About *Criminals, Militias and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq*

Organized crime, by and large, has been a neglected dimension of the conflict in Iraq. Yet its importance is difficult to overestimate. Dr. Phil Williams’ monograph on Iraq shows how both criminal enterprises and activities had a debilitating impact and made the attainment of U.S. objectives much more difficult. Organized crime inhibited reconstruction and development and became a major obstacle to state-building; the insurgency was strengthened and sustained by criminal activities; sectarian conflict was funded by criminal activities and motivated by the desire to control criminal markets; and more traditional criminal enterprises created pervasive insecurity through kidnapping and extortion. Organized crime also acted as an economic and political spoiler in an oil industry expected to be the dynamo for growth and reconstruction in post-Ba’athist Iraq.

In this monograph Dr. Williams identifies the roots of organized crime as it emerged after 2003 Iraq in an authoritarian and corrupt state dominated by Saddam Hussein and subject to international sanctions. He also explains the rise of organized crime after the U.S. invasion in terms of two distinct waves: the first wave followed the collapse of the state and was accompanied by the breakdown of social control mechanisms and the development of anomie; the second wave was driven by anarchy, insecurity, political ambition, and the imperatives of resource generation for militias, insurgents, and other groups. This monograph looks in detail at major criminal activities, including the theft, diversion, and smuggling of oil, the kidnapping of both Iraqis and foreigners, extortion, car theft, and the theft and smuggling of antiquities. The author also considers the critical role played by corruption in facilitating and strengthening organized crime. He shows how al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jaish-al-Mahdi, and the Sunni tribes used criminal activities to fund their campaigns of political violence. Dr. Williams also identifies necessary responses to organized crime and corruption in Iraq, including efforts to reduce criminal opportunities, change incentive structures, and more directly target criminal organizations and activities. His analysis also emphasizes the vulnerability of conflict and post-conflict situations to organized crime and the requirement for a holistic or comprehensive strategy in which security, development, and the rule of law complement one another. The analysis has considerable relevance to the conflict in Afghanistan and to future military contingencies.