

Criminal Patronage Networks and the Struggle to Rebuild the Afghan State

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Throughout the international community's 2001-14 engagement in Afghanistan, few challenges proved as complex, pervasive, and threatening as corruption and organized crime.¹ Together, systemic corruption and organized crime undermined efforts to build Afghan institutions, consolidate security gains, achieve political progress, encourage economic growth, and create conditions for enduring stability. Corruption in Afghanistan reached crippling levels after the post-2001 political settlement, which was built on the distribution of political power between factions formed during the country's civil war. Benefiting from judicial impunity, these factions facilitated penetration of the Afghan state by what eventually became known as *criminal patronage networks* (CPNs). In the Afghan context, CPNs are a form of organized illicit power structure made particularly intractable by their integration into the government and by their access to international money.

Criminal patronage networks stymied reconstruction and hindered the 2009-12 U.S. and NATO troop surge leading up to Afghanistan's two major transitions in 2014: the country's first-ever transfer of power from one elected president to another, and the withdrawal of most international forces. While Afghanistan in 2014 was stronger than it had been in decades—possessing a sizable and increasingly capable national army and police—factionalism, corruption, and criminal subversion of state institutions left its politics fragile and security uncertain. The coalition government of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, formed after the contentious 2014 presidential election, will be limited by factional fault lines, weak rule of law, and the continued influence of CPNs as Afghanistan adjusts to an era of reduced foreign support.

These challenges are not unique to Afghanistan. Conflicts elsewhere in recent decades have revealed that states emerging from insurgencies and civil wars—especially where rule of law is minimal and substantial international resources have been injected with inadequate oversight—are vulnerable to the rise of illicit power structures both inside and outside government. The Afghan experience is rich with lessons for the U.S. military and foreign policy establishment. In the years ahead, the United States and allies may again be compelled to assist or intervene in weak states experiencing protracted instability or rebuilding after years of violence. In such environments, there is a pressing requirement, not only for seamless integration of civilian and military efforts to establish security, enable law enforcement, and promote rule of law, but also for transparency and accountability within the state's critical institutions. All these efforts, meanwhile, must be grounded in a thorough understanding of that state's politics and tailored to generate among its key leaders the necessary will to undertake complementary reforms.

This chapter outlines the nature and origins of CPNs in Afghanistan, and the effect they have had on efforts by the United States and its allies to rebuild the country and

¹ The authors wish to thank Michael Miklaucic, Michelle Hughes, and Michael Dziedzic for their contributions in editing this chapter. We also acknowledge valuable feedback from a roundtable discussion with a panel of experts consisting of John Agoglia, William Byrd, Scott Carlson, Sasha Kishinchand, and James Shear. We also received written feedback from Michael Metrisko and Shahmahmood Miakhel.

insulate it against the Taliban and transnational terrorists. We then discuss the evolution of U.S. and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strategies to address these threats, examining both successes and failures. The chapter concludes with a review of lessons and implications of the Afghan experience for future armed conflict and stability operations.

Cause of the Conflict

The corruption prevalent in Afghanistan since 2001 does not reflect an intrinsic cultural phenomenon, as some have carelessly asserted. Rather, the subversion of the Afghan government by CPNs in recent decades can be understood only in the context of the country's turbulent post-1978 history. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the Afghan monarchy maintained peace and order throughout the country, overcoming the centuries-old problem of tribal revolts by developing mechanisms for addressing popular grievances. To maintain its legitimacy among the myriad tribes and ethnic groups, the monarchy vigilantly policed its own officials, and investigations and prosecutions of government functionaries were common. This formal justice system, which applied to Afghanistan's city dwellers and elites, functioned in tandem with an informal system of tribal and religious law that maintained order in rural areas. By the 1960s, most senior Afghan government officials won their positions on the basis of merit, without consideration of their ethnic or tribal origins, and Afghan officials strove to maintain a public image of being poor but honest.²

Afghanistan's golden decades came to a close in 1978, when Communist officers in the Afghan army assassinated President Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan. The new Communist government launched an ambitious set of Marxist social, political, and economic reforms. Thousands of supporters of the old regime, particularly Pashtun aristocrats and radical Islamists, were arrested and imprisoned, and thousands more fled into exile abroad. These measures provoked a fierce popular backlash, forcing the Soviet Union to send over 100,000 troops to Afghanistan, beginning in 1979, to prop up the faltering regime.

Opposition to the Soviet occupation and its puppet government coalesced around the *mujahideen* – an Arab term for those waging jihad. Most of these resistance fighters were affiliated with one of the “Peshawar Seven” mujahideen commanders' networks, based in Peshawar, Pakistan. The Peshawar Seven depended to varying degrees on support from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) and the CIA, which provided weapons, funding, and sanctuary. By 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew all troops from Afghanistan, and three years later, it ended its \$35 billion annual subsidies to the Communist government, which collapsed in April 1992 as a result. Afghanistan's principal mujahideen commanders occupied Kabul but failed to agree on a power-sharing arrangement, initiating a second civil war (1992-96). The mujahideen's power squabbles and abuses against the Afghan people, and Pakistani disillusionment with its mujahi-

² On the Afghan government's effectiveness in maintaining law and order in the mid-twentieth century, see, for example, Shahm Mahmood Miakhel, “Myths and Impact of Bad Governance on Stability in Afghanistan,” in *Afghanistan in Transition: Beyond 2014?* ed. Shanthie Mariet D'Souza (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2012).

deen allies, led to the emergence of the Taliban, a radical Islamist movement backed by Pakistan's ISI and led by ethnic Pashtuns. By 1998, the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan. Some of the mujahideen leaders and their fighters defected to the Taliban, while others, particularly non-Pashtuns, formed a loose alliance and, with Iranian and Russian support, kept a small foothold in northern Afghanistan. They eventually coalesced into what would become known as the Northern Alliance.

In November 2001, the United States and its new ally, the Northern Alliance, toppled the Taliban regime following the Taliban's refusal to hand over al-Qaeda leadership responsible for the 9/11 attacks. By that time, two decades of civil war had destroyed the foundations of national unity and civil order. The country suffered from chronically weak governance, nonexistent rule of law, and fractured social structures. Conflict left deep divisions between Afghanistan's solidarity groups. While most mujahideen parties began as multiethnic movements, they took on distinct ethnic identities during the civil war as commanders began to affiliate along ethnic and tribal lines, giving rise to intense ethnic polarization by 2001.³

The upheaval of the 1990s had also destroyed Afghanistan's state and civil institutions. By the time the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996, state institutions existed in name only and had ceased performing their official functions. The Taliban attempt to replace Afghanistan's older hybrid system of civil and traditional law with Sharia law further undermined what remained of the legal system. War and the breakdown of any institutional check on illicit power drove many of Afghanistan's mujahideen and tribal leaders to embrace organized crime, including narcotics trafficking, arms smuggling, and arbitrary confiscation of land, to fund private local militias.⁴

The Post-2001 Political Settlement

During a UN-sponsored conference in Bonn in late 2001, international diplomats, led by the United States and the United Nations, tried to piece together the fragments of Afghanistan and form a post-Taliban government. The agreement achieved there between the primary Afghan and international participants—including the United States, Iran, Russia, representatives from various Afghan expatriate communities, and members of the network of commanders known as the Northern Alliance—laid out a three-year plan for creating a new constitution and electing a new government.⁵ In the eyes of UN, U.S., and European officials, these agreements—later known as the Bonn Settlement—had

³ Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 269-71; Antonio Giustozzi, "The Ethnicisation of an Afghan Faction: Junbesh-i-Milli from Its Origins to the Presidential Election," (working paper no. 67, Crisis States Programme, Development Research Centre, 2005), <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/13315/1/WP67.pdf>.

⁴ On illicit forms of revenue extraction by Northern Alliance-affiliated militias in the 1990s, see Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009). On the evolution of tribally affiliated militias in Kandahar in the 1990s, see Carl Forsberg, "Politics and Power in Kandahar," Afghanistan Report no. 5, Institute for the Study of War, Apr. 2010, 1417, www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Politics_and_Power_in_Kandahar.pdf.

⁵ Ambassador James Dobbins, the U.S. envoy at Bonn (and formerly the Obama administration's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan) provides a thorough account of the conference in his 2008 memoir, *After the Taliban* (Dulles, VA: Potomac, 2008).

successfully established a process by which the Afghan people and the international community could build a democratic, sovereign Afghanistan. But Afghan factions understood the Bonn Settlement very differently. In their eyes, the deals struck at Bonn served as the origins of an ever-evolving grand bargain for distribution of power in the new state, between several of Afghanistan's ethnic and mujahideen factions. Afghan elites used the power they gained at Bonn to subvert UN hopes that the Bonn Settlement would lead to a more inclusive and accountable Afghan government. But instead, by co-opting leaders from the most powerful ethnic and mujahideen-era constituencies, the settlement provided a basic framework that has kept Afghanistan's ethnic fissures beneath the surface over the succeeding 13 years, as competition took the form of lobbying for positions within the government and for a larger share of international assistance.

CPNs' Relationship to the Political Settlement and Peace Process

One of the principal effects of the Bonn Settlement was to return mujahideen leaders to a dominant role in Afghanistan's internal politics. During 2002-4, in the new Afghan government, the predominantly Tajik⁶ Jamiat-e Islami Party staked a claim to power that was disproportionately large compared to Afghanistan's actual Tajik population. Jamiat had been the party of legendary mujahideen resistance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud and former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani. Following their assassinations in 2001 and 2011 respectively, Jamiat's paramount military commander, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, effectively assumed party leadership. Fahim had served as Afghanistan's minister of defense during 2001-4 and later returned to power as first vice president in 2009. By occupying Kabul with its militias and by gaining control over key ministries as a result of deals made during the Bonn Conference, Jamiat consolidated influence over the key organs of the central state, including the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. Its control over powerful state ministries enabled a system of patronage politics in which former mujahideen leaders distributed official appointments, businesses, and other opportunities to subordinates, who then proceeded to intimidate rivals, seize public and private land, and strengthen their own business interests. With no institutions to check their power, the ability of members of the new government and their clients to commit crimes with impunity in the years after 2001 established a precedent of violence and coercion as valid tools to be wielded by government elites.⁷

Across Afghanistan, mujahideen leaders who returned to influence after 2001 generally viewed the institutions of the Afghan state as personal patrimonies for factional interests and personal enrichment. This problem was exacerbated by a belief among senior mujahideen commanders that civil war would resume once international forces left the country. For example, when Fahim took Kabul in 2001, he told his commanders

⁶ Tajiks, Afghanistan's second-largest ethnic group, hail principally from the northeast provinces. Tajiks represent 27 percent of the Afghan population, second to Pashtuns, at 42 percent. CIA, "Afghanistan," in *The World Factbook* (Langley, VA: CIA, 2013).

⁷ Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 289; Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, "No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics, and Insurgency in Afghanistan," Chatham House, Dec. 2010, www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf; Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue* (London: Penguin, 2006); Forsberg, "Politics and Power in Kandahar."

that the U.S. presence would be short-lived, and pushed Jamiat to continue consolidating power in expectation of a return to ethnic and factional conflict.⁸ A sense of entitlement, arising from their long struggle against the Taliban and, before that, the Soviets, also drove the mujahideen elites. Fahim and his generation had joined the anti-Soviet Jihad while in their twenties and had spent two formative decades of their lives at war. As often happens when men who have never known peace seize power, the mujahideen felt entitled to use the state for personal and factional gain and to establish themselves as a new oligarchy. They ultimately lacked a vision for a more stable, unified Afghanistan after America's departure.

Hamid Karzai began his tenure as Afghanistan's interim president in 2002. A Pash-tun from the southern province of Kandahar, he lacked a power base of his own and, thus, was at the mercy of the mujahideen, most notably Fahim. In the early years of his presidency, Karzai's only alternative to the warlords was U.S. backing. But for his first year and a half in office, the U.S. government itself was making accommodations with regional strongmen, whom it viewed as allies in counterterrorism operations, and advised Karzai to follow its lead.⁹ Thus, Karzai's approach to governance was characterized by extreme caution and a conscious effort to avoid antagonizing the mujahideen parties. In particular, Karzai feared that enforcing the law would lead mujahideen elites to oppose the central government and challenge his leadership.¹⁰ As he noted in a 2002 speech, "We must have peace, stabilize peace, make it certain, make it stand on its own feet and then go for justice . . . Justice becomes a luxury for now."¹¹

In 2003, U.S. policy began to shift gradually toward strengthening Afghanistan's central government and helping Karzai co-opt his rivals. Karzai began to strengthen his hand vis-à-vis the mujahideen in 2003, thanks to changes in U.S. policy and his election as Afghanistan's first democratically elected president. The international community's initial inaction gave way to a series of state-building measures that gave Karzai greater leverage over regional mujahideen power brokers. With his 2004 election came enhanced presidential powers, including authority over all appointments, ranging from cabinet ministers to district police chiefs. The central government, with its tremendous powers of patronage, emerged as the center of gravity in Afghan politics.¹²

Despite the opportunities provided by his election, Karzai continued to govern cautiously. He adopted a strategy of balancing, dividing, and co-opting, rather than confronting, Afghanistan's fractious strongmen and their clients. Having assessed that they could cause less trouble inside the government than outside, Karzai parceled senior ministerial posts and provincial governorships to allies and competitors alike. Overt factionalism and violent conflict between armed militias was sublimated into competition

⁸ Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 290-93; Kai Eide, *Power Struggle over Afghanistan: An Inside Look at What Went Wrong – and What We Can Do to Repair the Damage* (New York: Skyhorse, 2010), 150-51.

⁹ See Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 398-408; Ahmed Rashid, *Decent into Chaos* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: Judicial Reform and Transitional Justice," Asia Report no. 45, Jan. 28, 2003, www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/045-afghanistan-judicial-reform-and-transitional-justice.aspx.

¹¹ *BBC News*, "Karzai Sets Out Afghanistan Vision," June 14, 2002.

¹² Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*; Carl Forsberg, "The Karzai-Fahim Alliance," (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2012).

for state offices, patronage, and wealth. Although intimidation remained ubiquitous in both the public and private sectors, money replaced guns as the leading source of political influence. To carry on criminal activity and expand their financial and political power, regional networks had to infiltrate and manipulate, rather than openly defy, the Afghan government. Thus, Karzai and the patrons of illicit networks developed a symbiotic relationship, with each using the other to achieve their goals.

But co-option into the central government did little to reduce the leverage of strongmen and mujahideen-era networks over President Karzai. The 2009 presidential election, which gave Karzai a second term, demonstrated that time, economic growth, advances in education, and international donor assistance had not reduced his dependence on strongmen and their illicit networks. In fact, the 2009 election only strengthened the influence of Afghanistan's CPNs when Karzai selected Fahim, whose reputation for corruption and abuse of power was infamous even by the Karzai government's standards, to be his vice presidential running mate and made concessions to other corrupt power brokers to buy their support for his candidacy.

U.S. policy in 2009 only exacerbated Karzai's inclination to make concessions to strongmen. The newly elected Obama administration made it clear that it would not give Karzai the same privileged relationship that he had enjoyed with President Bush, and U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke emphasized that the United States wanted Karzai's rivals to enjoy a level playing field in the election. These changes made Karzai deeply insecure about U.S. support, and he compensated by embracing old power brokers.

Following the 2009 elections, Karzai made Fahim a key governing partner, devolving significant authority and the power of appointment to Fahim and his network. As a result, Jamiat reemerged as the most powerful political network within the Afghan government during the 2009-12 U.S. and NATO troop surge, with significant influence in the security forces and across Afghanistan's northern provinces. In exchange for autonomy to operate criminal patronage networks within the government, Fahim kept powerful Tajik networks in the security forces loyal to the president. He also prevented anti-Taliban Tajik leaders from undermining Karzai's attempts to broker peace with the Taliban. Even as Karzai co-opted much of Jamiat, Tajik leaders not included in the flow of patronage resources—such as former foreign minister and 2014 presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah—together with ethnic-minority Uzbek and Hazara leaders, led a vocal opposition to Karzai.

Fahim's March 2014 death (from natural causes) and the 2014 presidential election marked a major transition for Afghanistan's Tajiks. After Abdullah Abdullah contested his loss in the second round of the 2014 election, on the grounds of massive voter fraud, U.S. and European diplomats negotiated a power-sharing arrangement by which Abdullah assumed the newly created post of chief executive officer under President Ghani. Abdullah's rise to power suggests that President Ghani will work in coalition with a new generation of Jamiat-affiliated Tajiks whose backgrounds are more civilian than military and who are less shaped by the country's pre-2001 conflicts. It remains to be seen whether, and how, these leaders will distance themselves and the Jamiat Party from the illicit activities that Fahim long protected.

Karzai's continued dependence on mujahideen networks and CPNs for political support ensured continued impunity for them through the end of his presidential term in September 2014. Even as Karzai modified his political alliances and shifted patronage from one group to another, he persistently refused to apply the rule of law to clients of his critical coalition partners. The result was a fragile political settlement wherein former mujahideen elites, integrated into senior positions in government, had free rein to extract for their personal enrichment (and that of their patronage networks) as many resources as their institution or post afforded.

Assessing the Nature and Operation of CPNs in Afghanistan

CPNs, enabled by Afghanistan's political settlement and a fragile war economy sustained by international aid, security assistance, and the narcotics trade, undermined U.S. and ISAF attempts to stabilize Afghanistan after 2001. They still pose a grave threat to the viability of the Afghan state. Corruption undermines the Afghan government's legitimacy, effectiveness, and cohesion, fuels popular discontent, generating active and passive support for the insurgency, and prevents the growth of a strong licit economy, thus perpetuating dependence on international assistance.

Along with weakening the country's critical institutions, systemic corruption and organized crime have helped foment instability and insurgent violence. Analysts consistently identified causal links between predatory governance and the growing insurgency, noting, for example, the connection between the Taliban's reemergence after 2003 and the abuse of power by government officials, security forces, and their affiliate networks.¹³ More recently, by undermining popular confidence in the government's legitimacy, effectiveness, and long-term durability, corruption has discouraged the population from actively mobilizing against the insurgency, thus lending the Taliban passive support. Moreover, uncertainty about Afghanistan's future, and the anticipation, despite reassurances, of a large-scale international disengagement from the country, drives the short-term maximization-of-gains mentality among the country's CPNs. This has heightened ethnic and factional tensions, accelerated the networks' efforts to consolidate power, and created conditions for continued violence.

The most serious and destabilizing forms of corruption in Afghanistan were carried out systematically by CPNs with political protection from President Karzai's coalition partners within the Afghan government. In December 2010, Afghanistan's national security adviser, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, said of the corruption problem, "In this government we have mafia networks."¹⁴ The networks, he continued, "begin with the financial banking system, with corruption networks, with reconstruction and security firms and also with drugs and the Taliban; they are in Parliament and they are in government." These CPNs engage in the capture and subversion of critical state functions, and they

¹³ See, for example, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008); Anand Gopal, "The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar," policy paper, New America Foundation, Nov. 2010, http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/kandahar_0.pdf; Tom Coglean, "The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History," in *Decoding the New Taliban*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Matthew Rosenberg, "'Malign' Afghans Targeted," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 29, 2010.

have been stakeholders in the state's weakness since the continued fragility of institutions gives them impunity.

Those CPNs embedded in state institutions have generally upheld the status quo of Afghanistan's post-Bonn political settlement – understandable given the enormous benefits and wealth they have derived from it. That said, they were not above using targeted violence, coercion, and intimidation against Karzai, international forces, or state bureaucrats. CPNs' use of violence is not primarily a means of opposing either the Afghan government or the international intervention. Rather, CPNs use violence and coercion as a form of blackmail to manipulate the Afghan president, international donors, or government officials to direct a greater share of resources to their affiliates. Violence has thus served primarily as a negotiating tool selectively employed to protect CPN revenue streams and influence within the state.

Afghanistan's CPNs depend on flows of money to co-opt government officials and keep supporters' loyalty, so they vie with each other to capture critical revenue streams. They divert customs revenue at the international airports and border crossing points, steal international security and development assistance disbursed to the Afghan government, protect and facilitate the narcotics trade, and abuse public and private financial institutions. The revenues available to CPNs, made possible by a rapid influx of international assistance and ongoing judicial impunity, gave rise, during the decade after 2001, to the commoditization of political power in Afghanistan and the sale of government offices and official influence.

Borders, Airports, and Inland Customs Depots

From 2002 on, power brokers have sought to use their political influence to control police and customs officers at Afghanistan's border crossing points, international airports, and inland customs depots in order to collect bribes for licit commerce, protect smuggling, and siphon off customs revenue. Border police and Ministry of Finance officials responsible for collection of customs duties have been co-opted by regional strongmen, mujahideen networks, and narcotics traffickers, sharing the profits of lucrative cross-border trade. Several powerful provincial governors, including Muhammad Atta Noor in Balkh province and Gul Agha Sherzai in Nangarhar province, were accused of diverting tens of millions of dollars in customs revenues, owed to the central state, to build their own local patronage networks.

This criminal capture of state functions at borders, airports, and customs depots robs the Afghan state of revenue, inhibits economic growth, and leaves the country vulnerable to transnational threats. In 2012, the World Bank ranked Afghanistan's borders as the fourth hardest in the world to cross for the purposes of trade, creating a significant obstacle to the country's regional economic integration.¹⁵ Corruption and organized crime at Afghanistan's critical ports of entry also directly undermine the state's security by enabling trafficking of narcotics, precursor chemicals, and weapons while facilitating insurgents' freedom of movement.

¹⁵ World Bank, *Doing Business in a More Transparent World* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012).

Diversion of Foreign Assistance

CPNs also targeted a post-2001 influx of international assistance, by diverting resources intended for the Afghan state and by directly manipulating aid agencies and foreign donors. International aid channeled through Afghan ministries is susceptible to embezzlement by government officials due to the lack of internal accountability mechanisms, impunity from prosecution, and poor budgeting processes in most ministries. Black markets, meanwhile, have emerged throughout Afghanistan for the resale of equipment donated by the international community to the Afghan government or pilfered from international forces, in some cases leading to U.S.-provided military equipment being sold to insurgent groups.¹⁶

International donors' lack of oversight in disbursing assistance and awarding contracts enabled the diversion of resources administered directly by development agencies and international forces. Local officials have often colluded with CPNs to direct international contracts and assistance projects to the businesses – particularly construction and private security firms – of their allies in exchange for payments. In many cases, CPNs' influence directed international funds to development projects that went unused, such as empty schools and hospitals, and electrical plants that could not be connected to major power grids. The awarding of international contracts also suffered from limited accountability for much of the post-2001 period, enabling fraud and abuse by both Afghan and Western firms – including, in the most egregious cases, payoffs by contractors to local strongmen and the Taliban.¹⁷

The Narcotics Trade

Afghanistan's CPNs have also sought to profit from facilitating, protecting, and participating in the narcotics trade. According to the United Nations, Afghanistan accounted for 75 percent of the world's heroin exports in 2012, and the narcotics trade is estimated to account for up to 15 percent of the country's gross domestic product.¹⁸ Afghan police, district governors, and provincial governors are particularly susceptible to narcotics-fueled corruption and often take protection payments from traffickers. In other cases, officials, including many border police commanders, use their state positions to engage directly in trafficking. The narcotics trade's profitability for local government appointments, in turn, has fueled the sale of government offices, with police appointments in the southern Afghanistan opium belt reportedly sold by Ministry of Interior officials for as much as one hundred thousand dollars.¹⁹

¹⁶ See, for example, Matt Millham, "Afghan Market Flourishing with Coalition Goods," *Stars and Stripes*, May 25, 2012; Martin Kuz, "Afghan Commander Suspected of Acting as Crime Boss," *Stars and Stripes*, Sept. 3, 2012.

¹⁷ "Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan," Report of the Majority Staff, Rep. John F. Tierney, Chair, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, June 2010; "Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan," Report of the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, Sept. 28, 2010.

¹⁸ Rod Nordland, "Production of Opium by Afghans Is Up Again," *New York Times*, Apr. 15, 2013.

¹⁹ Barnett Rubin, "Still Ours to Lose: Afghanistan on the Brink," Testimony for the House Committee on International Relations and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Sept. 21, 2006.

Financial System: The Case of Kabul Bank

CPNs also embedded themselves in Afghanistan's nascent financial system as owners of its fledgling banks. They built alliances with political elites, illicitly moving money, making payoffs, and distributing patronage in exchange for political protection for Ponzi schemes and unsustainably risky lending. More than any other institution, Kabul Bank illustrates the new political arrangement in Kabul, in which power became a commodity to be bought and sold. The commoditization of political influence explains how Afghanistan's largest bank gained political protection and hid its insolvency for years before its dramatic collapse.

Kabul Bank was founded in 2004 by two Afghan businessmen, Khalilullah Fruzi and Sherkhon Farnood, who were driven by profit, not politics. Both were quick to buy government protection and support and to build an alliance with Haseen Fahim, half brother of First Vice President Fahim, and, through him, with the Fahim family's business empire. In 2006, the bank also co-opted Mahmoud Karzai, the president's half brother, by lending Karzai the funds to purchase a seven percent share of the bank. Kabul Bank became a major financier of the Karzai-Fahim ticket in the 2009 presidential elections, and the bank subsequently paid millions in direct bribes to influence parliamentary votes in 2010. To further cement its influence within the government, Kabul Bank bribed senior government officials, with one estimate suggesting that it paid nearly \$100 million in bribes and gifts by the end of 2010.²⁰

Political influence paid off. The bank was awarded a number of key government contracts that covered its mushrooming liabilities. One of the most important contracts was for the pay of Afghan government employees, a sum of \$75 million a month, much of it provided by international donors. The bank placed a two-week hold on withdrawal of assets, ensuring a ready source of cash and encouraging government employees to keep their money in Kabul Bank accounts, thus helping capitalize the bank. Other critical contracts awarded to Kabul Bank included collecting and managing \$300 million in payments by pilgrims using the state-administered hajj service to travel to Mecca. By 2010, the bank claimed approximately \$1 billion in total assets—34 percent of all assets in the Afghan banking system.²¹

Government backing enabled, but did not cover, the cost of Kabul Bank's rapidly mounting liabilities, which consisted principally of risky and illegal loans to its shareholders and political allies. In October 2010, when the Central Bank completed its investigation of Kabul Bank after the bank's collapse, it discovered \$986 million in outstanding loans, many of which were paying no interest and had no collateral. Some \$380 million of those loans had been made without documentation. After the bank was placed in conservatorship, government officials discovered that most of the loans were unrecoverable.²²

²⁰ Adam B. Ellick and Dexter Filkins, "Political Ties Shielded Bank in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 2010; Dexter Filkins, "Letter from Kabul: The Great Afghan Bank Heist," *New Yorker*, Jan. 30, 2011.

²¹ Alissa Rubin and James Risken, "Losses at Afghan Bank Could Be \$900 million," *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2011; Filkins, "Letter from Kabul"; Gulkohi and Shakuri, "\$300m' Haj Account Is a Hot Potato," *Killid Group*, Aug. 5, 2010, <http://tkg.af/english/reports/others/212-300m-haj-account-is-a-hot-potato>.

²² Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, "Report of the Public Inquiry into the Kabul Bank Crisis," Nov. 15, 2012; Alissa Rubin, "Afghan Elite Borrowed Freely from Kabul Bank," *New York Times*, Mar. 28, 2011.

The bank's loans had been used to finance the small clique of businessmen, close to the Fahim family, who tried to build monopolies in several sectors of the Afghan economy, including the airline industry. Under the Fahims' influence, Afghanistan's largest bank had, in essence, become an instrument of patronage employed by the ruling elites. The actions of Farnood, Fruzi, Fahim, and Mahmoud Karzai suggested designs for a state-sponsored oligarchy in which several ruling families would dominate the business sphere on behalf of the regime, dispensing access to capital and business opportunities as a form of patronage.

In the summer of 2010, U.S. Treasury officials discovered Kabul Bank's insolvency, leading to a run on the bank in September. The Afghan government stepped in to guarantee the bank and ultimately injected \$800 million in bailout funds, a sum amounting to 56 percent of Afghanistan's GDP. Although Western donors adamantly insisted that they did not help bail out Kabul Bank, they continued to fund most of the Afghan government's budget and filled budget holes created by the bailout. Though a number of Afghan Central Bank officials were convicted in 2013 for failing to regulate the bank, shareholders connected to the Fahim and Karzai families escaped legal sanction for the duration of Karzai's presidency.²³

CPNs, the Judicial System, and Impunity

Since 2001, CPNs have operated with impunity, consistently avoiding meaningful investigations and prosecution by exerting influence within law enforcement, investigative, and judicial institutions across the Afghan government. "Politics is constraining [our] ability to prosecute high-level corruption cases," noted Afghan Attorney General Mohammad Ishaq Aloko, whose office was particularly vulnerable to political interference and manipulation during his tenure. The internal accountability and oversight mechanisms of many critical Afghan institutions are similarly subject to intimidation and coercion. A lack of capacity within the judicial system, including poor legal education, low pay for judges and public prosecutors, and limited judicial security, exacerbates the challenge of political interference and corruption within the judiciary and the attorney general's office.

International Strategy and the Limits of Capacity Building

Since 2001, the international community has made numerous, often episodic attempts to combat the causes and symptoms of Afghanistan's crippling CPNs. These efforts, developed at headquarters and embassies in Afghanistan and by policymakers in national capitals, were often frustrated by a lack of coordination, continuity, and political will. Countercorruption efforts were also stymied by the international community's failure to develop a common understanding of the corruption problem as officials debated whether politics, limited capacity, or international spending was to blame. The international

²³ Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, "Report of the Public Inquiry into the Kabul Bank Crisis"; Quil Lawrence, "Another Bailout Looms, but This Time It is for Kabul," NPR, Feb. 28, 2011; "Kabul Bank: Pitiful," *Economist*, Dec. 1, 2012; Matthew Rosenberg, "Trail of Fraud and Vengeance Leads to Kabul Bank Convictions," *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 2013.

community's response was thus defined, not by any coherent strategy, but rather by a series of disparate overlapping strategies and approaches, the most common of which was capacity building.

During the first two years after 9/11, the U.S. government and its NATO allies failed to recognize the growing risk posed by organized crime, factionalism, and warlordism. Instead, U.S. policy often exacerbated the problem by using regional strongmen and their CPNs as allies in operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters. The CIA and some military units gave their local proxies a degree of protection and impunity, as well as millions in cash, deeming the benefits that Afghan partners unrestrained by Afghan law provided for counterterrorism operations to outweigh the costs. By 2003, official U.S. government policy began to reverse course, even though the CIA continued its strategy of payoffs and cooperation with local proxies.²⁴ The U.S. government and its NATO partners grew concerned when armed clashes between regional militias of competing warlords, including Uzbek commander Abdul Rashid Dostum, Herat warlord Ismail Khan, and Balkh provincial governor Muhammad Atta Noor, left hundreds dead in 2002 and 2003. During 2003-5, the United States intervened to support Karzai and the central government in co-opting these strongmen. Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Kabul during 2003-5, helped implement a strategy by which the United States and Karzai sequentially confronted warlords, forced them to disarm and surrender their offices, and then co-opted them into the central government.

The United States also began to build a new Afghan National Army, which, it hoped, would lack the factional loyalties of the mujahideen-era militias and give the central government a monopoly on legitimate use of violence. Complementing U.S.-led efforts were those of the United Nations, which executed a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) campaign to disband the militias of the regional warlords. By 2005, DDR had succeeded in disarming the country's most powerful warlords. But the program learned its limits, for militias were often reflagged as police units during 2001-6, and used the newfound state authority to pursue their factional and criminal interests. UN pressure on Karzai during this period led to removals of some corrupt officials, but only those not necessary to Karzai's political agenda. This pattern continued over the next decade.

Aside from these early attempts to reduce the influence of Afghanistan's warlords, however, most of the international community's efforts against corruption and organized crime since 2002 downplayed the political and factional causes of Afghan corruption, focusing instead on capacity building and technical assistance. These efforts, undertaken by the United States, ISAF, the United Nations, and donor nations, often sought to reduce opportunities for corruption and strengthen Afghan institutions. These efforts have included training and advisory programs spearheaded by the UK government, for Afghanistan's elite counternarcotics and investigative units. Various interna-

²⁴ Note, for example, the activities of the Kandahar Strike Force, including the 2009 murder of Kandahar police chief Matiullah Qati; reports of CIA payments to the presidential palace; and the 2013 charges made against U.S. special operations forces interpreter Zakaria Kandahari. Dexter Filkins, Mark Mazzetti, and James Risen, "Brother of Afghan Leader Said to Be Paid by C.I.A.," *New York Times*, Oct. 27, 2009; Yaroslav Trofimov, "After Afghan Raid, Focus on Captors," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 11, 2013; Matthew Rosenberg, "Karzai Says He Was Assured CIA Would Continue Delivering Bags of Cash," *New York Times*, May 4, 2013; Rod Nordland, "Interpreter Accused of Torturing and Killing Afghan Civilians Is Arrested," *New York Times*, July 7, 2013.

tional development agencies have sponsored technical assistance programs in ministries across the government, and considerable resources and attention have been dedicated to the mammoth task of recruiting, training, equipping, and professionalizing the Afghan National Security Forces.

Although some of these areas saw progress, corruption and organized crime remained common and even proliferated within Afghan institutions during Karzai's first term in office (2005-9). From the beginning, the international community underfunded and underemphasized the rebuilding of Afghanistan's rule of law institutions, particularly the police, the judiciary, and the prison system, as donors placed more attention on large-scale infrastructure development. At the 2001 Bonn Conference, the German government volunteered to raise and train a new Afghan police force, while the Italian government took responsibility for rebuilding Afghanistan's judiciary. Neither government could muster the necessary resources, expertise, or will to adequately repair these institutions, both of which remained subject to infiltration and intimidation by CPNs. In time, the U.S. government established parallel efforts in both sectors, gradually increasing its training, mentoring, and advisory programs. By 2009, the newly elected Obama administration announced that reform and growth of the Afghan National Police would be a pillar of its new Afghanistan strategy. This led to a new influx of assistance and U.S.-led training programs. Much of this new American aid, however, went toward building the police as a paramilitary force trained to conduct combat operations, and new programs gave little attention to developing the police's law enforcement capabilities. European donors, in contrast, pushed for a less militarized community policing model, leading to a continued lack of coherence in training the Afghan police.²⁵

Even as the resources devoted to capacity building grew steadily during 2005-10, failure to acknowledge the inherently political nature of institutional reform remained a fundamental obstacle. Because the international community failed to make disrupting CPNs a priority, criminal networks within the Afghan government thwarted many of the structural and administrative anticorruption reforms that international donors had advocated since the early years of the conflict, including merit-based hiring, pay and grade reform, and asset declaration policies for senior government officials.

The failure of pay and rank reform of the Afghan police in 2006 provides an example of the limits of institutional reform undertaken without attention to political influence of the criminal networks it sought to target. In 2006, in response to growing concerns about the Afghan police's criminal and factional behavior, international donors pressed the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to undertake a comprehensive program of rank and pay reform. The initiative aimed at rationalizing the Afghan police's rank structure, removing the glut of mujahideen-era senior officers, and introducing merit-based criteria for promotions, including exams and the vetting of officers with criminal records. The international community believed that these measures would cull corrupt officers from the force and reduce opportunities for corruption.²⁶

The selection board created by the pay and rank reform process submitted its first

²⁵ Robert Perito, "Afghanistan's Police: The Weak Link in Security Sector Reform," U.S. Institute of Peace Special Report no. 227, Aug. 2009; Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammad Isaqzadeh, "Afghanistan's Paramilitary Policing in Context," Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 2011, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/AAAN-2011-Police_and_Paramilitarisation.pdf.

²⁶ Perito, "Afghanistan's Police"; author interviews with UN officials in Kabul, Jan. 20 and June 30, 2010.

list of 86 candidates for senior police appointments across Afghanistan in May 2006 and recommended removal of dozens of officers for corruption, criminal records, and poor performance. But days after the ministry made its recommendations, antigovernment riots, encouraged by Northern Alliance-affiliated politicians, erupted across Kabul. An insecure Karzai was unnerved by the riots, interpreting them as a threat from Fahim and other Jamiat-e Islami affiliates demanding a greater share of power in the Karzai government. To placate Jamiat and Fahim, Karzai unilaterally added 14 police officers, almost all of them Jamiat affiliates with reputations for extensive corruption, to the newly vetted list of senior police appointments. The move, driven by Karzai's political calculus, undermined the new pay and rank reforms by signaling that the palace and its mujahideen-era allies would continue to override selection boards at the Ministry of Interior, for political motives. While the international community eventually pressured Karzai to remove some of his 14 late additions from their posts, his disregard for the new selection board signaled that political elites would continue to intervene in appointing criminal allies to police command. MoI officials who tried to obstruct these appointments were often removed or intimidated into acquiescence. By relying on procedural fixes and not anticipating the interaction between national politics and institution building, the supporters of pay and rank reform in 2006 made limited progress in countering CPNs' influence within the MoI.

Because portions of Afghan ministries functioned as vertically integrated patronage networks, technical assistance and capacity building alone, without measures to counter CPNs' influence, could do little to prevent the growing dysfunction in state institutions. Moreover, CPNs have actively suppressed or sought to co-opt the junior, reform-minded officials trained by the United States and others in recent years, as well as the experienced—but politically vulnerable—technocrats operating within Afghan government bureaucracies.

Further limiting the capacity building approach was poor coordination between the countercorruption objectives established at major international donors' conferences, and the efforts of international agencies, embassies, and headquarters on the ground in Afghanistan. International donors established benchmarks for countercorruption reforms at the 2008 Paris Conference and the London and Kabul Conferences of 2010. In both cases, the broad benchmarks set by the international community focused largely on capacity building and institutional reform and, thus, had little impact on the underlying political causes of corruption. At the 2008 Paris Conference, the Afghan government announced the creation of a new High Office of Oversight to help implement donor nations' countercorruption benchmarks. But the new organization, designed to placate the international community, had an ill-defined portfolio that overlapped the authority of the Afghan Attorney General's Office and made no progress toward ending the impunity problem. International donors' conferences ultimately failed to provide leverage to hold the Afghan government accountable for disbursement of international funds, instead further complicating international countercorruption efforts in Kabul.

As the limits of capacity building became clear by 2007 and 2008, some U.S. officials focused on overcoming the impunity problem by encouraging the Afghan government to investigate, prosecute, and convict officials who committed serious crimes. The approach recognized that capacity building would fail to achieve lasting institutional re-

form unless Afghan officials faced real sanctions for serious crimes and for diverting state resources. In tackling the impunity problem, U.S. officials depended on the cooperation of the Afghan Attorney General's Office, the state's prosecutorial arm. In 2007, the Bush administration made an early attempt to energize prosecutions by appointing Tom Schweich coordinator for counternarcotics and justice reform in Afghanistan, with ambassadorial standing. Schweich partnered with Afghanistan's attorney general, Abdul Jabar Sabet, to encourage prosecutions, but Sabet's investigations were heavily politicized, used as tools to pressure the palace's rivals. This provoked a backlash, particularly when Sabet targeted the country's fledgling press. Schweich ended his tenure disillusioned and wrote a *New York Times* op-ed characterizing Afghanistan as a narco-state where the Karzai government protected a class of criminal elites.²⁷

In 2009, the Department of Justice (DoJ) in the newly elected Obama administration made a second, better-resourced attempt to secure prosecution of criminal Afghan officials. The most promising of the DoJ's initiatives was the creation of a vetted and FBI-mentored Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF) to investigate crimes by high-level government officials. With unprecedented protection from political interference, the MCTF achieved several successes in 2009 and 2010, including the successful prosecution of an Afghan police general and several police colonels for narcotics smuggling. It also opened investigations into several notoriously corrupt governors and members of parliament. Initial progress was undermined once again, however, by lack of attention to the realities of Afghan politics. The MCTF earned the ire of the presidential palace after it arrested Ahmad Zia Salehi, director of administrative affairs at the Afghan National Security Council, in July 2010. Salehi was apprehended for accepting a ten-thousand-dollar bribe to protect officials at the New Ansari banking network who were illegally moving money for government officials, CPNs, drug traffickers, insurgents, and terrorists.²⁸ Unbeknownst to the MCTF or the DoJ, allegedly Salehi was a key palace insider who moved money to facilitate Karzai's political agenda and was on the CIA payroll.²⁹ The presidential palace wrongly interpreted Salehi's arrest as an effort to undermine its influence and to target the president's key operatives. Seeing the MCTF as a threat to his political strategy, Karzai reined in the unit, reversing the momentum on prosecutions and stalling several high-profile cases.³⁰

Refocused ISAF Countercorruption Efforts (2010-13)

By 2010, ISAF was increasingly aware that countering the strategic threat of corruption required lines of effort beyond capacity building, as well as greater international coordi-

²⁷ Thomas Schweich, "Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?" *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.

²⁸ Yaroslav Trofimov, "Karzai and U.S. Clash over Corruption," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 3, 2010; Joshua Partlow and Greg Miller, "Karzai Calls for Probe of U.S.-Backed Anti-corruption Task Force," *Washington Post*, Aug. 5, 2010; Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazzetti, "Key Karzai Aide in Corruption Inquiry Is Tied to C.I.A.," *New York Times*, Aug. 25, 2010; Dexter Filkins, "The Afghan Bank Heist," *New Yorker*, Feb. 14, 2011.

²⁹ Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazzetti, "Karzai Aide in Corruption Inquiry is Tied to C.I.A." *New York Times*, August 25, 2010.

³⁰ Yaroslav Trofimov and Matthew Rosenberg, "Karzai Targets Two U.S.-Backed Task Forces," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 5, 2010; Filkins, "The Afghan Bank Heist"; Maria Abi-Habib, "U.S. Blames Senior Afghan in Deaths," *Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 1, 2012.

nation. To regain the initiative on countercorruption, ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan created the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force–Shafafiyat (“transparency” in Dari and Pashto) in coordination with the international community in the summer of 2010. Shafafiyat was designed to support the Afghan government, foster a common understanding of the corruption problem, plan and implement ISAF anticorruption efforts, and integrate the coalition’s countercorruption activities with those of key interagency and international partners. From the outset, the task force engaged regularly with leaders from Afghan civil society and officials across the Afghan government to frame the problem of corruption from the perspective of those who had experienced it and to develop a shared understanding as a basis for joint action and reform. In partnership with senior Afghan leaders, Shafafiyat (which in late 2012 evolved into the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force–Afghanistan, or CJIAF-A) established a variety of structured forums in which ISAF, U.S. interagency partners, and international organizations could exchange information and work cooperatively with Afghan officials to develop and implement concrete anticorruption plans and measure progress. In its coordination with Afghan and international partners, ISAF sought consistently to illustrate the comparative long-term risks of *inaction* in order to persuade senior leaders that it was in their ultimate interest—and the interest of the Afghan state and people—to address the problem with a sense of urgency.

Starting in 2010, ISAF and the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A), Regional Commands, and CJIAF-Shafafiyat, in partnership with the Afghan government and the international community, explicitly ranked the forms of corruption and organized crime presenting the greatest threat to the coalition’s mission and to the viability of the Afghan state. ISAF also adjusted its approach to account for the challenges encountered by earlier countercorruption efforts. This section discusses the priorities that ISAF established after 2010, and their relative success in reducing corruption and countering the influence of CPNs.

Security Ministries and the Afghan National Security Forces

ISAF, through NTM-A, expanded its efforts to develop professional Afghan security forces managed by transparent, accountable security ministries. By 2010, it was clear that training, equipping, and professionalizing Afghan security forces required complementary efforts to promote internal accountability. So NTM-A, Shafafiyat, and other organizations across ISAF worked closely with senior officials from the Ministries of Defense and Interior, through multiple joint Afghan-led working groups and commissions, to develop detailed anticorruption recommendations and implementation plans. Joint measures included creation of insulated investigative, oversight, and adjudicative bodies within the security ministries so that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) could enforce internal accountability while avoiding political interference and intimidation. ISAF regional commands and task forces, meanwhile, gave greater attention to the politics of Afghan security force appointments and to the patronage networks that protected corrupt army and police commanders. ISAF officers worked to build trust with their Afghan colleagues and expand intelligence sharing, in order to encourage leaders within the ANSF to act to remove corrupt officials.

ISAF efforts from 2010 onward made some senior ANSF leaders more willing to remove officers with known criminal records from their posts. In Eastern Afghanistan, for example, from mid-2011 to mid-2012, nearly 50 ANSF officers were removed for crimes, thanks to collaboration and information sharing between ISAF and ANSF leaders. Meanwhile, Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, during his 2010-12 term as minister of interior, removed a significant number of officials connected to CPNs from across the police (though he leaned toward removing officers from CPNs hostile to his own Jamiat Party). An increased willingness by some Afghan security leaders to remove CPN affiliates helped check CPNs' influence within the ANSF.³¹

But the removal of criminal officials often depended on a handful of bold Afghan leaders, and Afghan political elites continued to protect criminal affiliates, meaning that those officials removed from their positions were often recycled into new positions thanks to the influence of outside patrons. Progress in empowering internal accountability and oversight mechanisms – critical to the sustainability of countercorruption efforts – progressed more slowly.³²

Rule of Law and the Judicial Sector

ISAF and its partners in the U.S. mission in Kabul worked to support development of Afghan law enforcement and judicial institutions responsive to the population's needs and to reliably enforce the rule of law. Efforts included creating a U.S. Rule of Law Field Force in September 2010.³³ ISAF strove to achieve sustained, rather than merely episodic, engagement with the Afghan judicial sector and to enable investigators, prosecutors, and judges to operate free from bribery, intimidation, and political interference. After the Salehi case in July 2010, ISAF officials were more attuned to the political dimension of key criminal prosecutions. They increased efforts to work directly with senior national-level Afghan leaders to lift protection from criminals, encourage prosecutions, and prevent officials removed for corruption from being reinstated elsewhere in the government.

Despite more sophisticated international efforts, the Afghan government never prosecuted enough criminal officials to reduce the CPNs' power. After the 2010 Salehi case, the Attorney General's Office constantly succumbed to intense pressure from political elites to suppress high-level prosecutions. President Karzai, Vice President Fahim, and other senior officials showed no change of heart and continued refusing to support investigations and prosecutions.³⁴ The palace allowed only a handful of relatively low-level prosecutions to proceed, in response to pressure from international donors. The

³¹ Conclusions in this paragraph are based on authors' personal observations, assessments, and interviews at various times during 2010-12, while in Kabul.

³² The Ministry of Interior, for example, established several Transparency and Accountability Commissions (TACs) at the regional and provincial levels in 2012, which brought police leadership together to collectively develop and commit to countercorruption initiatives and oversight mechanisms. It is unclear what impact the TACs had, however, after the transfer of Minister Bismillah Mohammadi from MoI to MoD in late 2012.

³³ NATO later created a Rule of Law Field Support Mission (NROLFSM) of its own in June 2011. For greater unity of effort, the US and NATO missions were eventually placed under a dual-hatted common commander.

³⁴ See, for example, Filkins, "Letter from Kabul"; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, Oct. 30, 2013, 137.

most notable of these was the prosecution of Kabul Bank owners Farnood and Fruzi, who were convicted and given mild sentences in March 2013 for their role in the Kabul Bank scandal. The verdicts followed—and were almost certainly the result of—credible threats from U.S. and European donors to suspend billions in aid payments to the Afghan government if Farnood and Fruzi should escape legal sanction for their role in Kabul Bank’s collapse.³⁵

Borders and Airports

The civil-military team in Kabul and senior Afghan officials worked together to expose and act against the criminal networks operating at Afghan borders, airports, and customs depots. These countercorruption efforts sought to enable the Afghan state to maintain credible sovereignty and achieve enduring security while collecting revenue sufficient to expand its licit economy and reduce its dependence on international assistance. Recognizing the integral link between fighting corruption at Afghanistan’s borders and interdicting the movement of insurgents, weapons, bomb-making components, and narcotics, ISAF created the CJIATF-Nexus, a task force under operational control of CJIATF-Shafafiyat. Nexus coordinated efforts between Regional Commands, ISAF headquarters, and interagency law enforcement to target the intersection of CPNs, the narcotics trade, and the insurgency, with a particular focus on Afghanistan’s borders, border crossing points, and airports.

Through effective integration, ISAF, the United States, and the UK supported Afghan law enforcement in steadily increased interdiction of insurgent materiel moving across the Afghan border. The international community and the Afghan government achieved far less progress, however, in dismantling CPNs within the police and customs offices at the borders. Because criminal activity along the borders was so lucrative, CPNs and their patrons were highly motivated and well enough financed to ward off attempts to investigate or remove criminal officials.

Countering Drug Trafficking and Transnational Crime

As the mutually reinforcing relationship between the narcotics trade, corruption, and the insurgency became increasingly apparent, U.S. and UK interagency and law enforcement organizations, along with ISAF, began targeting the intersection of these convergent threats. Likewise, as the United States, the UK, and ISAF got a closer look at the flows of money, narcotics, precursor chemicals, weapons, and other resources across Afghanistan’s criminal networks, it became clear that corruption and organized crime in Afghanistan had a significant transnational dimension. As the 2011 U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime explained, “Nowhere is the convergence of transnational threats more apparent than in Afghanistan and Southwest Asia.”³⁶

Thus, the application of international law enforcement actions and targeted financial

³⁵ Rosenberg, “Trail of Fraud and Vengeance.”

³⁶ White House, “Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security,” July 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Strategy_to_Combat_Transnational_Organized_Crime_July_2011.pdf.

sanctions became a critical way to degrade Afghanistan's criminal networks, creating a deterrent effect that the judicial system could not. From 2010 on, U.S. and UK law enforcement and ISAF also strove to better integrate law enforcement and military operations for synergy and mutually reinforcing effects. To facilitate this integration, the U.S. and UK governments established an Interagency Operations Coordination Center in Kabul. This expedited intelligence sharing and coordination between the counternarcotics efforts of ISAF, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, and the UK Serious Organized Crimes Agency.

In 2010-12, joint international and Afghan counternarcotics efforts with military support achieved a high rate of interdictions and arrests, including the arrests of several high-level drug traffickers. Drawing on better intelligence support, coalition counternarcotics operations targeted drug traffickers who facilitated the insurgency. This had some effect in disrupting the movement of insurgent supplies, and a small (but not negligible) effect in squeezing insurgent finance.³⁷ Due to sustained UK mentorship, Afghanistan's Counter-Narcotics Justice Center functioned as the only judicial institution in the country that was insulated from bribery and political intimidation. This led to the successful conviction and sentencing of criminals and insurgents charged with narcotics trafficking.³⁸ But from 2011 to 2013, interdiction dropped sharply: interdictions of precursor chemicals fell 73 percent, and interdiction of hashish fell 79 percent. Further undermining counternarcotics progress, opium production in Afghanistan reached unprecedented levels in 2013, nearly doubling from 2012. The Department of Defense attributed the steep drop in interdiction to the drawdown of U.S. forces, and the resulting loss of operational enablers. The increase in opium production, meanwhile, occurred largely in areas with poor security and limited government presence. These trends demonstrate the tremendous importance of supporting and integrating counternarcotics efforts with a large military force, and the correlation between security and progress in counternarcotics.³⁹ But they also indicate that the Afghan government failed to develop sufficient capacity and will to carry on independent counternarcotics operations as U.S. force levels declined.

Contracting and Procurement

In 2010, recognizing the ongoing abuses of U.S. contracting by both Afghan and Western firms, the U.S. government, in tandem with CJIATF-Shafafiyat, created Task Force 2010, a component of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. The new task force's mission was to coordinate, expand, and apply greater oversight and management to U.S. contracting, acquisition, and procurement processes, thereby denying criminal patronage networks and insurgents access to U.S. funds and materiel. Acknowledging that international spending has the potential to directly affect campaign objectives, U.S. forces increasingly in-

³⁷ Department of Defense, "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," Dec. 2012, 123-4, www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf.

³⁸ Joshua Hersh, "Afghanistan's U.S.-Funded Counter-Narcotics Tribunal Convicts Nearly All Defendants, Records Show," *Huffington Post*, June 10, 2012, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/09/afghanistan-counter-narcotics-tribunal_n_1580855.html.

³⁹ Special Inspector General, Quarterly Report, 106.

tegrated procurement and contracting considerations into planning and operations at all levels. Task Force 2010 and others recognized that high-value construction contracts in insecure areas are the most difficult to oversee and administer, and the task force set its priorities accordingly. Additional contracting reforms included disaggregating large contracts to encourage more bidders and deter the emergence of monopolies; advertising contracts more widely to improve Afghan vendors' awareness of, and access to, the bidding process; and identifying intended subcontractors in the course of bidding. U.S. forces' efforts at contracting reform were coordinated with the Afghan government and civilian agencies operating in Afghanistan (such as USAID and the U.S. embassy). The embassy published its own COIN contracting guidance, similar to that issued by ISAF, in November 2010. By 2013, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction (SIGAR) had taken over primary responsibility for vetting and investigating contract and procurement fraud, while Task Force 2010 moved into a supporting role and relocated to Doha, Qatar.⁴⁰

The U.S. government, by vetting and restructuring contracts and investigating contracting fraud, made significant progress in cutting the flow of its contracts and spending to CPNs. In debarring contractors and cutting funding, the U.S. government could take virtually unilateral action without the need to work through the Afghan government, enabling efficient progress in cutting funding to CPNs. By February 2012, Task Force 2010 had vetted 1,000 contractors and debarred or suspended over 125 Afghan, U.S., and international companies. Investigations by SIGAR, meanwhile, achieved 47 convictions, 61 suspensions, and 94 debarments of individuals and companies by October 2013.⁴¹ Because the total magnitude of the misuse of U.S. funds is impossible to quantify, it is difficult to determine what proportion of total contract fraud was exposed and ended by Task Force 2010 and SIGAR. But the high number of debarments achieved from 2010 to 2013 had a clear effect of deterring the misuse of U.S. funds and signaling that anyone committing contract fraud faced a high risk of legal sanction. Moreover, the efforts blocked diversion of U.S. funds to some of Afghanistan's most noxious CPNs.⁴²

From 2010 on, ISAF, the U.S. country team in Kabul, and the international community made some progress working with their Afghan counterparts to reduce CPNs' influence within the Afghan government. Success was greatest in the two areas where the international community had the greatest influence and access: international contracting and the ANSF. As a result of international efforts, since 2010 Afghan officials have increasingly acknowledged that the scale of corruption within their country's critical institutions is compromising the state's security, stability, economic health, and cohesion. Afghan leaders also express concerns about their country's international reputation and standing, acknowledging that corruption, organized crime, and the narcotics trade jeopardize the credibility of Afghanistan's sovereignty. Many leaders remain deterred, however, by what they perceive as the near-term political risks of acting against powerful criminal networks. Because of these fears, progress in countering corruption

⁴⁰ Special Inspector General, Quarterly Report.

⁴¹ Ibid.; John Ryan, "Units Aim to Root Out Corruption in Afghanistan," *Army Times*, Feb. 16, 2012.

⁴² For example, the United States successfully cut funding to the CPN built around commander Ruhullah, who had been funneling money to the Taliban and whose men had abused Afghan civilians. "Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. Cuts Off Afghan Firm," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 8, 2010.

often stalled when it depended on leadership by Afghan political elites. The 2010 announcement by the United States and NATO that the ISAF mission would end in 2014 further undermined Afghan confidence in the long-term viability of countercorruption measures. This announcement led some Afghan leaders to intensify their factional and criminal behavior in an attempt to consolidate influence before a return to civil war or a reconciliation deal with the Taliban. These are deep, intractable challenges that the international approach to countercorruption, at times, failed to offset.

Recommendations and Conclusion

After the withdrawal of most international troops, Afghanistan's criminal patronage networks and organized crime remain poised to have disruptive effects on the country's future. As long as international resources have flowed steadily into the country, the major political players have retained an incentive to cooperate within the tenuous political order built by Karzai and his allies. Afghanistan has not had the strong state institutions necessary to enforce the rule of law and mediate internal conflicts (such as an independent and empowered judiciary and reliable police forces). This vacuum has left power brokers with few constraints, beyond the residual international-force presence, to prevent the same brand of violent competition that occurred in the 1990s. The new coalition government of President Ashraf Ghani, inaugurated in September 2014, has promised to lead Afghanistan toward a more inclusive, forward-looking political order. If Ghani is indeed committed to reform and accountability, the fragile coalition he has formed will face opposition from powerful CPNs inside and outside the Afghan state. The resilience of corruption and criminal networks will likewise challenge the new government's efforts to maintain security while sustaining the shaky power-sharing agreement arranged after the 2014 election, all in the face of significantly reduced U.S. military support. The patronage networks dominant within Afghan government ministries have consistently sought both profit and political advantage through graft and illicit activities as they consolidate power in anticipation of future instability. Networks with dual criminal and political objectives sponsor thugs to foment instability in rivals' home districts and provinces, entrench their own positions in the country's vast narcotics trade at the expense of competitors, intimidate or assassinate enemies, and, at times, collude with the insurgency and foreign intelligence services to do so. As access to foreign resources wanes in the coming years and the U.S. presence is further reduced, competition among the ethnic and tribal factions within the current government may manifest in more overt violence than before.

Recommendations

As the U.S. military and national security establishment looks back on the wars of the past decade to glean lessons in preparation for future conflicts, the Afghan anticorruption experience must be an essential area of focus. Few threats have cut as widely across the lines of effort undertaken by U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan as have criminal patronage networks. By hollowing out the critical institutions that the coalition and its partners have struggled to build, by undermining the legitimacy of the govern-

ment that ISAF and the international community have sought to support, by preventing the population's mobilization against the insurgency, and by contributing to insurgent narratives, CPNs have jeopardized all that the United States and its international allies have set out to achieve in Afghanistan. The full transfer of security responsibilities to a newly elected Afghan government will test whether Afghanistan's factionalized elites can pull together and overcome the legacy of a decade of limited action against—and, at times, complicity in—corruption and organized crime. The efforts of the U.S. government and ISAF to engage constructively with Afghan leaders on the corruption issue—while at the same time assembling the necessary tools to address the challenge directly—have laid a foundation for progress against Afghanistan's CPNs in the coming years. Much work lies ahead, though. The future will increasingly depend on the will of senior Afghan officials, including the Ghani-Abdullah coalition government, to commit definitely to reforms. While daunting in the near-term, these reforms represent the country's best hope for a promising, peaceful future, which its people, after decades of conflict, surely deserve.

In anticipation of future missions of similar complexity, it will be essential to integrate the lessons emerging from the countercorruption experience in Afghanistan into U.S. forces' training, doctrine, and leadership development. Although future efforts will demand close civil-military coordination and unity of effort, U.S. and allied forces and other international partners must be prepared to exercise initiative in addressing the problems of a political economy based on corruption and organized crime in counterinsurgency and stabilization environments. The lessons and insights outlined below reflect the expectation that U.S. and allied forces and their various partners will again operate where illicit power structures are drivers of conflict and impediments to sustainable security, political progress, and economic growth. These lessons come with the understanding that the United States and the international community have at times inadvertently contributed to the problems faced today with Afghanistan's criminal patronage networks—missteps that we cannot afford to repeat in future conflicts.

Anticipate and respond swiftly to criminal patronage networks. In insecure states with underdeveloped institutions and weak rule of law, any massive infusion of international resources to build local capacity, if disbursed with inadequate oversight, is likely to be accompanied by a surge in corruption and organized crime.⁴³ International forces and their interagency counterparts conducting counterinsurgency or stability operations must anticipate this development and be prepared, in the earliest stages of their mission, to put in place mechanisms to mitigate and monitor the problem (e.g., tracking illicit financial flows and implementing vendor-vetting measures). At the same time, expectations for transparency and accountability should be articulated to officials in the supported government. In all these efforts, timing is critical. It is vital to launch

⁴³ See, for example, UNDP, "Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict and Recovery Situations," June 9, 2010, www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/anti-corruption/fighting-corruption-in-post-conflict---recovery-situations.html; Fredrik Galtung and Martin Tisné, "A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 4 (2009).

countercorruption initiatives before criminal networks and patterns of corruption become entrenched, before the population grows disillusioned with its government and international forces, and before the perception arises within the host government that impunity for politically connected criminals will be tolerated. The international community will also maximize its influence if it acts before its will to impose costs for corruption—whether through conditionality of aid or through international law enforcement actions—has been called into question.

Acknowledge the centrality of politics. International forces and their civilian partners must ground their efforts in a thorough understanding of the history and politics of the state where they are engaged. Interventions, whether counterinsurgency campaigns or stability operations, are fundamentally political endeavors. Illicit power structures are also fundamentally a political problem, closely linked to the balances of power among national elites. As a 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study noted, “Effectively responding to corruption can be difficult because it nearly always requires taking political, economic, and social power away from those who benefit from the status quo.”⁴⁴ With this in mind, international forces must understand the key leaders they engage with, in the context of their political, social, and cultural networks. Intelligence on business networks and financial flows between elites can likewise provide tremendous insights into the structure of power and the influence of CPNs in the host nation. The intelligence community has an important role to play here. Analysts may need additional training, however, to get a proper focus, not only on the composition of illicit political networks, but also on the historical affiliations, dynamic relationships, and the balances of power within them—as well as an understanding of their roles in any broader national political settlement. It is also important to note that host-nation officials’ interests may not always align fully with those of international forces. Host-nation political actors may be motivated by narrow agendas driven by their historical, ethnic, and factional affiliations—as well as by a desire to maximize their political and financial positions before international forces’ ultimate departure—rather than by a shared commitment to satisfy mutual goals. Therefore, countercorruption efforts stand to have the greatest effect when implemented in support of a carefully coordinated political strategy by international forces and their civilian counterparts, designed to marshal military, diplomatic, and economic tools and resources in pursuit of a clearly articulated set of political objectives.

Rank disrupting criminal capture of institutions above capacity building. Attention to the politics of the supported government and early implementation of joint anticorruption measures are critical to preventing the emergence of what has been called the “political-criminal nexus”—a mutually beneficial relationship of protection and profit between corrupt government officials and criminal networks.⁴⁵ Left unchecked, this dynamic can

⁴⁴ UNDP, “Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict and Recovery Situations.”

⁴⁵ Roy Godson, *Menace to Society: Political-Criminal Collaboration around the World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003). See also Mark Shaw, “Drug Trafficking and the Development of Organized Crime in Post-Taliban Afghanistan,” in *Afghanistan’s Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy*, ed. Doris Buddenberg and William A. Byrd (Collingdale, PA: Diane, 2006);

lead to the criminal capture of critical state functions. Thus, the supported government's institutions become directed toward serving the interests of a narrow political elite and their criminal associates, rather than advancing and protecting broad national interests. In post-intervention states whose governments receive large sums of international assistance, there is an enormous incentive for criminal networks to infiltrate and co-opt fragile institutions newly flush with resources. The Afghan experience has demonstrated that international technical assistance and professionalization training are necessary, *but not sufficient*, for girding institutions against criminal infiltration and subversion. Rather than focus narrowly on capacity building, those providing international assistance must attune themselves to patterns of criminal activity. And they must work with key leaders in the supported government to develop coherent, broadly acceptable strategies to disrupt criminal networks and sever the relationships between political patrons and their criminal clients.

Understand the impact of international spending. The infusion of substantial international resources – whether development assistance or contracts – without sufficient oversight, into a contested or postpeace settlement state with an underdeveloped economy has the potential to empower some actors while disempowering others, thus generating unintended political, social, and security consequences. Development, procurement, and acquisition are military operational concerns that must be aligned with a comprehensive national or coalition political strategy. In future conflicts, rigorous vetting of vendors and sustained oversight for large logistics and development contracts will be crucial. And full integration across the civilian and military agencies involved is indispensable to achieving a common contracting operating picture. In Afghanistan, failure to judge local populations' development needs or accurately assess communities' capacity to absorb international aid generated extreme waste and opportunities for graft, corruption, and patronage while preventing the emergence of free-market entrepreneurs.⁴⁶ Instead, models of development focusing on host nations' nascent small enterprises and business sectors can serve as a check against large-scale corruption while setting the conditions for inclusive and responsive governance that deters systemic abuse of power.⁴⁷

Promote transparency and accountability in security force development. With the expectation that future counterinsurgency and stability operations will be coupled with security force development missions, international forces can anticipate having significant access, agency, and leverage within the supported government's security sector. This access presents a critical opportunity to integrate countercorruption efforts within training and professionalization initiatives. The development of effective, professional, and ac-

Peter Andreas, "The Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2004).

⁴⁶ Greg Mills and Ewen Mclay, "The Path to Peace in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 55, no. 4 (2011); and the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan," June 8, 2011, www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/foreign-relations-committee-releases-comprehensive-report-on-us-civilian-aid-in-afghanistan.

⁴⁷ See, for example, R. Glenn Hubbard and William Duggan, *The Aid Trap* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009); and David Kilcullen, Greg Mills, and Jonathan Oppenheimer, "Quiet Professionals: The Art of Post-Conflict Economic Recovery and Reconstruction," *RUSI Journal* 156, no. 4 (2011).

countable security forces is essential, of course, for the transfer of security responsibilities to the host nation. But in many developing countries emerging from conflict, control of the security ministries and their forces is a prize much sought after by elites and their networks as the political settlement develops.⁴⁸ As a result, security forces can become subject to factionalism, politicization, and corruption.

Therefore, international forces assigned to develop the supported government's security sector must be prepared to apply the same rigorous analysis to the political and factional affiliations of key leaders within the host nation's security forces as to those of other national figures. A security force development model focused strictly on capacity building and professionalization may not be sufficient for ensuring a politically neutral force or for adequately integrating former combatants into new national security structures. As the 2006 *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* makes clear, "the acceptance of values, such as ethnic equality or the rejection of corruption, may be a better measure of training effectiveness in some COIN situations" than simple "competence in military tasks."⁴⁹ In the long term, of course, there is no dichotomy between these objectives, since host-nation security forces rife with corruption will suffer greatly impaired operational effectiveness. The Afghanistan experience demonstrated the extent to which corruption consistently undermined a unit's leadership, morale, will to fight, readiness, and logistical sustainability. To the degree that the population sees host-nation security forces as professional and above ethnic, tribal, and political factionalism, they can add credibility to the supported government, serving as the locus of an emerging sense of national unity.

Integrate law enforcement, military, and information operations. As the war in Afghanistan has made clear, corruption, organized crime, and insurgency are interconnected problems that cannot be dealt with in isolation. In states in or emerging from conflict, an effective response to these converging threats requires integration of law enforcement, military, and information operations at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels in order to employ the full range of tools available to address these problems. Integration of these capabilities is also essential to countering the likely criminalization of the insurgency. This dynamic has been seen to varying degrees in Colombia, Iraq, and Afghanistan as insurgent groups that had engaged in illicit activities initially as a means of financing their operations became increasingly profit focused at the expense of their original ideological or political aims. International forces and their civilian partners can capitalize on this dynamic not only through information operations—calling attention to the insurgent group's venality and hypocrisy—but by mobilizing and empowering host-nation law enforcement assets through evidence-based operations against the insurgent group's criminal activities.⁵⁰ Because host-nation law enforcement and judicial

⁴⁸ See Andrew Rathmell, "Reframing Security Sector Reform for Counterinsurgency—Getting the Politics Right," in *Complex Operations: NATO at War and on the Margins of War*, ed. Christian Schnaubelt, NATO Defense College Forum Paper 14, July 2010, www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/maro/pdf/NATO_Defense_College_MARO_article_7_10.pdf.

⁴⁹ Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency, Field Manual 3-24*, section 6-13, Dec. 2006, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/Repository/Materials/COIN-FM3-24.pdf>.

⁵⁰ See David Spencer et al., *Colombia's Road to Recovery: Security and Governance 1982-2010*, (Washington, DC: Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, National Defense University, 2011); Gretchen Peters, "Crime

institutions often become targets for infiltration and subversion by criminal networks and their affiliates, international forces and their civilian partners must also help insulate and protect these institutions from intimidation and coercion.

Identify and operate against the transnational dimensions of the problem. As President Obama's "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime" makes clear, the problem can be particularly acute within weak and developing states where criminal networks "threaten stability and undermine free markets as they build alliances with political leaders, financial institutions, law enforcement, foreign intelligence, and security agencies."⁵¹ Transnational criminal organizations exploit and destabilize weak institutions, internal divisions, and permissive security environments of states engaged in or emerging from conflict. If the Afghan experience and others are a reliable guide, key figures within indigenous criminal networks will also rely on links to the international financial system to launder their criminal proceeds and maintain licit business interests abroad. In these instances, the United States and allies have a range of tools and capabilities at their disposal to operate against the transnational dimension of corruption and organized crime while furthering counterinsurgency and stabilization objectives – by tracking illicit finance, initiating targeted coercive financial actions, pursuing sanction designations, and identifying opportunities for mutual legal assistance. In future conflicts, international forces and their civilian partners would benefit from the creation of a central, unified interagency strategic planning body with the capacity to manage and coordinate application of these tools and capabilities against transnational networks.

Develop a countercorruption narrative that demonstrates long-term commitment. Given the extent to which corruption undermines popular confidence in a supported government's effectiveness, legitimacy, and sovereignty, international forces and their civilian partners must find a means of presenting themselves as an honest broker between the population and the state, thereby avoiding perceived complicity in the host government's corruption – even as international forces continue to provide vital assistance to the supported state's leaders and institutions. In this, it is essential to consistently transmit a message of enduring international commitment at the strategic and tactical levels – commitment not only to end corruption but also to ensure durable security and advance the interests and aspirations of the population. Without a compelling narrative of commitment, a series of harmful hedging strategies can develop: criminal networks and their patrons will accelerate and expand their illicit activities, driven by a short-term maximization-of-gains mentality that anticipates the eventual departure of international forces and, with them, the easy access to international resources.

Promote civil society as a force for anticorruption advocacy and reform. As evidenced in Sicily, Colombia, Georgia, Mexico, and elsewhere, civil society groups can play a dra-

and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan," report, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Oct. 2010, www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a536511.pdf; Phil Williams, *Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq*, monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, June 2009, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=930.

⁵¹ Barak Obama, "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security," report, White House, July 2011.

matic role in reversing the influence of organized criminal networks and the institutional corruption they enable.⁵² When properly networked and empowered, social activists, educators, entrepreneurs, the media, religious leaders, and other moral authorities can together foster a critical mass of societal support for upholding the rule of law while stigmatizing corruption, thus generating positive social pressure for reform. International forces and their civilian counterparts can create the space for these groups to mobilize unimpeded, in part by realizing that civil society organizations, much like the host nation's judicial institutions, will become targets of intimidation and retribution from criminal networks and their political patrons. Supporting and engaging with civic and social organizations can directly advance fundamental counterinsurgency and stability objectives. A healthy, vibrant civil society is the foundation of a stable state whose institutions are responsive and whose leaders are accountable.

Employ incentives and disincentives. International forces and their civilian partners should be aware of the leverage they have to shape events within a host nation's political space. This leverage derives largely from the security assurances provided by international forces and from international aid, which may be the only reliable source of revenue for the government of a beleaguered state struggling to emerge from conflict. Although it must be carefully and strategically applied, this leverage can prove vital when pursuing anticorruption efforts, especially where host-nation officials have little appetite for reform. Leaders will thus need to be motivated to action. Incentives can include additional assistance to a given state institution (or military unit), linked to the execution of a desired reform or law enforcement action. Targeted coercive financial sanctions or international law enforcement measures are another means of leverage (although, again, they must be applied only after careful consideration of the political context). And finally, the international community can exert a more indirect form of influence by taking steps to integrate the host nation into international regimes and compacts related to corruption, transparency, and accountability. Encouraging compliance with international norms and standards appeals to host-nation leaders' concerns about the state's international reputation, standing, and sovereignty.

Conclusion

Since 2001, the United States and its NATO and ISAF partners have made tremendous investments in Afghanistan's reconstruction. From 2001 to 2014, the United States spent over \$57 billion to rebuild and sustain the Afghan National Security Forces, along with \$30 billion on development and governance projects.⁵³ This assistance left Afghanistan stronger in 2014 than at any point in its tragic post-1978 history. But Afghanistan's state institutions remain fragile and, in some cases, dysfunctional, so that it is not clear whether the new government under President Ashraf Ghani can secure the country against a

⁵² See, for example, Leoluca Orlando, *Fighting the Mafia and Renewing Sicilian Culture* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2001); and Roy Godson, "Fostering a Culture of Lawfulness: Multi-Sector Success in Pereira, Colombia, 2008-2010," report, National Strategy Information Center, Oct. 2010, www.strategycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Fostering-a-Culture-of-Lawfulness.pdf.

⁵³ SIGAR, "Interactive Funding Tables," 2014, www.sigar.mil/quarterlyreports/fundingtables/.

resilient Taliban. The persistence of corruption and the power of CPNs has undermined or coopted many of the institution-building efforts launched by the United States and ISAF. Too often, the coalition pursued capacity building without attention to whether criminal networks were diverting foreign resources, hollowing out military units, and appropriating state power for factional and illicit ends.

Capacity building efforts, meanwhile, failed to emphasize the primacy of the rule of law, overlooking the importance of investigative, judicial, and internal accountability institutions. The U.S. experience in Afghanistan clarifies that countercorruption cannot be an afterthought in stabilization and counterinsurgency operations. Rather, it is the necessary foundation for economic and military assistance to achieve its full potential. And it is the best assurance that foreign assistance does not inadvertently strengthen organized crime. The case of Afghanistan also highlights the centrality of elite politics to stability and the rule of law. Afghanistan's political settlement protected and, at times, empowered the country's CPNs and rendered ineffective many of the coalition's governance and development efforts. Postconflict reconstruction is, at its core, a political endeavor, not a technical one.

As intractable as the problems of corruption and organized crime appeared during the United States and ISAF's 13-year engagement in Afghanistan, countering these threats is not impossible. The international community's failure to coordinate countercorruption and make it a priority in the first eight years after 2001 was costly, forfeiting critical opportunities and handicapping subsequent efforts. By 2010-11, the coalition had developed a focused countercorruption strategy, with tangible lines of effort. Despite the resistance of some of Afghanistan's senior leaders and their affiliated CPNs, a growing number of Afghan officials and civil society leaders embraced the cause of accountability and worked in close cooperation with their international counterparts to achieve progress where they could.

Criticism and public outrage against corruption, meanwhile, has become a mainstay of Afghan political discourse. For the coalition government of Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, tackling corruption and displacing CPNs from government institutions will be imperative in consolidating the gains their country has made since 2001. Should the new government possess the political will needed to achieve real progress, it can hope to build on the initiatives of the past four years. Success is possible, but only with the confluence of genuine resolve by Afghan leaders to confront the problem, and international willingness to support and sustain Afghan-led efforts against corruption and organized crime.