FOREWORD

Strategies that weaken illicit power structures and strengthen legitimate state authority are vital to national and international security. As Dr. Henry Kissinger observed, we may be "facing a period in which forces beyond the restraints of any order determine the future." Because threats to security emanate from disorder in areas where governance and rule of law are weak, defeating terrorist, insurgent, and criminal organizations requires integrated efforts not only to attack enemy organizations, but also to strengthen institutions essential to sustainable security.

Successful outcomes in armed conflict require confronting illicit networks. A failure to do so effectively frustrated efforts to consolidate gains in Afghanistan and Iraq, and after more than a decade of war and development, the international community and the governments of those countries, continue to contend with the violence and instability that are the result. In Afghanistan, corruption and organized crime networks perpetuate state weakness and undermine the state's ability to cope with the regenerative capacity of the Taliban. The failure to counter militias and Iranian proxies that infiltrated the government and security forces in Iraq led to a return of large scale communal violence and set conditions (along with the Syrian Civil War) for the rise of a terrorist proto-state and a humanitarian catastrophe that has adversely impacted the entire Middle East. These and other cases illustrate how governments and international actors struggle to establish security and rule of law, and reveal incomplete plans and fragmented efforts that fail to address the causes of violence and state weakness.

While challenging, success in confronting illicit power structures is not impossible. While still works in progress, successful efforts, such as those in Colombia and Sierra Leone, are the result of integrated diplomatic, military, economic, development, informational, intelligence, and law enforcement efforts directed toward well-defined political outcomes. The case studies and analyses in this volume make clear that understanding the dynamics associated with illicit power and state weakness is essential to preventing or resolving armed conflict.

These case studies also point out that confronting illicit power requires coping with political and human dynamics in complex, uncertain environments. People fight today for the same fundamental reasons the Greek historian Thucydides identified nearly 2,500 years ago: fear, honor and interests. They further remind us that that illicit power structures often depend on the perpetuation of violence and the conflict economy. Crafting effective strategies to address the challenge of weak states must begin with an understanding of the factors that drive violence, weaken state authority, and strengthen illicit actors and power structures. Terrorist, insurgent, and criminal networks exploit fear and anger over injustice, portraying themselves as patrons or protectors of a community in competition with others for power, resources, or survival. Thus military and law enforcement capabilities provide only one component of what must be comprehensive, civilian and military approach to confronting illicit power.

Because of the political basis for illicit power, mediation between parties in conflict to reach an accommodation is often necessary to end violence and isolate illicit networks from popular support. However, attempts to mediate before security conditions improve and illicit network control over territory and populations is weakened are likely

to fail. Political and security efforts must be aligned to consolidate gains and achieve sustainable outcomes. A comprehensive approach is necessary because consolidating security gains requires efforts both to strengthen the state and weaken a range of criminalized adversaries. *Ultimately, the state must possess the strength and legitimacy to control its territory, contend with the regenerative capacity of illicit power networks, and convince the vast majority of the population to advance their interests through politics rather than violence.*

Unfortunately, as many of the case studies in this volume reveal, plans are often driven by what international actors prefer to do or would like to avoid doing rather than what is necessary to address the causes of violence and state weakness. Because the greatest obstacle to confronting illicit power is oftentimes a lack of political will, international actors must help persuade leaders that it is in their interest to undertake necessary reforms. Those working on reform must understand that control of institutions is often the prize that drives competition between illicit organizations. Security sector and judicial reform require special emphasis to insulate investigative and adjudicative bodies from infiltration and subversion. Paradoxically, avoiding state building or sidestepping the political causes of state weakness in the hope of avoiding costly or protracted commitments often increases costs and extends efforts in time.

International organizations and indigenous leaders must also galvanize the will to defeat illicit organizations and undertake reforms to strengthen legitimate state authority, and demonstrate commitment through action. To isolate illicit networks from popular support, leaders must craft and build confidence in a long-term vision for the future in which communities believe their interests will be advanced and protected. Communications efforts must bolster the legitimacy of the state and discredit illicit organizations. Information campaigns must draw attention to the brutality and venality of illicit organizations and trace popular grievances back to their actions. Exposing the criminality of key actors and applying national and international law enforcement, financial actions, and other sanctions against illicit network leaders and facilitators is important to weaken illicit power structures psychologically, as well as physically.

Maintaining the will to defeat illicit power and consolidate security gains is difficult because the standard of success for illicit networks is low relative to the standard for those who confront the malignant effects of terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime. Illicit groups need only to impose pain rather than secure populations, incite fear rather than build confidence, foment hatred rather than foster tolerance, protract conflict rather than arbitrate peace, subvert institutions rather than build state effectiveness, and perpetuate destitution rather than rekindle hope. Licit actors are held to a much higher bar. But meeting the high standard for success, especially in traumatized and fragmented societies, requires that we, and our host nation partners, make a concerted effort to learn from recent and ongoing experiences and adapt efforts to changing local conditions. The case studies in this volume are an excellent starting point for learning and adapting to the problem of illicit power.

As readers study this book, however, they might be discouraged by the fact that our record of learning is poor. As the analysis reveals, failures to confront illicit power often stem from either an ignorance of history or the simplistic application of erroneous historical lessons. The neglect of history is often willful; wishful thinking makes the future appear easier and fundamentally different from the past. Budget pressures, the

perception that the nation is fatigued by recent wars, and persistent fascination with technology encourage wishful thinking and a reductionist vision of future armed conflict divorced from its political and human nature.

From a military standpoint, a vision that uncouples the military instrument from policy as well as the causes of violence, portrays future conflict mainly as targeting exercises. Precision strikes, whether executed by drones or special operations forces, promise to deliver security from afar without requiring complex efforts associated with consolidating gains politically or confronting illicit power structures. While emerging technologies are essential for military effectiveness, employing these advanced capabilities without a strategy that addresses the causes of violence and state weakness confuses military activity with progress toward wartime goals. Paradoxically, the advanced military technologies that some argue will solve the problem of future armed conflict from standoff range are likely to drive future enemies further away from conventional battlegrounds. They tend to push illicit power structures closer to civilian populations and offer few solutions to the kinds of problems described in this volume.

A serious and effective effort to meet the challenges of illicit power in the 21st century will require technology, global partnership, and an integrated, comprehensive campaign driven by international commitment and broad political will. Of the many important lessons that emerge from these essays the most important is to be skeptical of concepts that divorce conflict from its political and human nature, particularly those that promise fast, cheap victories through technology while ignoring the need to confront illicit power in war and transition.

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