

SILENT PARTNERS: ORGANIZED CRIME, IRREGULAR GROUPS, AND NATION-STATES

Dr. Shima D. Keene

The U.S. Army increasingly faces adversaries that are difficult to define. The threat landscape is further blurred by cooperation between transnational organized crime groups and irregular armed formations, linked directly or indirectly to governments or individual authority figures in nation-states. At a fundamental level, the motivations and aspirations of transnational organized crime groups differ from those held by irregular groups. However, in practice, there are many similarities in terms of their modus operandi and the harm they cause, often making it difficult to distinguish one from the other. This collaboration, whatever its exact nature, is problematic, because it confounds understanding of the adversary, making existing countermeasures less effective and thus directly challenging U.S. national security interests.

Using the term “silent partners” to describe the collaboration between organized crime groups (OCGs), irregular groups, and nation-states is appropriate, as these partnerships are unlikely to be publicly or willingly acknowledged. In many cases, even the existence of such relationships is likely to be denied not only by those directly involved, but also by the international community tasked with providing assistance for the purpose of peace-building or state-building. This is because interventions to support and strengthen host nations will lose credibility if many of the key political figures are acknowledged as directly or indirectly involved with organized crime or irregular groups. In addition, there is also political pressure on those involved in state-building interventions to get positive results quickly.

However, these partnerships are a reality that cannot and must not be ignored as they have the ability to undermine interventions carried out not only by the U.S. Army and its military allies, but also by the international community more broadly, working toward the same goal to stabilize a fragile or post-conflict state. The risks identified in this monograph will im-

pact military planning at an operational and strategic level, as well as impact U.S. foreign policy overall as a result of the involvement of nation-states.

Furthermore, military action taken without full appreciation of the dynamics of the nature of these relationships is likely to be ineffective at best or suffer negative second and third-order effects. This can be best avoided by developing a deeper appreciation of the relationship dynamics of adversary networks, enabling U.S. Army intelligence officers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the relationships that can then be exploited as appropriate to the advantage of the U.S. Army.

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