy the financial resources and political capital generated by sponsoring the illicit economy, frequently experience great success in the political process. They are able to secure official positions of power as well as wield influence from behind the scenes. Consequently, the legitimacy of the political process is subverted. The problem perpetuates itself as successful politicians bankrolled with illicit money make it more difficult for other actors to resist participating in the illicit economy, leading to endemic corruption at both the local and national levels.

Large illicit economies with powerful traffickers also have a pernicious effect on the *judicial* system of the country. First, as the extent of

the illicit economy rises, the investigative capacity of the law enforcement and judicial systems diminishes. Impunity for criminal activity also increases, undermining the credibility and deterrence of the judicial system and the authority of the government. Second, powerful traffickers frequently turn to violent means to deter and avoid prosecution, killing off or bribing prosecutors, judges, and witnesses.<sup>3</sup> Of course, efforts to suppress the production of illicit drugs sometimes also lead to an increase in government human rights abuses.<sup>4</sup>

While the detrimental effects of intense crime and large-scale illicit economies on political processes are apparent, it is a significant and often inappropriate leap of analysis to assume that the emergence of organized crime and extensive illicit economies will always necessarily challenge political stability and threaten existing governments and the power of ruling elites. To the extent that external drug traffickers make alliances with internal outsiders—former or existing rebels not linked to the official system or young challengers who seek social mobility in an exclusive system—the traffickers will develop a conflictual relationship with the state, and political instability may well follow. To the extent that the governing elite captures the new drug rents, a symbiosis between external (and internal) drug traffickers and the ruling elites may develop. Drug traffickers will enjoy a sponsored safe haven, and while democratic processes and institutional development of the country will be threatened, political stability and the existing political dispensation may well be strengthened.

Illicit economies also have large *economic* effects. Drug cultivation and processing, for example, on the one hand generate employment for the poor rural population, numbering frequently in the hundreds of thousands. Moreover, not only does the drug economy allow the impoverished poor to make ends meet, it also facilitates upward mobility for many participants. A burgeoning drug economy also contributes to inflation and can hence harm legitimate, export-oriented,

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<sup>3</sup>Mónica Serrano and María Celia Toro, "From Drug Trafficking to Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America," in *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?* Mats Berdal and Monica Serrano, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002): 141-154; and Mauricio Rubio, "Violence, Organized Crime, and the Criminal Justice System in Colombia," *Journal of Economic Issues*, 32 (2): 605-610.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, eds., *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005).

import-substituting industries. In Gambia, for example, the influx of external dollars from the illicit drug trade set off significant inflations. It encourages real estate speculation and a rapid rise in real estate prices, and undermines currency stability. It also displaces legitimate production. Since the drug economy is economically superior to legitimate production not only in price profitability, but also in requiring less developed infrastructure and not imposing large sunk and transaction costs, the local population is frequently uninterested in, or unable to, participate in a different form of economic activity. The existence of a large illicit economy thus complicates efforts at local development and crowds out legitimate economic activity. The illicit economy can thus lead to the so-called Dutch disease where a boom in an isolated sector of the economy causes or is accompanied by stagnation in other core sectors, since it gives rise to appreciation of land and labor costs. Finally, it appears that the small share of the final profits that is captured by the country producing the illicit commodity is used mainly for unproductive consumption by the traffickers, rather than productive economic investment.<sup>5</sup>

Certain illicit economies also create *environmental* threats to the state. Poaching and smuggling of wildlife throughout Africa as well as South East Asia, for example, depletes biodiversity and contributes to the demise of endangered species. Illegal logging in East and West Africa leads to further soil erosion and desertification, making land inhospitable for agriculture. In the Congo and Amazon, illegal logging and mining decimates some of the world's last rain forests, contributes to carbon release and global warming, and species loss. Coca cultivation in Latin America too results in deforestation, and the processing of coca leaves into cocaine leaks highly toxic materials, such as kerosene, into the waterways of some of the richest ecosystems in the world. Illicit smuggling of toxic waste into Africa generates critical

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<sup>5</sup>For details on the economic effects of illicit economies, see, for example, Francisco E. Thoumi, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Pranab Bardhan, "Corruption and Development: A Review of the Issues," *Journal of Economic Literature* 35 (3), 1997: 1320-65; Peter Reuter, "The Mismeasurement of Illegal Drug Markets: The Implications of Its Irrelevance," in Susan Pozo, ed. *Exploring the Underground Economy* (Kalamazoo: W.E. Upjohn Institute, 1996): 63-80; and Mauricio Reina, "Drug Trafficking and the National Economy," in Charles Berquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington: A Scholarly Resources Inc. Imprint, 2001).

health problems and ecological catastrophes, such as happened in the Cote d'Ivoire port of Abidjan in August 2006.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the presence of a large-scale illicit economy in the context of violent conflict greatly exacerbates *security* threats to the state.<sup>7</sup> And under some circumstances, organized crime can become so violent and so overwhelm a state's weak law enforcement capacity that its actions can amount to a national security, not merely a public safety, threat to the state. Belligerent groups that embrace illicit economies, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Sendero Luminoso in Peru, the FARC and the paramilitaries in Colombia, derive a multitude of benefits from such illicit economies. With the large profits they derive, belligerents improve the physical resources they have to fight the state: they can hire more combatants, pay them better salaries, and equip them with better weapons. In fact, the increase in the belligerents' physical resources is frequently immense; in the case of the FARC and the officially-demobilized paramilitaries in Colombia, for example, the financial profits from drugs are on average estimated at about \$100 million a year, or between fifty and seventy per cent of the groups' incomes.<sup>8</sup>

Better procurement and logistics also enhance what can be called "the freedom of action" of belligerents, that is, the scope of tactical options available to belligerents and the ability to optimize both tactics and their grand strategy. Prior to penetrating illicit economies, belligerents frequently have to deplete much time and energy on activities that do little to advance their cause, such as robbing banks and armories to obtain money and weapons, or extorting the local population for food supplies. Once their participation in an illicit economy, such as the drug trade, solves the belligerents' logistics and procurement needs, they become free to concentrate on high-value, high-impact targets.

Critically, participation in illicit economies greatly increases the belligerents' political capital—i.e., the extent to which the population welcomes and tolerates the presence of the belligerents. Large-scale illicit

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<sup>6</sup>A tanker carrying 500 metric tons of European industrial waste illegally dumped its cargo in the port, killing or sickening thousands, and overwhelming the state's infrastructure. See "The Abidjan toxic waste dump," editorial, *L'Occidental*, 4 October 2006; <http://www.loccidental.net/english/spip.php?article138>.

<sup>7</sup>This section draws heavily on Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2009).

<sup>8</sup>Author's interviews in Colombia, fall 2005.

economies frequently provide basic livelihood for the population in a conflict zone, and by sponsoring the illicit economy, belligerents are able to distribute real-time economic benefits to the population. Moreover, as already indicated above, beyond the basic provision of livelihood, belligerents also provide protection and regulation services to the illicit economy and its producers against, for instance, brutal and unreliable traffickers. With large financial profits from the illicit economy, belligerents also often provide a variety of otherwise-absent social services, as did Peru's Shining Path during the 1980s, such as clinics, roads, and schools.<sup>9</sup>

Four factors have a decisive influence on the extent to which belligerent groups derive political capital from their sponsorship of illicit economies: the state of the overall economy in the country/region; the character of the illicit economy; the presence or absence of independent traffickers; and the government's response to the illicit economy.

The *state of the overall economy* determines the extent to which the local population is dependent on the illicit economy for basic livelihood and any chance of social advancement. The poorer the country and the smaller the size and accessibility of the licit economy, on the one hand, the greater is the dependence of the population on the illicit one, and the greater is the political capital that accrues to belligerents for sponsoring the illicit economy. On the other hand, in a rich developed country with a plentitude of legal economic opportunities, the larger population may well object to the illicit economy and the belligerents' participation in it can discredit them. Hence, in Afghanistan today, the Taliban derives substantial political capital from its protection of the poppy fields. This political capital is all the more vital for the movement since its brutality has antagonized the population. By contrast, the Catholics in Northern Ireland, where legal economic opportunities were far greater than in Afghanistan, objected to the participation of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in drug distribution. The resulting loss of legitimacy ultimately led PIRA to abandon its participation in the drug trade.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN & Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998); and Cynthia McClintock, "The War on Drugs: The Peruvian Case," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 2 and 3 (Summer/ Fall 1988): 127-142.

<sup>10</sup>Andrew Silke, "Drink, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: Financing Loyalist Terrorism in Northern Ireland—Part Two," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23, no. 2 (April-June 2000): 107-127.

The *character of the illicit economy* determines the extent to which it provides employment for the population. Labor-intensive illicit activities, such as the cultivation of banned crops, easily employ hundreds of thousands to millions of people in a particular locale. The smuggling of drugs or other contraband, by contrast, are labor-non-intensive illicit activities that frequently employ only hundreds of people. Belligerents' sponsorship of labor-intensive illicit economies thus brings them much greater and more widespread political capital than their sponsorship of labor-non-intensive ones. The Taliban's regulation of the labor-non-intensive illicit smuggling of licit goods bought it the favor of Afghanistan's trafficking groups in the early 1990s, but it was only in late 1995 when it came to tolerate and regulate the labor-intensive opium economy that it obtained political capital from the larger population.

The *presence or absence of independent traffickers* determines the extent to which belligerents can provide protection and regulation for the population against the traffickers. To the extent that independent traffickers are present and abuse the population, the belligerents can insert themselves into the relationship and act as protection and regulation agents, thus increasing the well-being of the population and their own political capital. If traffickers are not present, perhaps because the belligerents eliminated them, belligerents cannot provide the same scope of protection and regulation services to the producers, and hence their political capital decreases. During the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the FARC bargained on behalf of farmers for better prices from the traffickers, and limited the abuses by the traffickers against the population. Its actions were met with widespread approval from the *cocaleros*.<sup>11</sup> During the late 1990s, however, the FARC displaced independent traffickers from the territories it controlled, demanded a monopoly on the sale of coca leaf, and set a ceiling on the price paid to the *cocaleros*. Consequently, the FARC's political capital plummeted substantially, further contributing to the deterioration of its legitimacy, which already was in decline as a result of its brutality and its failure to protect the population from the paramilitaries' mas-

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<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); and Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, "Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of Civil War and Criminality from the Colombian Experience," *Politics and Society* 32:2 (June 2004): 257-285.



sacres. In fact, some *cocaleros*, such as those in the Nariño region, have complained that they would prefer that the FARC were absent, since it interferes with their drug cultivation and profits by demanding a monopoly on sales of coca leaf and paste.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the *government response to the illicit economy* critically influences the extent of the political capital belligerents can derive from it. The government's response can range from suppression—eradication and interdiction—to *laissez faire*, to some form of official sanctioning of the illegal economy, including its full-blown legalization. Although suppression policies often dominate government responses, increasingly various less punitive policies are being explored as well. Legalization or licensing has been adopted in the case of gems, such as in the case of diamonds in Africa under the so-called Kimberly certification process. Similarly, although easily evaded and falsified, certification systems are to distinguish illegally-sourced, processed, and transhipped timber, and from legally-certified one.<sup>13</sup> The Organization of American States has called for considering legalizing marijuana,<sup>14</sup> in August 2013 Uruguay became the first country ever to fully legalize the cultivation and sale of marijuana, and Guatemala's President Otto Pérez Molina even suggested that drug trafficking in cocaine and heroin might be legalized as well.

The more the government attempts to suppress the illicit economy, the more it boosts demand for the belligerents' protection and regulation services, and the more dependent both the criminal business elites and the wider population are on the belligerents for the preservation of the illicit economy. Government suppression policies, such as the effort to eradicate illicit crops, thus frequently have the inadvertent effect of strengthening the belligerents politically by undermining the willingness of the population to provide intelligence on them to the government. Accurate and actionable human intelligence is of

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<sup>12</sup>Author's interviews with Colombian and U.S. government officials, Bogotá, Colombia, November 2005, and Washington, D.C., Spring and Summer 2007.

<sup>13</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Indonesia Field Report III: The Orangutan's Road: Illegal Logging, and Mining in Indonesia," The Brookings Institution, February 2013.

<sup>14</sup>Organization of American States, *The Drug Problem in the Americas*, 2013, [http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction\\_and\\_Analytical\\_Report.pdf](http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf); and Organization of American States, *Scenarios for the Drug Problem in the Americas, 2013-2015*, 2013, [http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Scenarios\\_Report.PDF](http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Scenarios_Report.PDF).

course essential for successful counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations.

Although they frequently alienate the population, government efforts to crack down against illicit economies rarely result in a substantial curtailing of the belligerents' financial income. Drug eradication policies so far, for example, have not bankrupted or seriously weakened any belligerent group.<sup>15</sup> They tend to fail because belligerents and producers of the illicit products and services have a variety of adaptive methods at their disposal: relocating production to new areas, altering production methods to avoid detection or survive suppression, or even switching to other illegal activities. Going after the belligerents' finances, including those derived from illicit economies, is inherently difficult and rarely limits their physical resources. But in the case of labor-intensive illicit economies in poor countries, such suppression efforts, especially those that affect the larger population, can greatly increase the belligerents' political capital and hamper the government's intelligence acquisition, and hence the overall counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts.

Although illicit economies threaten states in a multitude of ways, and although they frequently thrive in ungoverned spaces, criminal actors with vested interests in the illicit economy frequently do not desire a complete collapse of the state. This is especially the case if there are no belligerents ready to provide the governing function and the crime entrepreneurs themselves are unable or unwilling to provide it. Nor do the criminal business elites necessarily desire a weak state, as long as the state is not antagonistic to the illicit economy. In fact, if the state is at minimum not attempting to suppress the illicit economy or is in fact favorably disposed to its existence, traffickers and producers may even support the state and oppose the belligerents. When

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<sup>15</sup>A 2007 classified White House study estimated that the FARC's drug income fell between 2003 and 2005 by a third and it was now between \$60 and \$115 million a year. Author's interviews with U.S. government officials, Washington, D.C., Spring 2007. See Juan Forero, "Colombia's Low-Tech Coca Assault," *Washington Post*, 7 July 2007: A01. Even disregarding the notorious difficulties in estimating profits from illicit economies, the estimates betray the extraordinary difficulty of trying to bankrupt belligerent groups by eradication. If six years of the largest aerial spraying campaign ever—Plan Colombia—managed to reduce the FARC's income only to a still extraordinarily high \$60 million a year (the lower bound of the estimate), the prospects are not good that such efforts will be successful elsewhere. Indeed, bankrupting belligerents via the eradication of illicit crops from which they profit has yet to work anywhere.

eradication policies were suspended in Peru in 1989, for example, both the traffickers and the larger population were willing to provide critical information on the Shining Path to the military, so that the military was able to deliver fatal blows to the insurgents in the Upper Huallaga Valley.<sup>16</sup> Rather than criminal elites always existing in a fully antagonistic relationship with the state, criminal organizations and the governing elites sometimes develop a mutually beneficial accommodation.<sup>17</sup> Such an accommodation is not optimal from the perspective of the society and certainly undermines rule of law and democracy, but it may well result in a sustainable internal modus operandi, at least to the extent that external actors do not threaten such an accommodation by insisting on the destruction of the illicit economy.

## **Society and Crime**

At the same time, large populations around the world in areas with inadequate or problematic state presence, great poverty, and social and political marginalization are dependent on illicit economies, including the drug trade, for economic survival and the satisfaction of other socio-economic needs. For many, participation in informal economies, if not outright illegal ones, is the only way to satisfy their human security and provides any chance of their social advancement, even as they continue to exist in a trap of insecurity, criminality, and marginalization. The more the state is absent or deficient in the provision of legal jobs and public goods—starting with public safety and suppression of street crime and including the provision of dispute resolution mechanisms and access to justice, enforcement of contracts, and also socio-economic public goods, such as infrastructure, access to health care, and education—the more communities become susceptible to becoming dependent on and supporters of criminal entities and belligerent actors who sponsor the drug trade and other illegal economies.

By sponsoring especially labor-intensive illicit economies criminal and belligerent actors provide public goods, suboptimal as they may be.

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<sup>16</sup>José E. Gonzales, “Guerrillas and Coca in the Upper Huallaga Valley,” in David Scott Palmer, ed., *Shining Path of Peru* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 123-144.

<sup>17</sup>Bertil Lintner, “Drugs and Economic Growth: Ethnicity and Exports,” in Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Burma: Prospect for a Democratic Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 165-184.

First, they provide employment in the illegal economy. In the case of illicit crop cultivation, these job opportunities are often extensive, generating employment for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people in particular locale. Other aspects of the drug trade, such as processing, smuggling, or the production of synthetic drugs are considerably less labor-intensive, but nonetheless generate spillovers that often foster economic activity, such as retail. This ability to provide employment is all the more significant in places where political-economic arrangements, such as taxation systems, weak fiscal capacity, limited access to even deficient education, and monopolistic economic and political setups often fail to create jobs even at times of economic growth.

Second, both criminal entities and belligerent groups also often provide security. Of course, they are the sources of insecurity and crime in the first place, but they often regulate the level of violence, suppress street crime, such as robberies, thefts, kidnapping, and even homicides. Functioning as an order and rule provider brings criminal entities important support from the community, in addition to facilitating their illegal business since that too benefits from reduced transaction costs and increased predictability. Organized-crime groups and belligerent actors also provide dispute resolution mechanisms and even set up unofficial courts and enforce contracts—be they the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) in Sao Paolo's shantytowns, the mafia in Sicily, or the Taliban in Afghanistan. They also provide socio-economic public goods, such as roads and health clinics. The extent to which they provide these public goods varies, of course, but their provision often takes place regardless of whether the non-state entities are politically-motivated actors or criminal enterprises. The more they do so, the more they become *de facto* proto-state governing entities.

In turn, such groups obtain not only large financial benefits from their participation in illegal economies, but also large political capital—support from the population and even identification of the population with these criminal and other nonstate entities. Their political capital and ability to act as protostates increase the more they transform themselves into polycrime franchise enterprises and also acquire control of informal economies, in addition illegal ones.

Thus, much of the debate about whether an actor is a political actor or a criminal actor is often misguided. Of course, it is critical to have a

good intelligence picture and strategic understanding of a group, including its motivations, objectives, and structures, to inform the design of policy responses. For example, the effectiveness and appropriateness of suppression and negotiation strategies will vary with the strategic objectives of a group.

However, even criminal organizations obtain political capital if they sponsor illicit economies and distribute patronage and public goods as a result of their sponsorship of the illicit economies in a way that outperforms the state. Moreover, most organized-crime actors have at least minimal political goals, such as to influence local economic, political, law enforcement, and judicial structures in a way that it conducive to the preservation of their business. And their control of violence, corruption, and extortion on the street has profound social effects on the life of society and its ability to independently organize. High persistent levels of violence—whether they are from street crime or organized crime—eviscerate such social capital and the organizational capacity of civil society and its ability to resist organized crime.

Despite the profound effects intense organized crime and large-scale illicit economies can have on state and society, it is a common misconception to assume that when the drug trade or other organized-crime rackets arrive to a new place they encounter innocent virgin land with no experience in illegality or rents. Sometimes that may be the case, such as when illegal loggers for the first time encounter indigenous groups in the Brazilian Amazon that have had no previous exposure to civilization. But in all other cases, both the state and the society have preexisting susceptibility, proclivity, and resilience to particular criminal rackets, crime-state political arrangements, and their local perturbations. The local institutional and cultural context matters a great deal in how organized crime will be able to penetrate and threaten state and society and what shape it will take.

West Africa has become very much the focus of international attention because of its recent drug trade epidemic<sup>18</sup> and the connections

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<sup>18</sup>See, for example, James Cockayne and Phil Williams, "The Invisible Tide: Towards an International Strategy to Deal with Drug Trafficking Through West Africa," International Peace Institute, October 2009; Davin O'Regan, "Narco-States: Africa's Next Menace," *New York Times*, March 12, 2012; Davin O'Regan and Peter Thompson, "Advancing Stability and Reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau: Lessons from Africa's First Narco-State," Africa Center for Strategic Studies Special Report, June 2013, <http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/>

between various illicit economies and militancy and terrorism. Thus in the pundit discussion, it has become a favorite factoid to wave that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar has long smuggled cigarettes and other addictive substances in West Africa and the Maghreb and is now the poster boy of “narco-jihadism.” And of course, the region is rife with many illicit economies: whether cars and bicycles stolen in Europe and smuggled into the region, cannabis from and cocaine via Morocco heading into Europe, Viagra pills smuggled into Egypt,<sup>19</sup> weapons pouring out of Libya into Mali, Niger, Syria, and Nigeria, or something as seemingly harmless as eggs being smuggled in large quantities out of Tunisia. Many of these illicit enterprises, even potentially the smuggled eggs, do pose the very serious and multiple threats outlined above.

Yet to simply equate West Africa’s chronic instability and the Maghreb’s current turmoil with the recent drug trade epidemic in the area and its newly visible illicit economies fundamentally misses the deep structural roots of the problem and often leads to inadequate and even counterproductive policy recommendations. Europe’s new taste for cocaine, the decline of the cocaine market in the United States, and U.S. interdiction pressure in the Americas all helped reroute drug smuggling into West Africa. However, it was the preexisting institutional and governance deficiencies in the region that resulted in the newly-arrived drug trade being such a potent amplifier of political instability and militancy.

Political contestation in West Africa has long centered on taking over the state to capture rents, decades before Latin American drug traffickers started using West Africa to smuggle cocaine to Europe. Indeed, almost immediately after its independence (and often predating it), the region has been characterized by a variety of illicit

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2013/06/SpecialReport-Guinea-Bissau-JUN2013-EN.pdf; and Neil Carrier and Gernot Klantschnig, *Africa and the War on Drugs* (Zed Books: 2012); Kwesi Aning, Sampson B. Kwarkye, and John Pokoo, “A Case Study of Ghana,” in Camino Kavanagh, ed., *Getting Smart and Scaling Up: The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*, New York University Center for International Cooperation, June 2013, [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_ghana\\_study.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_ghana_study.pdf); Summer Walker, “A Desk Study of Sierra Leone,” in Camino Kavanagh, ed., *Getting Smart and Scaling Up: The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*, New York University Center for International Cooperation, June 2013, [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_sierra\\_leone\\_study.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_sierra_leone_study.pdf).

<sup>19</sup>“Trafficking in North Africa,” *Economist*, August 17, 2013.

economies and their deep integration into the political arrangements and frameworks of the countries in the region. Such rent-generating legal, semi-illegal, or outright illegal economies have included diamonds (Sierra Leone, Liberia), gold and other precious metals, stones, and timber (Liberia, and Sierra Leone), the extraction, monopolization, and smuggling of agricultural goods, such as cacao (Cote d'Ivoire), trafficking in humans for sexual exploitation and domestic slavery (Mali, Togo, Ghana), oil (Nigeria), and fishing (often conducted illegally and destructively by international fleets from outside West Africa).<sup>20</sup> Illicit diamond mining—frequently linked to politicians and tribal chiefs in Liberia—vexed the departing British colonial officers as early as the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> Contestation over rents from these economies fueled much of the fighting in Sierra Leone in the 1990s and early 2000s, for example—giving rise to the concept of “greed” wars, supposedly not motivated by political grievances, but mainly by economic interests. In this conceptualization of violent conflict, the distinction between insurgents and criminal actors becomes highly blurred.<sup>22</sup>

Politics in West Africa has for decades been about taking over the state in order to control the main sources of revenue—licit or illicit. In essence, the government has been seen as a means to personal wealth, not service to the people. The state would then define (or redefine) what constitutes illegal economic behavior and selectively issue exemptions from law enforcement and prosecution to families, friends, and its network of clients. Such political arrangements have been so pervasive in West Africa that some scholars have described the environment there as a “mafia-like bazaar, where anyone with an official designation can pillage at will...”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, fearing internal coups and yet facing little external aggression even in the context of very porous borders, many ruling elites in West Africa after independence

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<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, William Reno, “Understanding Criminality in West African Conflicts,” *International Peacekeeping*, 16(1), February 2009: 52.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Collier Paul and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars,” October 21, 2001, [http://econ.worldbank.org/files/12205\\_greedgrievance\\_23oct.pdf](http://econ.worldbank.org/files/12205_greedgrievance_23oct.pdf); Michael Ross, “What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil War?” *Journal of Peace Research*, 31 (3), 2004: 337-356; and Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup>George B.N. Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999): 151.

systematically allowed their militaries and law enforcement institutions to deteriorate. Thus, they have found themselves with institutional arrangements highly susceptible to the drug trade.<sup>24</sup>

In short, many societies have a deep and long history of participation in illegal enterprises and extensive criminal know-how. Over time, such illegal enterprise give rise to what I call *technology of illegality*—networks and knowledge to evade and subvert law enforcement and transform one form of illegal economic activity into another to take advantage of new opportunities or mitigate law enforcement pressure.

In the context of poverty, limited social mobility, and political marginalization, many may thus understand that participating in a criminal economy is illegal, but may still see such behavior as legitimate. Thus, in addition to giving rise to a technology of illegality, long-term dependence on illicit economies for economic livelihoods and social advancement also undermines or prevents the emergence of a *culture of lawfulness*. A culture of lawfulness means that the population broadly, not every single individual, follows established rules and laws and seeks to address its grievances and disputes and obtain justice by accessing the formal legal system.<sup>25</sup> Where illegal actors provide public goods and illicit economies are the source of livelihoods, public goods, and social advancement, the opposite culture—a *culture of illegality*—develops. Society extolls breaking laws, evading law enforcement, and taking advantage of the state.<sup>26</sup> Following rules and laws is seen undesirable, foolish, and carried out only by those who lack smarts. In Medellín, Colombia, for example, I was told of a lesson mothers supposedly share with their sons: “If you make money, I’ll be

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<sup>24</sup>For details on the role and evolution of law enforcement in West Africa to fight organized crime and belligerency, see, for example, Vanda Felbab-Brown and James J.F. Forest, “Political Violence and the Illicit Economies of West Africa,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(5), November 2012: 787–806.

<sup>25</sup>For further details on the concept of *culture of lawfulness*, see Roy Godson, “A Guide to Developing a Culture of Lawfulness,” presentation at the Symposium on the Role of Civil Society in Countering Organized Crime: Global Implications of the Palermo, Sicily, 2000; United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction (The Web Version)*, Section 7.9: Culture of Lawfulness, <http://www.usip.org/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction-the-web-version/7-rule-law/culture-lawfulness>.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003).



proud of you,” a mother is reputed to say. “If you make money by tricking the law, I’ll be doubly proud of you.”<sup>27</sup> In Michoacán, Mexico, when inquiring about local population’s attitudes toward the police, I was told a more drastic version of that general attitude to legality: “If a boy is smart, he’ll cross the border to the United States. If he’s fairly smart, he’ll join the *narcos*. If he’s stupid and can’t do either, he’ll become a policeman.” Fostered by structural deficiencies, such *culture of illegality* thus both prevents the internalization of laws and formal rule as well as *a priori* sets up hostile relations between law enforcement officials and the population.

### **Conceptualizing Crime as Competition in State-Making and Designing an Effective Response**

It is thus important to stop thinking about crime solely as aberrant social activity to be suppressed, but instead think of crime as a competition in state-making. In strong states that effectively address the needs of their societies, the non-state entities cannot outcompete the state on a large scale. But in areas of socio-political marginalization and poverty, nonstate entities do not.

While non-state entities can thus outcompete the state in governance in areas of marginalization, it is also important to note that states, especially weak and unaccountable states, also use crime and criminal entities for their purposes, including to strengthen their ruling power structures. Criminal entities, of course, also seek not only to dominate society, but also to influence the state and its ruling power arrangements.

In areas of state weakness and underprovision of public goods, the effective state strategy toward organized crime is thus not merely one of law enforcement suppression of crime. Approaches such as *mano dura* policies, saturation of areas with law enforcement officers, especially if they are corrupt and inadequately trained, or highly repressive measures rarely tend to be effective in suppressing organized crime and often only attack the symptoms of the social crisis, rather than its underlying conditions.

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<sup>27</sup>Author’s interviews with NGO representatives and local residents in *commúna* 13, Medellín, January 2011.

An appropriate response is a multifaceted state-building effort that seeks to strengthen the bonds between the state and marginalized communities dependent on or vulnerable to participation in the drug trade and other illicit economies for reasons of economic survival and physical insecurity. The goal of supply-side measures in counternarcotics efforts, for example, should not only be to narrowly suppress the symptoms of illegality and state-weakness, such as illicit crops or smuggling, but rather to reduce the threat that the drug trade poses from a national security concern to one of a public safety problem that does not threaten the state or the society at large.

Such a multifaceted approach requires that the state address all the complex reasons why populations turn to illegality, including law enforcement deficiencies and physical insecurity, economic poverty, and social marginalization. Efforts need to focus on ensuring that peoples and communities will obey laws—by increasing the likelihood that illegal behavior and corruption will be punished, but also by creating the social, economic, and political environment in which the laws are consistent with the needs of the people so that the laws can be seen as legitimate and hence be internalized.

In the case of narcotics suppression, one aspect of such a multifaceted approach that seeks to strengthen the bonds between the state and society and weaken the bonds between marginalized populations and criminal and armed actors is the *proper sequencing of eradication and the development of economic alternatives*. For many years, the United States has emphasized eradication of illicit crops, including forced eradication, above rural development, such as alternative livelihoods efforts. Moreover, the United States has also insisted on eradication first. Such an approach has been at odds with—in fact, the reverse of—the counternarcotics policy of the European Union and many individual Western European countries. Such sequencing and emphasis has also been at odds with the lessons learned from the most successful rural development effort in the context of illicit crop cultivation, Thailand. Indeed, Thailand offers the only example where rural development succeeded in eliminating illicit crop cultivation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>For details, see, for example, Ronald D. Renard, *Opium Reduction in Thailand, 1970-2000: A Thirty-Year Journey* (Bangkok: UNDCP Silkworm Books, 2001) and Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of Poppy* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2009): 63-93.

Effective economic development—be it for urban or rural spaces—does require not only proper sequencing with suppression policies and security, but also a *well-funded, long-lasting, and comprehensive development approach* that centers on the creation of legal jobs—always the single hardest developmental challenge whether in Nigeria’s Delta or Rio de Janeiro’s slums. In the context of a massive youth bulge, such as in West Africa, pervasive unemployment or underemployment, taxation systems that favor capital-intensive industries, and elite capture of political and economic rule-making, creating legal jobs will be very hard.

Moreover, development efforts need to address all the structural drivers of why communities participate in illegal economies—such as access to markets and their development, deficiencies in infrastructure and irrigation systems, access to microcredit, and the establishment of value-added chains, and not merely chase the replacement crop.

It is critical that such social interventions are designed as comprehensive rural development or comprehensive urban planning efforts, not simply limited handouts or buyoffs. The latter approaches fail—whether they were conducted in Medellín as a part of the demobilization process of the former paramilitaries many of whom have returned as *bandas criminales*, in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, or in Ciudad Juarez under its flagship *Todos Somos Juarez* development program to build societal resilience against organized crime. The handout and buyoff shortcuts often also paradoxically strengthen criminal and belligerent entities and set up difficult-to-break perverse social equilibria where criminal entities continue to control marginalized segments of society while striking a let-live bargain with the state, under which criminal actors even control territories and limit state access.<sup>29</sup>

An effective multifaceted response by the state also entails other components:

- addressing street crime to restore communities’ associational capacity. This dimension is often neglected in external assistance policies, which overwhelmingly tend to privilege broad-stroke economic assistance or the development of specialized interdiction units;

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<sup>29</sup>See, for example, Enrique Desmond Arias, “Trouble en Route: Drug Trafficking and Clientelism in Rio de Janeiro Shantytowns,” *Qualitative Sociology*, 29:4 (2006): 427–45.

- providing access to dispute resolution and justice mechanisms, including informal or less formal ones, such as Colombia's *casas de justicia*;
- building resilience against penetration and capture by organized crime within the local political system by engaging with political parties and reinforcing less corrupt politicians;<sup>30</sup>
- encouraging protection of human rights, reconciliation, and nonviolent approaches;
- improving access to effective education as well as health care—a form of investment in human capital;
- \* insulating informal economies from takeover by the state and limiting the capacity of criminal groups to become polycrime franchises;
- and creating public spaces free of violence and repression in which civil society can recreate its associational capacity and social capital and otherwise fostering civil society resistance to criminal groups and a *culture of illegality*.

An effort to boost the capacity of communities to resist coercion and cooptation by criminal enterprises, however, does not mean that the state can rely on communities themselves to tackle crime, esp. violent organized crime, on their own. In fact, there is a great deal of danger in the state attempting to mobilize civil society to take on crime prematurely while the state is not still capable of assuring the protection of the people. Without the state's ability to back up communities and protect them from retaliatory violence by organized-crime or militant groups, civil society's resistance will quickly collapse. The population will not provide intelligence to the state under such circumstance, and actionable and accurate human intelligence is often critical for success of not only counterinsurgency, but also anti-organized crime efforts. Equally significantly, the community can all the

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<sup>30</sup>For an excellent discussion of how to launch and expand such difficult and complicated efforts and identify partners for engagement in the context of pervasive corruption, see Camino Kavanagh, ed. *Getting Smart and Scaling Up: The Impact of Organized Crime on Governance in Developing Countries*, New York University Center for International Cooperation, June 2013, [http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh\\_crime\\_developing\\_countries\\_report.pdf](http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/kavanagh_crime_developing_countries_report.pdf), and Brooke Stearns Lawson and Phyllis Dininio, *The Development Response to Drug Trafficking in Africa: A Programming Guide*, USAID, April 2013, [http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Development\\_Response\\_to\\_Drug\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Africa\\_Programming\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Development_Response_to_Drug_Trafficking_in_Africa_Programming_Guide.pdf).

more sour on the state. If a state's effort to mobilize civil society to resist organize crime ends with the civil society massacred by organized crime, with its leaders assassinated, it will then be very hard for the state to mobilize civil society the second time around and restore trust in state capacity and commitment. Such mistakes in anti-organize crime policies are very costly and difficult to correct. Society will always place the burden of responsibility for violence on the state for its inability to reduce it, rather than on the criminals. During periods of intense and persistent violence, civil society may even start calling for an accommodation between the state and organized crime. The evolution of social support for anti-organized crime policy of the government of Mexico during President Felipe Calderón's administration—with progressively weakening support for the government's policy and growing nostalgia for the corporatist accommodation policy toward organized crime under the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—provides a vivid example.

*A concentration of resources*, both non-corrupt law enforcement and socio-economic efforts to strengthen communities, often improves the chance that the state will succeed in such a complex undertaking. Yet it is very hard politically to concentrate resources and tackle organized crime neighborhood by neighborhood and illegal economies municipality by municipality. Under conditions of acute budgetary and law enforcement asset scarcity, justifying why a community is deserving of a comprehensive state assistance while others go resource hungry (sometimes literally) is extremely difficult for government authorities. In a democracy where votes matter, the pressure to give everyone a little bit instead of concentrating resources to particular intervention areas will be all the more tempting politically.

But spreading resources over extensive areas—as much as they may be acutely in need of intervention—without achieving a necessary law enforcement and socio-economic development momentum in any place greatly augments chances of policy failure. Limited political handouts may improve the life of a community to some extent—a marginalized community is likely to be better off with twenty-five hospital beds instead of twenty and with an electric generator than without—but such limited state interventions will not be sufficient alter the basic economic patterns and their political effects in a community.

Critically, the associational and organizational capacity and social action potential of communities becomes extremely quickly eviscerated during intense violence. It may well be that the *narcos* are killing each other, but when they do so on streets of cities or rural areas where the population lives, they also hollow out the communities. The bullets may only be flying overhead, but they are still deeply injuring the community underneath. Often, success hinges on the state's ability to bring violence down to start with: without a reduction in violence, socio-economic interventions do not have a chance to take off and even institutional reforms become difficult to sustain as political support weakens.

Inadequate *implementation* can kill the best strategy. Effective implementation among others depends on how operationalization corresponds to local cultural and institutional settings.

All such social interventions require careful and consistent monitoring and the ability to correct and restructure policy that is not effective. Both the monitoring and policy adaptation are often very difficult to institutionalize effectively. They require a certain density of government oversight assets, such as embassy officials tasked with development aid or law enforcement policies, who have sufficient capacity to monitor contractors and NGO implementors and who have sufficient distance from policy design to not to be threatened by highlighting ineffective and counterproductive policy elements.

Many of the above policies suggest a considerable expansion and reconceptualization of the policies the United States and the European Union have taken toward combatting organized crime and drug trafficking in West Africa. Both have recognized the need to expand assistance to West Africa to combat organized crime. These external assistance policies have specified several objectives: 1) to suppress the nexus of militancy-terrorism-and-organized-crime in the region and its spillovers and leakages into Europe, and reduce the chances of terrorist targeting of U.S. and European citizens in the region; 2) to suppress any potentially destabilizing effects of organized crime on often already unstable and problematic governments in the region; 3) to suppress drug flows, and 4) to foster economic development in the region which criminality and organized crime can undermine.<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup>Author's interviews with U.S. officials of the Department of State, Washington, DC, August 2012, of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Nairobi, April 2013, and UK officials of the

European Union has launched several initiatives, the largest of which is the €22 million Cocaine Route Program that focuses mainly on airport and sea-based interdiction in the region.<sup>32</sup> Since 2008, the European Union has sought to integrate anti-drug-trafficking programming into its economic assistance for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under its *European Development Fund* to support implementation of the drug action plan adopted by ECOWAS States in Praia in December 2008. Nonetheless, many of the European Union's direct anti-organized crime and counternarcotics efforts have prioritized mainly interdiction efforts.

Between 2009 and 2012, U.S. counternarcotics assistance to West Africa amounted to \$142.5 million, with an additional \$50 million allocated for 2013 under the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative.<sup>33</sup> The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) produced an excellent nuanced document for context-specific anti-organized-crime programming in Africa, *The Development Response to Drug Trafficking in Africa: A Programming Guide*.<sup>34</sup> Overall, however, the dominant U.S. response to drug trafficking in West Africa has been to build special interdiction units (SIUs) in the region. In the context of highly-corrupt and inadequate law enforcement capacities such as in West Africa, SIUs are often the only policy instrument easily available and it is a form of assistance that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is used to delivering abroad. Nonetheless, despite SIUs

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Department for International Development, London, May 2013. See also, Cecilia Malmström, "The External Dimension of EU-Police Cooperation in West African Countries –Towards Global and Integrated International Policing," Press Release, SPEECH/10/505, September 30, 2010, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-10-505\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-10-505_en.htm), and European Commission, *Long-term Responses to Global Security Threats: Contributing to Security Capacity Building in Third Countries through the Instrument for Stability*, March 2011, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/documents/207a\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/documents/207a_en.pdf).

<sup>32</sup>European Union, *Cocaine Route Programme*, <http://corms.esteri.it/>.

<sup>33</sup>Charlie Savage and Thom Shanker, "U.S. Drug War Expands to Africa, a Newer Hub for Cartels," *New York Times*, July 21, 2012; and Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Memorandum for the Secretary of State: Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2014," Presidential Determination No. 2013-14, September 13, 2013, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/09/20130913282879.html#ixzz2glhlmqC1>.

<sup>34</sup>Stearns, Lawson, and Dininio.

important occasional successes,<sup>35</sup> SIUs are often of limited overall effectiveness, and they can end up going rogue.<sup>36</sup>

Latin America countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, have a plethora of experience of fighting organized crime to share with West Africa. They also do not come with some of the same colonial or hegemonic baggage that European countries or the United States can suffer from in attempting to build anti-organized crime policies in the region. The government of Colombia has been particularly eager to export its policies and show off its progress around the world—advising Mexico and Central America on how to build SIUs and boost intelligence-gathering capacities and instructing the Philippines how to demobilize insurgents and paramilitaries and teaching Afghanistan how to do airport interdiction. Colombia can also showcase its socio-economic efforts to reduce criminal violence in Medellín, despite their great limitations. Similarly, Brazil's *favela* Pacification (UPP) program, despite its deficiencies and at times problematic implementation and continual police abuse, offers one model of a comprehensive effort to reduce criminal violence in urban slums and how to build community police forces.<sup>37</sup> Sao Paulo's police reform efforts similarly provide an interesting example of community-police boards helping to reduce police abuse and increase law enforcement effectiveness in fighting organized crime. Brazil has talked of providing interdiction assistance to Bolivia and could explore similar initiative with West African countries.<sup>38</sup> Mexico too can engage with West Africa on police reform, including counseling them on how difficult and lengthy such a process is as well as on the complexities of interdiction policies. Both European and Latin American countries can also engage with West Africa on how best to prevent and treat drug use and what public health approaches to adopt.

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<sup>35</sup>Adam Nossiter, "U.S. Sting That Snared Guinea-Bissau Ex-Admiral Shines Light on Drug Trade," *New York Times*, April 16, 2013.

<sup>36</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Despite Its Siren Song, High-Value Targeting Doesn't Fit All: Matching Interdiction Patterns to Specific Narcoterrorism and Organized-Crime Contexts," The Brookings Institution, October 1, 2013.

<sup>37</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Bringing the State to the Slum: Confronting Organized Crime and Urban Violence in Latin America," *Brookings Latin America Initiative Paper Series*, December 2011.

<sup>38</sup>Marcel Fortuna Biato, Embajador de Brasil en Bolivia, "Brasil en la cooperación regional para la lucha contra la violencia y el crimen organizado," *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, No. 97-98, Abril 2012: 117-133.



This wealth of experience from Latin America potentially offers highly valuable lessons for West Africa—about which programs have worked well as well as on how and why many policies against organized crime and illicit economies have gone awry. It is as important that West African countries absorb the negative lessons as much as the positive ones. Indeed, they need to approach the external advice and policies delivered from abroad with a caveat emptor attitude and careful consideration of whether those external lessons and policies are well suited to their contexts. A distorted importation of high-value targeting from Colombia and an incomplete version of the components of success in eliminating the Medellín cartel, for example, contributed to the choice of counterproductive policies in Mexico and the escalation of criminal violence there.<sup>39</sup> Hardly all has been successful with Medellín socio-economic policies and much of the so-called Medellín miracle turned out to be a mirage of Medellín miracle.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned above, the UPP in Rio de Janeiro has been plagued by numerous problems, some of which appear to be increasing, and the verdict is still out about its overall effectiveness.<sup>41</sup> Many of the successful public health approaches to drug use in places like Switzerland and the Netherlands may not fit countries where all public health is inadequate or lacking; instead, lessons from other countries that have managed to expand low-cost health care access to the poor may be better suited. The recipients of external aid and advice need to be cognizant of what has not worked as well as what has, such as the fact that Brazil and Argentina's decriminalization of personal possession of drugs has not decreased the corruption and abusiveness of its police forces.

Equally, however, external assistance partners need to approach engagement with considerable caution. Rather than rushing to assistance wherever organized crime has become visible, the United States, the European Union, Latin American countries and NGOs, and any

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<sup>39</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Battling Drug Trafficking Organizations: Law Enforcement Lessons from Colombia for Mexico," *Revista*, February 2012.

<sup>40</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Reducing Urban Violence: Lessons from Medellín," Brookings Institution, February 14, 2011, [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/0214\\_colombia\\_crime\\_felbabbrown.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/0214_colombia_crime_felbabbrown.aspx); and Vanda Felbab-Brown, "No Stairway to Heaven: Rescuing Slums in Latin America," Brookings Institution, February 2, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/02/02-latin-america-slums-felbabbrown>.

<sup>41</sup>Simon Romero, "Brazilian Officers Will Face Charges of Torture and Murder," *New York Times*, October 2, 2013.

other potential partners need to engage in law enforcement, anti-organized crime, counternarcotics, and counterterrorism assistance with care. A do-no-harm attitude and careful evaluation of the side-effects of policy actions need to prominently figure in considering policies. Apart from smart design based on state-building conceptualization of fighting organized crime and careful implementation, policy design must be keenly cognizant of the fact that it is unrealistic to expect that external policy interventions can eradicate most organized crime and illicit economies in a particular place or, for that matter, most of the drug trade in that place.

The priority for the United States and the international community needs to be to combat the most disruptive and dangerous networks of organized crime and belligerency. Such networks are those with the greatest links or potential links to international terrorist groups with global reach. Indeed, there is a considerable variation in the capacity of organized crime groups to penetrate new territories, as Frederico Varese has shown, or new domains. Hardly all criminal groups are polycrime enterprises: smuggling cocaine is not the same as smuggling fissile material. Although it is frequently suggested that organized crime groups will easily make alliances or enthusiastically cooperate with terrorist and militant groups,<sup>42</sup> the relationship between the two kinds of actors is often fraught and violent.<sup>43</sup> Most organized crime groups are not simply blind profit maximizers; they also weigh risks, including the risk of acting in cahoots with militant groups and thus drawing a far different level of scrutiny and repression from international and domestic law enforcement and security forces.

Similarly, terrorist groups are not uniform in their capacities to penetrate new territories and sustain their operating bases there without triggering a backlash from local populations: In Mali and Syria, Salafi groups succeeded in rapidly appropriating local causes for their

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<sup>42</sup>See, for example, Douglas Farah, Fixers, Superfixers, and Shadow Facilitators: How Networks Connect,” in Jacqueline Brewer and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2013): Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*.

<sup>43</sup>Kenneth Menkhaus and Jacob Shapiro, “Non-state Actors and Failed States: Lessons from Al Qaeda’s Experiences in the Horn of Africa,” in Anne Clunan and Harold Trinkunas, eds., *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

global jihad purpose. In Iraq al-Qaeda initially succeeded in anchoring itself among the Sunni population until U.S. efforts fostered a Sunni rebellion against al-Qaeda. In Pakistan, the ability of al-Qaeda and other salafi groups to take over or appropriate local actors has varied considerably and also stirred tribal rebellions and tribal anti-al-Qaeda militias. In Somalia, al-Qaeda struggled to establish itself there in the 1990s, eventually gave up, and ultimately its presence came instead through a reverse process: a native Somali jihadi group, al-Shabab, embracing the global salafi cause and embracing al-Qaeda.<sup>45</sup> Rather than assuming uniformity in motivations and capabilities of terrorists and criminality, external assistance policy efforts need to be guided by strict prioritization of those posing the most serious threats.

Such dangerous networks that the international community should prioritize in targeting in their external efforts, however, also include the criminal groups that are most rapacious and predatory to the society and accountable government and most concentrate rents from illicit economies to a narrow clique of people. Not only are those criminal groups most reprehensible, they also most undermine internal stability and create the conditions for militant groups to establish themselves among local populations.

The above two criteria for priority targeting in international cooperation—criminal groups with linkages to major terrorist groups and the most rapacious organized crime groups—may occasionally be in conflict and thus pose a difficult dilemma. In addition to considering the severity of the threat posed to the international community and to the host state and society, the estimated effectiveness of policy intervention with respect to each type of groups needs to be factored into the analysis of such policy choices.

It is important to realize that indiscriminate and uniform application of law enforcement—whether external or internal—can generate several undesirable outcomes that need to be guarded against:

First, the weakest criminal groups can be eliminated through such an approach, with law enforcement inadvertently increasing the efficiency, lethality, and coercive and corruption power of the remaining criminal groups operating in the region.

Second, such an application of law enforcement without prioritization can indeed push criminal groups into an alliance with terrorist groups—the opposite of what should be the purpose of law enforcement and especially outside policy intervention. Both outcomes have repeatedly emerged in various regions of the world as a result of opportunistic, non-strategic drug interdiction and law enforcement policies.

There are multiple dangerous risks in rushing to provide external assistance. First is the danger that with minimal monitoring presence and rollback capacity of the United States and the international community on the ground, U.S. or internationally-trained law enforcement forces will “go rogue” and the international community will only end up training more capable drug traffickers or coup forces.

Second, there is a not-insubstantial risk that some governments will come to see international counternarcotics or anti-organized crime aid as yet another form of rent to be acquired for their power and profit maximization, in the same way that anti-communist or counterterrorism aid had often been seen. Such funds can be diverted for personal profits; or worse yet against domestic political opposition and undermine institutional development and effective and accountable governance in the country.

Third, building up law enforcement capacity and intervening against illicit economies may often be perceived by local populations as antagonistic to their interests. Such a misalignment between state and societal interests may at the minimum limit the effectiveness of policy intervention; at worst compromise other, more important U.S. and international interests, such as to reduce violent conflict and suppress terrorism.

The international community can limit these dangers by following some overarching guiding principles regarding extending outside assistance to suppress organized crime.

First, international assistance should be carefully calibrated to the absorptive capacity of the partner country. In places where state capacity is minimal and law enforcement often deeply corrupt, an initial focus on strengthening the police capacity to fight street crime, reducing corruption, and increasing the effectiveness and reach of the justice system may be the optimal initial interventions. Only once careful

monitoring by outside actors has determined that such assistance has been positively incorporated, may it be fruitful to increase assistance for anti-organized crime efforts, including advanced-technology transfers and training. Careful monitoring of all anti-organized crime programs—including their effects on the internal political arrangements and power distribution within the society and their intended effects on the power of criminal groups and their links to terrorist groups—needs to be consistently conducted by outside actors.

Second, as detailed above, the international policy package needs to include a focus on broad state-building and on fostering good governance. Policy interventions to reduce organized crime and to suppress any emergent crime-terror nexus can only be effective if there is a genuine commitment and participation by recipient governments and sufficient buy-in from local communities.