

# Covert Netherworld: An Invisible Interstice in the Modern World System

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Over the past thirty years, the world has witnessed a succession of extraordinary events that, though momentary sensations, soon faded without due consideration of their deeper implications. By simply listing several, we can detect traces of a political domain generally overlooked by conventional scholarship.

—In 1986–1987, eleven senior officials in President Ronald Reagan’s administration were convicted for selling Iran embargoed arms to finance Nicaragua’s Contra guerrillas, an anti-communist force implicated in the smuggling of cocaine into the United States.<sup>1</sup>

—A decade later, President Joseph Mobutu’s “kleptocracy” collapsed as a rebel militia captured Congo’s capital Kinshasha and unleashed a ten-year civil war—fueled by trafficking in blood ivory and rare minerals—that left an estimated three to five million dead, some of the highest casualties in any conflict since World War II.<sup>2</sup>

—In 2001, Philippine President Joseph Estrada was jailed for taking bribes from illegal gambling syndicates, sparking a crisis that mobilized a mob of fifty thousand, many of them drug gangs from Manila’s slums, for a bloody showdown at the gates of the presidential palace.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledgments: Among the countless debts I have incurred in forty years of thinking about the interaction between crime and covert operations, I must acknowledge a smaller number that played a seminal role in formulating this synthesis of all that work. At a conference at Melbourne University Law School in August 2006, Robert Cribb inspired this theoretical turn by remarking, en passant, that my book, *The Politics of Heroin*, had surprisingly little impact upon scholarly analysis. My first opportunity to correct this oversight came six years later when George Chauncey asked for a novel approach to my Wilbur Cross lecture at Yale’s History Department. At that lecture, which was the first full articulation of these ideas, my old friend Larry Lifschultz offered some provocative insights about the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands reflected in this essay. In the final drafting, my colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison offered insightful comments, including Mike Cullinane at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Erin Cantos in the History Department, and Gwen Walker at the University Press. Finally, the anonymous readers for *CSSH* offered sharp, critical comments that helped this essay reach its potential.

<sup>1</sup> John Prados, *Safe for Democracy* (Chicago, 2006), 500–67; *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Transparency International, “Plundering Politicians and Bribing Multinationals Undermine Economic Development, says TI,” Press Release, 25 Mar. 2004, [www.globalcorruptionreport.org](http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org); Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz* (London, 2000), 250–55; “DR Congo War Deaths ‘Exaggerated,’” *BBC News*, 20 Jan. 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8471147.stm>.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, “Covert Netherworld,” in Eric Wilson, ed., *Government of the Shadows* (London, 2009), 226–55.

—In reporting the 2011 assassination of Ahmad Wali Karzai, brother of Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, BBC News described him as “a warlord mired in corruption who was openly involved in the drugs trade”—charges U.S. officials had been loath to investigate, said the *New York Times*, because he was a critical asset for the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>4</sup>

To identify the underlying commonality in these and countless similar incidents over the past half-century, we should look beneath the surface of politics into a clandestine domain, an invisible interstice in the world order, where secret services and criminal syndicates play a significant role in contemporary political life. “As they say, the living are above, and the dead are below,” explained Massimo Carminati, Rome's reputed Mafia boss. “And we're in the middle.”<sup>5</sup> By combining the contemporary term *covert*, signifying state security, with the classical concept of the *netherworld*, connoting a shadowy realm beneath the surface of political life, the term *covert netherworld* can treat such sensational incidents as manifestations of a recurring social milieu and thereby restrain them from floating untethered into the ether of conspiracy theory.

Whenever conflicts erupt from this netherworld into a *grande scandale d'État*, they usually obsess modern publics briefly before becoming, at best, an historical footnote. Despite the frequency of such irruptions, national historians have long relegated this clandestine domain's most visible manifestations, intelligence and crime, to popular history or pulp fiction, effectively encircling the state with a sacral barrier that prohibits full cognizance of its profane margins, whether criminal or clandestine.

By breaking this sanction and using this concept to merge these separate realms—overt and covert, licit and illicit, legal and illegal—we can gain a fuller, three-dimensional view of contemporary politics, entire empires, and the global system that encompasses both. In recent years, moreover, anthropologists and political scientists have produced close-grained analyses of some specific manifestations of the covert netherworld, warlords and illicit traffics, thereby contributing cases that can help us build an analytical frame for global comparative analysis.<sup>6</sup> Although the recent history of this shadowy domain has been marked by millions of deaths, massive fiscal malfeasance, and epidemic drug addiction, this analysis aspires to be normatively neutral:

<sup>4</sup> “Afghan President's Brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, Killed,” *BBC News*, 11 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14118884>; *New York Times*, 4 Oct. 2008, and 27 Oct. 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Social scientists who have probed this netherworld include Jean-François Bayart, “L'Afrique Invisible,” *Politique internationale* 70 (Winter 1995–1996): 287–99; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, 1998); Peter A. Lupsha, “Drug Lords and Narco-Corruption,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 16 (1991): 41–58; Carolyn Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws: Crime, Money, and Power in the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, 2007); and Janet Roitman, “A Successful Life in the Illegal Realm,” in P. Geschiere, B. Meyer, and P. Pels, eds., *Readings on Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington, 2008), 214–20.

not a plea for the world as it should be, but rather an analysis of the world as it is.

During the Cold War and its aftermath, covert netherworlds have formed in countless locale through the confluence of four essential elements: notably, the increasing reliance of modern states on *covert methods* in their exercise of power at home and abroad; the consequent emergence of a *clandestine social milieu* populated by secret services and criminal syndicates; a complementary *illicit economic nexus* that sustains non-state actors, whether criminal syndicates, local warlords, or sometimes state security; and related *spatial dimensions*, shaped by geography and state policy, that range from a narrow clandestine milieu to entire countries or continents.

#### COVERT METHODS

Although secret services, drug trafficking, and syndicate crime appeared in the years surrounding World War I, it was not until the clash of empires called the Cold War that these four essential elements achieved the critical mass to merit the term covert netherworld. During the forty years of the Cold War, all the major powers—Britain, France, the United States, and the U.S.S.R.—deployed expanded, empowered clandestine services, making the first element, *covert methods*, a central facet of geopolitical power. Moscow and Washington also sponsored satellite states with clandestine coercive capacities manifest in secret police, prisons, torture, and extrajudicial executions. As Europe's overseas empires retreated in the mid-twentieth century, the United States, the U.S.S.R., and their respective allies also launched covert operations to control the world's hundred new nations—leading, during frequent regime changes, to coups and covert interventions, or at times of open conflict, to proxy wars through local surrogates such as warlords, rebels, or client armies that devastated vast swaths of Asia and Africa. At the peak of the Cold War, President Eisenhower avoided conventional combat yet authorized 170 CIA covert operations in forty-eight nations, while President Kennedy approved 163 more during his three years in office—numbers whose sum represents a significant shift in U.S. force projection from the conventional to the covert.<sup>7</sup>

In effect, this recurring reliance on covert intervention transformed secret services from manipulators at the margins of state power into major players in international politics. As clandestine and criminal activities proliferated beyond the hegemonic powers and their operational zones, these elements also achieved sufficient conjuncture to form netherworlds that, though more localized, still had potent ramifications for their societies.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York, 2008), 321.

## CLANDESTINE SOCIAL MILIEU

At its core, this netherworld's *social milieu* is an invisible interstice inhabited by criminal and clandestine actors who can carry out complex financial or political operations covertly, that is without leaving a tangible trace. Although local iterations of this clandestine demimonde can be found around the world and across time, the rise of modern empires was the essential precondition for the transformation of this milieu from sordid social margin into significant political space. Over the past century, European and U.S. imperial states have created powerful police to repress dissidents, bureaucracies to suppress personal activities deemed deviant, and clandestine services for covert projection of state power, thereby creating the key actors who inhabit this shadow domain—secret services and criminal syndicates.

At the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the so-called Iron Curtain opened the globe to untrammelled illicit traffics that sustained a surprisingly large criminal milieu. By the late 1990s, UN investigators would report that “highly centralized” transnational crime groups employed 3.3 million members worldwide for trafficking in arms, drugs, humans, endangered species, and copyrighted goods, giving these non-state actors the sheer numbers for political or paramilitary action.<sup>8</sup>

While the illegality of their commerce forces criminal syndicates to conceal activities, associates, and profits, political necessity dictates that secret services practice a parallel tradecraft of untraceable finances, concealed identities, and covert methods. This milieu is often more metaphysical than physical, as criminal and clandestine operatives live simultaneously in both dimensions, overt and covert, shape shifting seamlessly between businessman and vice entrepreneur, minor diplomat and undercover operative. In sum, both criminal and covert actors are practitioners of what famed CIA operative Lucien Conein once called “the clandestine arts”—the skill of conducting complex operations beyond the bounds of civil society.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout much of the twentieth century, there were recurring instances of affinity and even alliance between covert and criminal actors who inhabit this clandestine political space. Since the start of international narcotics prohibition in the 1920s expanded criminal syndicates, state security services around the globe have found drug traffickers useful covert-action assets—from Nationalist China's reliance on Shanghai's Green Gang to fight communists in the 1920s to the Gaullist regime's use of Marseille's criminal *milieu* for executive

<sup>8</sup> UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *World Drug Report 2000* (Oxford, 2000), 5, 12–14, 143–48; UN International Drug Control Programme, *World Drug Report* (Oxford, 1997), 132, 162–63.

<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein (former CIA operative in Saigon), McLean, Virginia, 18 June 1971.

action midst the political tumult of the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> As our knowledge of the Cold War grows, the list of drug traffickers who served the CIA lengthens to include Corsican syndicates, Nationalist Chinese irregulars, Lao generals, Haitian colonels, Honduran smugglers, and Afghan warlords. The sum of these clandestine alliances is a political symbiosis within this milieu that amplifies the reach of state security services and provides informal protection for select criminal syndicates.

#### ILLICIT ECONOMIC NEXUS

While state policy and clandestine actors animate the covert domain, an illicit commerce serves as its economic foundation, allowing this realm a measure of autonomy from both individual nations and the international community. Throughout the twentieth century, states and empires used their growing coercive capacities to tax, regulate, or restrict economic activity, often forcing targeted goods and services into an *illicit economic nexus*. Whether alcohol, drugs, or gambling, moral prohibition campaigns have usually transferred these vice trades to a growing criminal milieu and often served to stimulate such illicit activity. Even routine taxation can move conventional commodities into contraband commerce, as happened with cigarettes in both France and the Philippines after World War II. In recent decades, post-Cold War conflicts have forced otherwise legal goods into illicit circuits—whether “blood diamonds” and “blood ivory” in Africa, rare minerals in eastern Congo, or oil in the insurgent-controlled areas of Iraq.<sup>11</sup>

But nothing can approach the scale, scope, and significance of illicit narcotics trafficking. Over the past two centuries, the major powers have moved from an aggressive free trade in opium to a rigorous prohibition—a succession of contradictory policy regimes whose conjuncture, nay collision, has transformed coca and opium from folk pharmacopeia into major illicit commodities with extraordinary profits that made them the economic foundation for the covert netherworld. After more than a century enmeshed in the imperial opium trade, China harvested 35,000 tons of opium in 1906 and imported 4,000 more to supply 13.5 million users, or 27 percent of its adult males—an unequalled level of mass addiction.<sup>12</sup> Amplifying its commercial resilience, opium consumption also grew rapidly in the West, with a fourfold increase per capita in the United States and a sevenfold surge in the United Kingdom. By the time imperial Britain began phasing out India’s opium exports to China in

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927–1937* (Berkeley, 1996), 25–39; *New York Times*, 29 July 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan Christy, “Ivory Worship,” *National Geographic* 222, 4 (Oct. 2012): 46, 52–55; David Western, “The Undetected Trade in Rhino Horn,” *Pachyderm* 11 (1989): 26–28.

<sup>12</sup> International Opium Commission, *Report of the International Opium Commission*, vol. II (Shanghai, 1909), 44–66, 356; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1915* (Washington, D.C., 1916), 713.

1907, this drug had become a global commodity with a supple nexus of supply and demand capable of resisting eradication.<sup>13</sup>

In a sharp policy reversal at the start of the twentieth century, the world's powers launched a drug diplomacy that would curtail much of the global narcotics commerce.<sup>14</sup> After a League of Nations convention banned non-medical narcotics in 1925, however, criminal syndicates quickly emerged to take control of the residual illicit drug traffic in Asia and the West.<sup>15</sup> At its founding in 1945, the United Nations continued the League's anti-narcotics mission by adopting a succession of international agreements that attempted to control narcotics (1961), ban psychotropic drugs (1971), and suppress transnational organized crime (2000).<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1970s, moreover, President Richard Nixon declared a "war on drugs," expanding U.S. prohibition efforts beyond the nation's borders through bilateral suppression in the Mediterranean basin and Mainland Southeast Asia, temporarily reducing heroin supply in the United States while simultaneously stimulating drug trafficking on five continents in response to unmet demand.<sup>17</sup> A decade later, President Ronald Reagan redirected the U.S. drug war toward coca eradication in the Andes and intensified domestic enforcement.<sup>18</sup> Through the synergistic stimulus of narcotics suppression and covert operations in drug source regions, global supply of illicit opium increased seven-fold from 1,200 tons in 1972 to 8,870 tons by 2007.<sup>19</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, an expanding global narcotics traffic has sustained criminal syndicates, rebel armies, and covert operations on four continents. Showing the sheer scale of these commodities, the United Nations concluded, in the late 1990s, that the global traffic in illicit drugs

<sup>13</sup> David Musto, *The American Disease* (New Haven, 1973), 5; David T. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise* (Cambridge, 1982), 9–28; Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, *Opium and the People* (New Haven, 1987), 21–35, 274; UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Bulletin on Narcotics: A Century of International Drug Control* (Vienna, 2010), 54–58.

<sup>14</sup> Ethan A. Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes," *International Organization* 44, 4 (1990): 484–513.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Block, *East Side, West Side* (New Brunswick, 1983), 133–34; Alan A. Block, "European Drug Traffic and Traffickers between the Wars," *Journal of Social History* 23, 2 (1989): 315–37.

<sup>16</sup> UN, *World Drug Report 2000*, 5, 13–14, 143–48; UN, *World Drug Report* (1997), 162–63.

<sup>17</sup> See, Alfred W. McCoy, "The Stimulus of Prohibition," in Michael K. Steinberg, Joseph J. Hobbs, and Kent Mathewson, eds., *Dangerous Harvest: Drug Plants and the Transformation of Indigenous Landscapes* (New York, 2004), 24–111.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Program, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prisoners in 1988," *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 1; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1990* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 604; Ethan A. Nadelmann, "U.S. Drug Policy," *Foreign Policy*, no. 70 (1988): 99; *New York Times*, 23 Apr. 2008, and 27 May 2008.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Cabinet Committee on International Narcotics Control, *World Opium Survey 1972* (Washington, D.C., July 1972), 7, 11, A11–15; UN, Office of Drugs and Crime, *2008 World Drug Report* (United Nations, 2008), 25.

was a \$400 billion industry that constituted 8 percent of world trade—comparable to the international trade in textiles, one of three fundamentals for human survival.<sup>20</sup> A decade later, the UN reported that drugs were “the single most profitable sector of transnational criminality” with a value of \$322 billion, ten-times larger than the next largest activity, human trafficking.<sup>21</sup> When covert elements thus achieve a scale sufficient to fuel major conflicts, as they have in Afghanistan and Colombia, this netherworld can attain the autonomy, the sheer geopolitical power, to influence the course of world events.

#### SPATIAL DIMENSIONS

In its *spatial dimensions*, this netherworld is a fluid, even ephemeral, social phenomenon, appearing at local, national, or transnational levels when its critical components achieve the requisite array and receding after one or more attenuate. This netherworld can thus expand from an invisible interstice in stable states, to transitory tumult during coups or covert interventions at the periphery of empires, all the way to the surrogate warfare that can engulf entire countries or continents. Closure of such spatial rupture occurs readily in stable states, but can prove protracted and problematic in regions with some combination of privatized force, illicit commerce, and weak states.

Although its clandestine character often precludes any fixed locus, the international traffic in illicit goods can sometimes expand that invisible interstice for a protracted period, thereby creating a *local dimension* of pirate ports, bandit zones, rebel territory, or urban slums—autonomous enclaves of contraband commerce, detached from nation-state controls and often known by evocative place-names such as the Golden Triangle, Golden Crescent, City of God, or Forest of Assassins. For fifteen years, 1982 to 1996, the Golden Triangle’s heroin king Khun Sa, for example, commanded an army of twenty thousand men that controlled strategic territory along the Burma-Thai border and half the world’s heroin supply. For over thirty years starting in the early 1980s, the FARC rebels occupied 190,000 square miles in southern Colombia with an army of seventeen thousand guerillas that produced a substantial share of that country’s cocaine exports.<sup>22</sup>

Inside *individual nations*, the interaction between secret services and outlaw elements, whether rural warlords or urban gangsters, can sometimes influence the character of an entire polity. During tempestuous times in their respective national histories, nominally non-state actors such as Corsican *milieu*,

<sup>20</sup> *New York Times*, 26 June 1997; UN, *World Drug Report* (1997), 31, 32, 124; UN, *World Drug Report 2000*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *2007 World Drug Report* (UN, 2007), 170.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2000; Alain Labrousse and Laurent Laniel, “The World Geopolitics of Drugs, 1998/1999,” *Crime, Law & Social Change* 36, 1–2 (2001): 186–87.

Italian *mafia*, Indonesian *preman*, or Japanese *yakuza* have become mechanisms of social control integral to the functioning of the legitimate state.<sup>23</sup>

Taking a leaf from UN documents, this domain's *transnational dimension* is a mutable sector of modern geopolitics at the intersection of covert operations and contraband commerce. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain removed this transcontinental barrier to global trafficking, the international community was suddenly forced to confront a proliferation of criminal actors who threatened global stability. At the Special Session of the General Assembly in June 1998, attended by 185 states, the UN adopted the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and formed the Office of Drugs and Crime to curtail criminal syndicates with three million members and an illicit drug trade with 180 million users (4.2 percent of the world's adults).<sup>24</sup> At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the UN thus discovered both the scale and significance of this supra-national netherworld.

To lend shape and substance to these generic elements, we can explore three arenas of widening geographical scope to see how the covert dimension has shaped politics in several exemplary world regions: from the *local* level in the southern Philippines where a porous sea frontier fostered a protracted Islamic insurgency; to the *national* level where illicit commerce shaped the character of an emerging Philippine polity; all the way to the *transnational* level, by comparing France's postcolonial hold on the West African region dubbed *Françafrique* with more ephemeral U.S. covert interventions in Afghanistan and Central America. Through comparison to tease out the dynamics of this shadowy domain, we can see how effective covert operations usually encompassed key clandestine elements, while, conversely, complications ensued when one or more eluded control and thus achieved something akin to autonomy.

#### LOCAL LEVEL—PHILIPPINES

The southern Philippines illustrates how a conjuncture of illicit commerce, empowered state surrogates, and a resilient insurgency formed a local iteration of the covert netherworld that has shaped the character of the larger polity. This southern frontier of seas and island chains has remained, since the end of U.S. colonial rule in 1946, a region whose incomplete incorporation within any state and consequent extra-legal commerce has sustained a continuing mix of smuggling, Islamic insurgency, and covert state controls.

<sup>23</sup> E. H. Norman, "The Genyosha," in Jon Livingston, Joe Moore, and Felicia Oldfather, eds., *The Japan Reader; Volume 1* (New York, 1973), 355–67; Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* (London, 1963), 84–131; Tim Lindsey, "Law, Violence and Corruption in the *Preman* State" (Melbourne, Conference on Government of the Shadows, 10–12 Aug. 2006).

<sup>24</sup> UN, *World Drug Report 2000*, 5, 13–14, 70, 143–48; UN, *World Drug Report* (1997), 132, 162–63; UN, *2007 World Drug Report*, 170.



The first of these illicit commodities emerged between 1949 and 1954 as a bankrupt Philippine Republic imposed duties and regulations that slashed imports of U.S. cigarettes.<sup>25</sup> Several years later, both Indonesia and the Philippines punished exporters by overvaluing their currency, encouraging producers of dried coconut, called copra, to smuggle their exports. In the late 1950s, farmers in Sulawesi, Indonesia were selling copra to rebels who financed their secessionist struggle by smuggling cargoes to Sabah.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile in the southern Philippines, “virtually all of the copra production,” amounting to 60,000 tons, “was being shipped to Borneo in small, heavily powered Moro launches.”<sup>27</sup> By 1963, an estimated 338,000 tons of copra, half the Philippines’ exports, were illegally exported, while four years later some 60,000 tons of Sulawesi copra were illicitly imported.<sup>28</sup>

Along a 2,000-mile arc of islands from North Sulawesi to Central Luzon, the intersection of copra exports and imported cigarettes at Sabah during the 1950s made the tiny port of Sandakan “the largest importer of American cigarettes in the world.” By 1963, the town of Tawau further south was sending over a billion illegal cigarettes a year into the Philippines. Both ports were the epicenter of a vast illicit commerce—transforming some poor Filipino fishermen and petty criminals into smuggler kingpins, corrupting the once-strong Philippines Constabulary, and generating illicit income to sustain two major insurgencies.<sup>29</sup> Indicative of the scale of this traffic, in 1964 the Armed Forces impounded 169 ships, arrested 2,933 suspected smugglers, and confiscated 1,678,469 cartons of cigarettes. A pack of “C grade” foreign cigarettes purchased in North Borneo for 27 centavos could be retailed at Manila for P1.20. Driven by profits of 80 to 100 percent, the smuggling persisted and these massive seizures still amounted to only 12 to 15 percent of the total traffic, while the arrests left at least 1,600 “suspected smugglers” still active, including fifty Constabulary officers.<sup>30</sup> Adding a third leg in this illicit

<sup>25</sup> Robert R. Reed, “The Tobacco Economy,” in Robert E. Huke, ed., *Shadows on the Lands* (Manila, 1963), 353–56; Frank H. Golay, *The Philippines* (Ithaca, 1961), 76, 163–66, 336.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Harvey, “Tradition, Islam and Rebellion: South Sulawesi, 1905–1965” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1974), 264, 322; Kathryn M. Robinson, *Stepchildren of Progress* (Albany, 1986), 85–86; Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca, 1962), 488–94.

<sup>27</sup> Golay, *Philippines*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> Albert John Nyberg, “The Philippine Coconut Industry” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1968), 33–37; “Official Week in Review: February 9–February 22, 1967,” *Official Gazette* (Quezon City), <http://www.gov.ph/1967/03/06/official-week-in-review-february-9-february-22-1967/>.

<sup>29</sup> A.V.H. Hartendorp, *History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines* (Manila, 1961), 273–74; Thomas M. McKenna, “The Defiant Periphery,” *Social Analysis* 35 (1994): 11–27, 21; “Tawau Faces Its Big Test,” *Straits Times*, 2 Oct. 1963, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19631002-1.2.92.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> Armed Forces of the Philippines, “Report on Smuggling of BSC into the Philippines for the Years 1962, 63, 64 and 65,” dated 30 Nov. 1965, *Manila Times* files, Lopez Memorial Museum, Pasig, Metro Manila; *Manila Times*, 11 Dec. 1963, 11 Dec. 1965, and 17 Dec. 1965.

commerce, firearms were frequently trafficked between these two island nations: first, supplying anti-colonial Indonesian nationalists in the late 1940s, then equipping CIA-backed secessionists in North Sulawesi in 1957–1958, and, since the early 1970s, arming Muslim rebels in Mindanao and Sulu.<sup>31</sup>

After this burgeoning illicit commerce breached Manila's southern sea frontier, localized smuggling, radical Islam, and arms trafficking introduced the prime ingredients for a Muslim secessionist revolt. In 1968, the Philippine executive mounted a misbegotten covert operation to claim the Malaysian state of Sabah by deploying clandestine operatives and a top tobacco smuggler, culminating in the military's massacre of its Muslim infiltrators that sparked a bitter backlash in their southern communities. From 1972 to 1976, some thirty thousand Muslim rebels fought the bulk of the Philippine armed forces, backed by aircraft and armor, in a brutal civil war that caused fifty thousand deaths.<sup>32</sup> As the combat stalemated, Marcos negotiated with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) at Tripoli, and drove a wedge into Muslim ranks by coopting eight top rebel commanders on Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, awarding them local government posts and, said one of these ex-rebels, delivering "hundreds of firearms ... to combat the MNLF."<sup>33</sup> After continuing fitfully for another quarter century, the insurgency erupted again after September 2001, prompting a decade of joint counter-terror operations by U.S. Special Forces and the Philippine military.<sup>34</sup>

To contain the centrifugal pull of both local and transnational forces, Manila has deputized a panoply of parastatal elements to control its violent southern frontier, including bandits, warlords, smugglers, militia chiefs, forest concessionaires, ex-rebels, and vigilantes. Instead of maintaining its monopoly on violence via military and police, Manila has controlled much of its

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *Feet to the Fire* (Annapolis, 1999), 28–35, 44–80; Lino Miani, *The Sulu Arms Market* (Singapore, 2011), 65–73; John T. Sidel, "Filipino Gangsters in Film, Legend, and History," in Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *Lives at the Margin* (Quezon City, 2000), 149–80; John Sidel, "The Usual Suspects," in Vicente L. Rafael, ed., *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam* (Ithaca, 1999), 70–90.

<sup>32</sup> Marites Dañguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon* (Quezon City, 2000), 2–23; Eva-Lotta E. Hedman and John T. Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000), 166–73; Max L. Gross, *A Muslim Archipelago* (Washington, D.C., 2007), 184–221.

<sup>33</sup> Sol Jose Vanzi, "Politicians Predict Revival of Sulu's 'Magic 8,'" *Philippine Headline News Online*, 7 July 2004, <http://www.newflash.org/2004/02/ht/004500.htm>; "ARRM Water System Project Leads to Reconciliation of Warring Siblings in Sulu," *Mindanao Examiner*, 5 Nov. 2008, [http://mindanaoexaminer.com/news.php?news\\_id=20081104181843](http://mindanaoexaminer.com/news.php?news_id=20081104181843); "Arbison on Alleged Arms Landing in Luuk: A Big Lie?" [www.zambotimes.com](http://www.zambotimes.com), 9 Jan. 2010, <http://www.zambotimes.com/archives/17398-Arbison-on-alleged-arms-landing-in-Luuk-A-big-lie.html>; Amina Rasul, "In Tawi-Tawi, They Asked: Why not Bangsa Sama or Bangsa Mindanao?" *BusinessWorldonline*, 16 Nov. 2014, <http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Opinion&title=in-tawi-tawi-they-asked-why-not-bangsa-sama-or-bangsa-mindanao&id=97972>.

<sup>34</sup> Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror* (New York, 2003), 104–23.

remote periphery by delegating informal authority to these fragments of the state, variants of what Max Weber called “autonomous functionaries,” by conceding them legal immunity and local autonomy.<sup>35</sup>

Such delegated authority came with high costs—deforestation, systemic illegality, and political violence. In 2009, for example, a Mindanao provincial governor’s militia massacred fifty-seven people, including thirty-four journalists.<sup>36</sup> One analysis of such vendettas argues that, since 2002, that island’s political clans have fought to control eighteen economic activities, all of them extralegal, including smuggling, drug production, DVD piracy, kidnapping, arms trade, illicit *jueteng* gambling, and illegal logging.<sup>37</sup> As illegal logging “tore through one rainforest after another to satisfy ... the demands of a reindustrializing Japan,” Mindanao lost 45 percent of its forest cover from 1950 to 1987.<sup>38</sup>

More broadly, Manila’s attempt at pacification through a fusion of conventional and surrogate forces failed to suppress an Islamic insurgency that has persisted within this periphery for nearly half a century. If not defeating it outright, however, the seemingly weak Philippine state has constrained this secessionist revolt and thus avoided the fate of seemingly stronger states such as Indonesia and Pakistan. At considerable social cost, the Philippines has harnessed a localized covert netherworld to the task of maintaining its territorial integrity, and this clandestine domain has in turn shaped the character of the larger polity, making it decentralized and even diffuse, yet resilient and paradoxically potent.

#### NATIONAL LEVEL—PHILIPPINES

Even when we shift our analytic focus to the country’s core on Luzon Island, systemic illegality, in the form of illegal gambling and illicit drugs, has played an outsized role in regional and national elections since the 1980s, allowing this criminal milieu to influence the character of the Philippine polity. By banning opium and most gambling between 1906 and 1908, the U.S. colonial regime created the regulatory preconditions for the rise of a thriving vice economy. Although the opium ban was moderately effective, parallel gambling restrictions were an ill-advised attempt to transform popular culture through police coercion. After independence in 1946, a conservative moral consensus preserved these prohibitions on personal vice, maintaining the regulatory prerequisite for the country’s covert netherworld. Apart from a periodic recurrence

<sup>35</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (New York, 1946), 82–83.

<sup>36</sup> *Guardian*, 26 Nov. 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/26/philippines-masacre-politician-charged>.

<sup>37</sup> Francisco J. Lara, Jr. and Phil Champaign, “Inclusive Peace in Muslim Mindanao,” *International Alert* (2009): 4–16.

<sup>38</sup> Patricio N. Abinales, *Orthodoxy and History in the Muslim-Mindanao Narrative* (Quezon City, 2010), 167–68.

of illegal drugs—heroin in the 1960s and amphetamines since the 1980s—illegal gambling, especially a daily lottery called *jueteng*, has dominated the vice economy of Manila and its Luzon hinterland through its resilience, size, and political ramifications.<sup>39</sup>

Since the resumption of free elections in 1987 after fourteen years of authoritarian rule, illegal *jueteng* gambling has fueled the machinery of local politics with cash and campaign workers. During the daily betting, *jueteng cobradores*, or runners, emerge from a maze of urban slums with hundreds of small bets whose sum is a billion-dollar industry. Reversing this process during elections, these runners move back down the same nameless alleys to numberless squatter shacks buying votes and mobilizing otherwise faceless voters.

Statistics indicate the sheer scale of this illicit industry. A 1999 survey found that 28 percent of all adult Filipinos bet on *jueteng*. A few months later, the Philippine legislature estimated the annual gross from gambling syndicates on Luzon Island alone at nearly a billion U.S. dollars. This illegal lottery employed an estimated four hundred thousand workers—far more than the 280,000 in the country's largest export industry, silicon chip manufacturing. If we add this \$1 billion in illegal gambling to the \$5 billion from illicit drug sales, then the Philippine vice economy was a vast underground industry with gross revenues equivalent to nearly half the government's annual budget and a commensurate power to corrupt.<sup>40</sup> "It's the drug lords and the gambling lords ... who finance the candidates," said House Speaker Jose de Venecia in October 2007. "So from Day One, they become corrupt ... the whole political process is rotten."<sup>41</sup>

Through three administrations from 1987 to 2010, *jueteng*'s grip on the country's politics tightened. Confronted with a succession of military coups, the government of Corazon Aquino (1986–1992), desperate for cash to build a private security force and a bloc of loyal legislators, forged the first explicit alliance between the national executive and provincial *jueteng* bosses. Under

<sup>39</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, "Covert Netherworld," in Eric Wilson, ed., *Government of the Shadows* (London, 2009), 226–55.

<sup>40</sup> *Manila Bulletin*, 18 Sept., 11 Oct., and 21 Oct. 2000; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 Mar., 6 Oct., and 9 Oct. 2000; and Wilfredo R. Reotutar, *So The People May Know* (Quezon City, 1999), 113–17; Social Weather Stations, SWS Media Release, 8 Dec. 1999, "Moral Attitudes against Gambling Hardly Affect Gambling Behavior—SWS Survey," <http://www.sws.org.ph/pr120899.html>; U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2001* (Washington, D.C., 2001), Philippines, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2001/rpt/8483.htm>; Republic of the Philippines, National Statistical Coordination Board, *2000 Philippine Statistical Yearbook* (Manila, 2000), Tables 15.2, 15.4, and 15.5; Steven C. McKay, *Satanic Mills or Silicon Islands? The Politics of High-Tech Production in the Philippines* (Ithaca, 2006), 46–47.

<sup>41</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 Oct. 2007; Paul D. Hutchcroft, "The Arroyo Imbroglgio in the Philippines," *Journal of Democracy* 19, 1 (2008): 141–55, 151.

the administration of Joseph Estrada (1998–2001), an unexpected exposé of the president's alliance with leading “gambling lords” prompted mass demonstrations that soon pushed him out of Malacañang Palace and into prison. Although his successor, Gloria Arroyo (2001–2010), took her oath of office before a crowd that cheered her promises of reform, she too was soon mired in a strikingly similar scandal that came perilously close to evicting her from the palace—specifically, taking bribes from gambling syndicates and vote rigging in the same Mindanao region where, in November 2009, a warlord ally massacred those fifty-seven political opponents.<sup>42</sup>

If political patronage and illegal gambling were now the interlocking gears in Philippine politics, then illegal *jueteng* gambling was the oil that lubricated a costly electoral machinery otherwise unsustainable in such an impoverished society. Clearly, the covert dimension has shaped Philippine state formation, fostering a semi-autonomous region in the Muslim south and influencing the conduct of electoral politics in the core region of Central Luzon. In sum, the Philippine experience since independence in 1946 reveals how localized netherworlds can take form at the confluence of key components—state policy, illicit commerce, and syndicate crime—and thereby shape both the character of a national polity and the pattern of its politics.

#### TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL—CENTRAL AMERICA

Two of the largest CIA covert operations during the Cold War in Central Asia and Central America reveal the complexities of politico-military operations in this murky netherworld. In both cases, protracted U.S. force projection through clandestine alliances in regions with significant narcotics trafficking created vibrant covert netherworlds with resonant political ramifications. Once a state projects its force covertly, whether through secret services, privatized force, or their combination, then capture of that netherworld's elements, particularly its volatile illicit income, is critical to the operation's success and, conversely, losing control over any component can produce complications.

After the Soviet troops occupied Kabul and leftist Sandinista guerrillas seized Managua in 1979, the White House—first under Jimmy Carter but most decisively under Ronald Reagan—responded with clandestine operations rather than conventional military intervention. By fighting through surrogates, Nicaraguan Contras and Afghan mujahedeen, and tolerating their involvement in the local drug traffic, the CIA catalyzed formation of covert netherworlds astride the Nicaraguan-Honduran borderlands and the Afghan-Pakistan frontier that entailed realpolitik manipulations of these clandestine forces.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire* (Madison, 2009), 448, 477–95, 498–99, 506–10; Human Rights Watch, “*They Own the People*” (16 Nov. 2010), <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/11/17/they-own-people>.

When the Contra guerrillas began attacking Nicaragua from camps inside Honduras in the early 1980s, Honduras was already serving as a major transit route for the Medellín cocaine cartel's flights north to the United States.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) opened a new office at Tegucigalpa in 1981, and its chief agent there, Tomas Zepeda, soon found that the country's ruling military officers were implicated in the transit traffic. In June 1983, however, the DEA shut that office without consulting Zepeda and transferred him to Guatemala "where he continued to spend 70 percent of his time dealing with the Honduran drug problem."<sup>44</sup> Asked why this office was closed, another DEA agent replied: "The Pentagon made it clear that we were in the way. They had more important business."<sup>45</sup> In the late 1980s, a Senate subcommittee also found that four Contra-connected corporations hired by the U.S. State Department to fly "humanitarian aid" to Contra forces were also smuggling cocaine back into the United States, part of the flood of drugs that unleashed a crack epidemic inside American cities.<sup>46</sup>

Such charges of Contra trafficking were soon overshadowed by the larger Iran-Contra political scandal and largely forgotten until 1996 when the *San Jose Mercury News* tried to establish a direct connection between Contra cocaine smuggling and street-level crack distribution in Los Angeles. In the firestorm of controversy that followed publication of the paper's "Dark Alliance" series, the national press attacked the *Mercury's* interpretation of these connections. But a later report by the CIA's Inspector General Frederick P. Hitz documented agency collusion with traffickers in Central America.<sup>47</sup>

With extensive quotations from classified memoranda and interviews, volume two of the Hitz report offers forty-eight paragraphs of extraordinary detail—since suppressed at the CIA's website—about the agency's alliance with one of the Caribbean's top cocaine smugglers, and thus allows our first inside look at its management of the complex forces at play within a covert netherworld.<sup>48</sup> To facilitate its arms shipments to the Contras, complicated by a Congressional embargo, the CIA allied with Alan Hyde, a notorious

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Senate, 100th Congress, 2d Session, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations, *Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C., Dec. 1988), 73–75.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Mort Rosenblum, "Hidden Agendas," *Vanity Fair*, Mar. 1990, 120.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Senate, *Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy*, 42–49.

<sup>47</sup> *San Jose Mercury News*, 18–19 Aug. 1996. For a book-length exposition of this case, see, Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (New York, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Between my downloading this report from the CIA website on 1 November 1998 and reviewing it on 12 October 2015, these forty-eight paragraphs were replaced by a notice reading "[Paragraphs 913 to 961 removed]." See, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of the Inspector General, *Allegations of Connections between CIA and Contras in Cocaine Trafficking in the United States* (1) (96-0143-IG), "Vol. II: The Contra Story," pars. 913–61, <http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/cocaine2/contents.html>.

cocaine trafficker with thirty-five ships crisscrossing the Caribbean, to access his port facilities in the strategic Bay Islands off Honduras.<sup>49</sup>

In the years before the CIA allied with Hyde, every U.S. security agency active in Honduras had intelligence that he was a major trafficker. During the 1980s, Hyde had used his fishing fleet and fish-processing plant at Roatan Island to emerge, in the words of the U.S. Coast Guard, as the “godfather for all criminal activities originating in Bay Islands.” In 1984, the U.S. Defense Department attaché at Tegucigalpa reported that Hyde “is making much money dealing in ‘white gold,’ i.e. cocaine.”<sup>50</sup> Two years later, the U.S. Coast Guard reported that Hyde’s “organized criminal organization” was smuggling cocaine from the Bay Islands on “fishing vessels bound for South Florida.” In addition to his own ships, Hyde was also serving as master of the vessel M/V *Bobby* “as a favor to Pablo Escobar, a major Colombian cocaine trafficker.”<sup>51</sup> In March 1988, a report from the CIA’s own Directorate of Intelligence, titled “Honduras: Emerging Player in the Drug Trade,” stated that Hyde was smuggling chemicals for two cocaine-producing plants in the Bay Islands.<sup>52</sup>

Showing how a local social matrix can shape the character of covert operations, geography circumscribed the CIA’s choices along this Caribbean coastline. Lying astride the main smuggling routes between Colombia and the U.S. Gulf Coast, Hyde’s base in the Bay Islands was ideally sited not only for smuggling cocaine north to America but also for the transshipment of arms south to the Contra bases along the Honduras-Nicaragua border.

Consequently, the CIA found it convenient to collaborate with Hyde to supply its Contra allies from 1987 to 1989, a critical three-year period in both the proxy war against Nicaragua’s leftist Sandinista government and the smuggling of cocaine into the United States. In July 1987, a CIA field operative first suggested “using Hyde’s vessels to ferry supplies would be more economical, secure and time efficient than using aircraft.” Although the Central American Task Force (CATF) at CIA headquarters warned, for the record, that Hyde “might have ties to drug traffickers,” it still permitted contacts pending higher approval for a logistical alliance.<sup>53</sup> On 14 July, CIA headquarters cabled field officers that “there is a very real risk that news of our relationship with subject, whose reputation as an alleged drug smuggler is widely known to various agencies, will hit the public domain—something that could bring our program to a full stop.”<sup>54</sup> Two weeks later, however, W. George Jameson, counsel to the CIA’s Director for Operations, advised Alan Fiers, head of the CATF, that

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pars. 914, 916–17, 921.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., par. 916.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., par. 922.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., par. 925.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., par. 930.

despite a Congressional ban on ties to “any individual who has been found to engage in ... drug smuggling,” this contact could proceed since “neither the firm, nor its owner, Alan Hyde, is under indictment or investigation to your knowledge and the allegations of drug trafficking are not substantiated.”<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, on 5 August 1987, Fiers advised his superior, CIA Deputy Director for Operations Clair George, that they “had no choice but to use Hyde on the grounds of ‘operational necessity,’” even though he was “not attractive.” George, in turn, discussed Hyde with the CIA’s Deputy Director Robert Gates, saying, “We need to use him, but we also need to figure out how to get rid of him.” After Gates approved the relationship at the agency’s highest level, George, in a cable dated 8 August, issued the authorization to use Hyde to “provide logistical services to complete a project, after which all contacts must cease.”<sup>56</sup> During the Inspector General’s later investigation, Fiers recalled that Gates, as acting CIA Director, had also given him verbal approval to use Hyde “on a highly restricted basis.”<sup>57</sup>

Over the next two years, CIA headquarters sent what one agent called “mixed signals” about “the relationship with Hyde” to its field operatives. One CIA officer recalled that there was “a lot of pressure from Fiers and DCI [William] Casey to get the ‘job done.’” But other officials urged caution “to make sure that the Agency would be protected in case the congressional intelligence oversight committees ‘came calling.’”<sup>58</sup> Left to resolve these contradictory directives, one CIA logistics officer, illustrating the affinity that can form between clandestine and criminal actors, insisted he “never believed the drug allegations against Hyde, whom he came to regard as a close friend,” though he admitted “it might have been possible for an employee of Hyde to use one of the boats for smuggling.”<sup>59</sup>

In March 1988, CIA headquarters authorized the leasing of additional storage facilities from Hyde despite recent internal intelligence that he was “the head of an air smuggling ring with contacts in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area.”<sup>60</sup> Within several months, however, “the receipt of continuing allegations of Hyde’s involvement in cocaine trafficking” pressured CIA headquarters to find an alternative, particularly once a resumption of shipments to the Contras, briefly suspended in response to Congressional sanctions, made the agency less dependent upon his storage facilities to “mothball” supplies. Even so, field officers resisted requests from headquarters to sever ties, arguing that Hyde was their only reliable “delivery mechanism.”<sup>61</sup> By early

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 936.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 938–39, 942.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 943.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 927.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 932–33.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pars. 949–50.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 951.



1989, however, these logistics problems had apparently been resolved, and CIA headquarters finally ordered its field operatives to break off all contact—just a year before the Sandinistas finally lost power in Nicaragua’s February 1990 elections.<sup>62</sup>

Although the tactical alliance was over, the CIA apparently continued to shield Hyde’s drug smuggling from investigation by both Honduran and American authorities for another four years. In March 1993, an internal CIA directive stated that it was agency policy to “discourage ... counternarcotics efforts against Alan Hyde because ‘his connection to [the CIA] is well documented and could prove difficult in the prosecution stage.’”<sup>63</sup>

In retrospect, it seems the CIA had closed its covert war zone to narcotics enforcement and thereby protected a top drug smuggler from investigation for six years, 1987 to 1993, at the peak of the U.S. crack-cocaine epidemic. Simultaneous with his determined support for the Contras, President Reagan also re-directed the U.S. drug war toward intensified domestic enforcement, raising the cry of moral crisis to win draconian penalties for personal drug use. After remaining stable at 110 prisoners per 100,000 population for a half-century, drug enforcement doubled the U.S. prison population during his two terms from 370,000 in 1981 to 713,000 in 1989. Driven by Reagan-era drug laws, the nation’s incarceration continued climbing to 2.3 million by 2008 (for 751 prisoners per 100,000 population), with over half (53 percent) of those in federal penitentiaries sentenced for drug offenses.<sup>64</sup>

Such mass incarceration led to significant disenfranchisement, starting a trend that would, by 2012, deny the vote to nearly six million people and 8 percent of all African Americans, a liberal constituency that had voted overwhelmingly Democratic for over half a century. Moreover, this U.S. carceral regime concentrated its prison populations, comprising guards and enumerated yet disenfranchised prisoners, in conservative rural districts, creating something akin to latter-day “rotten boroughs” for the Republican Party.<sup>65</sup> By fusing covert and overt, the underlying systemic logic of the clandestine netherworld invested President Reagan’s drug policy with an implicit synergy, strengthening his conservative political base at home through moral crisis and mass incarceration while simultaneously securing critical peripheries abroad.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 952.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 953.

<sup>64</sup> Tracy L. Snell, *Correctional Populations in the United States, 1991* (Washington, D.C., NCJ-147729, Aug. 1993), 6; U.S. Department of Justice, “Prisoners in 1988,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, 1; U.S. Department of Justice, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1990*, 604; Ethan A. Nadelmann, “U.S. Drug Policy,” *Foreign Policy* 70 (Spring 1988): 83–108, 99; *New York Times*, 23 Apr. 2008, and 27 May 2008.

<sup>65</sup> The Sentencing Project, “Felony Disenfranchisement,” <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=133>.

From the realpolitik perspective implicit in such covert warfare, the post-facto firestorm sparked by the *San Jose Mercury's* accusations about a “Dark Alliance” between CIA operations and Contra traffickers, allegedly flooding American cities with crack cocaine, missed a more fundamental point, regardless of this exposé’s merits or demerits. Operating within this netherworld where smuggling and surrogate warfare coincided, manipulation of clandestine elements to effect a congruence with the covert operation was integral to the mission’s success. Indeed, the operational requisite of containing these volatile covert elements, particularly the illicit income from narcotics trafficking, would become blindingly clear in the initial success and later failure of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.

#### TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL—AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan’s iteration of the covert netherworld ultimately demonstrated a marked autonomy that would restrain the global reach of the world’s greatest superpower. Throughout more than three decades in Afghanistan, 1979 to 2015, Washington’s clandestine operations succeeded when they coincided with Central Asia’s illicit traffic in opium, the ultimate covert commodity, and suffered when they failed to capture or complement it. During its first intervention from 1979 to 1989, the CIA mounted a surrogate war that expelled the Soviets, in part, because the agency’s mujahedeen allies used the country’s swelling drug traffic to sustain their decade-long struggle. Throughout fourteen years of combat since 2001, by contrast, pacification by 100,000 American troops and 350,000 Afghan forces failed to curtail the Taliban insurgency, largely because, as conventional military forces, they could not capture the swelling surplus from the county’s heroin trade. In retrospect, control over this volatile illicit income seems determinative, contributing materially to the success of CIA covert warfare from 1979 to 1989 but constraining the U.S. pacification campaign since 2001.

During its surrogate war against Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989, CIA intervention catalyzed an array of factors—ethnic divisions, Islamic fundamentalism, Pakistani influence, and opium trafficking—that transformed the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands into a covert netherworld. By operating from the nearby Pakistani tribal territory known as the North-West Frontier Province, the agency sited its operation midst the circuits of Central Asia’s illicit commerce, showing once again how social context shaped a covert intervention. “In the tribal area,” the U.S. State Department reported in 1986, “There is no police force. There are no courts. There is no taxation. No weapon is illegal.... Hashish and opium are often on display.”<sup>66</sup> Instead of forming its own coalition of resistance leaders, the CIA allied with Pakistan’s Inter

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C., 1986).

Service Intelligence (ISI) and its Afghan clients who soon became principals in the burgeoning cross-border opium traffic.<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, Afghanistan's opium production grew twentyfold from 100 tons in the 1970s to 2,000 tons by 1991.<sup>68</sup> In 1979–1980, a network of heroin laboratories opened along the Afghan-Pakistan frontier, which soon became the world's largest heroin producer supplying 60 percent of the U.S. market and 80 percent of the European.<sup>69</sup> Inside Pakistan, the number of heroin addicts rose from near 0 in 1979 and 5,000 in 1980 to 1,300,000 by 1985—one of the highest rates of addiction in the world.<sup>70</sup>

According to a 1986 U.S. State Department report, opium “is an ideal crop in a war-torn country since it requires little capital investment, is fast growing and is easily transported and traded.” Moreover, Afghanistan's climate was well suited for this temperate crop, with average yields two to three times higher than Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle region.<sup>71</sup> With the war generating five million refugees and disrupting food production, Afghan farmers turned to opium “in desperation” since it allowed “high profits” which covered rising food prices, while resistance elements, said the State Department, “engage in opium production and trafficking ... to provide staples for population under their control and to fund weapons purchases.”<sup>72</sup>

As the mujahedeen guerrillas gained control over liberated zones inside Afghanistan during the early 1980s, they collected tax payments from peasants in opium, particularly in the fertile Helmand Valley, once the breadbasket of Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup> Caravans carrying CIA arms into Afghanistan for the resistance often returned to Pakistan loaded with opium—sometimes, in the words of the *New York Times*, “with the assent of Pakistani or American intelligence

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Lifschultz, “Dangerous Liaison,” *Newsline* (Karachi), 19 Nov. 1989: 49–54; *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 2001, and 30 May 2002; Charles G. Cogan, “Partners in Time,” *World Policy Journal* 10, 2 (1993): 73–82, 76, 79.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Cabinet Committee on International Narcotics Control, *World Opium Survey 1972* (Washington, D.C., 1972), 10–11, 47; U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, April 1994* (Washington, D.C., 1994), 4; “Afghanistan,” *Geopolitical Drug Dispatch*, no. 3 (Jan. 1992), 1, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Mathea Falco, “Asian Narcotics: The Impact on Europe,” *Drug Enforcement* 6, 1 (Feb. 1979): 2–7, 2–3; *World Opium Survey 1972*, A-7, A-14, A-17; U.S., Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 4; William French Smith, “Drug Traffic Today—Challenge and Response,” *Drug Enforcement* (Summer 1982): 2–5, 2–3; U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 1986* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 480.

<sup>70</sup> Pakistan Narcotics Control Board, *National Survey on Drug Abuse in Pakistan* (Islamabad, 1986), iii, ix, 23, 308; Zahid Hussain, “Narcopower,” *Newsline* (Karachi), Dec. 1989: 17; UN, *World Drug Report 2000*, 4, 78, 150.

<sup>71</sup> *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 1986*, 480–81.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C., 1988), 177–78.

<sup>73</sup> *New York Times*, 18 June 1986.

officers.”<sup>74</sup> Once the mujahedeen brought the opium across the border, they sold it to Pakistani heroin refiners operating in the North-West Frontier Province, the covert war zone administered by General Fazle Haq, an ISI officer. By 1988, there were an estimated one hundred to two hundred heroin refineries in the Province’s Khyber district alone.<sup>75</sup> Further south in the Koh-i-Soltan district of Baluchistan Province, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the CIA’s favored Afghan asset, controlled six refineries that processed much of the opium harvest from the Helmand Valley into heroin.<sup>76</sup> From these borderlands, trucks of the Pakistan army’s National Logistic Cell, arriving from Karachi with crates of CIA arms, carried the heroin to ports and airports for export to world markets.<sup>77</sup>

In May 1990, as this covert operation was ending, the *Washington Post* reported that the CIA’s chief asset Hekmatyar was also the rebels’ leading heroin trafficker. Significantly, the *Post* claimed that U.S. officials had long refused to investigate charges of heroin dealing by Hekmatyar and Pakistan’s ISI largely “because U.S. narcotics policy in Afghanistan has been subordinated to the war against Soviet influence there.”<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, the former CIA director for the Afghan operation, Charles Cogan, spoke frankly about his agency’s choices. “Our main mission was to do as much damage as possible to the Soviets,” he told Australian television in 1995. “We didn’t really have the resources or the time to devote to an investigation of the drug trade. I don’t think that we need to apologize for this.... There was fallout in term of drugs, yes. But the main objective was accomplished. The Soviets left Afghanistan.”<sup>79</sup> For obvious political reasons, Cogan could not add that the mujahedeen’s control over the lucrative opium traffic had tightened their political ties to the country’s peasantry and consequently amplified their military capacities, contributing significantly the success of the CIA’s covert mission.

Over the longer term, however, such clandestine intervention, so easily unleashed in Afghanistan during the Cold War, produced a black hole of geopolitical instability not easily sealed or healed in its aftermath. As Afghanistan’s covert war wound down between 1989 and 1992, the Western alliance failed to sponsor a peace settlement or finance reconstruction, leaving the country with 1.5 million dead, three million refugees, a ravaged economy, and well-armed warlords primed to fight for power. After growing twentyfold to 2,000 tons

<sup>74</sup> *New York Times*, 22 Oct. 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Kathy Evans, “The Tribal Trail,” *Newsline* (Karachi), Dec. 1989: 26.

<sup>76</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, testimony before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, “Answers to Questions for Private Witnesses,” 7 Mar. 1990, 18–19; *Washington Post*, 13 May 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence Lifschultz, “Inside the Kingdom of Heroin,” *Nation*, 14 Nov. 1988: 495–96.

<sup>78</sup> *Washington Post*, 13 May 1990.

<sup>79</sup> Aspire Films, “Dealing with the Demon: Part II” (Sydney: produced by Chris Hilton, 1994).

during the covert war of the 1980s, the opium harvest would double during the civil war of the 1990s.<sup>80</sup>

In the broadest sense, opium's ascent was a social response to the severe damage two decades of warfare had inflicted on this country's arid ecology with a fragile balance of annual field crops, orchards, and herding.<sup>81</sup> With the return of some three million Afghan refugees to a war-ravaged land after 1989, agricultural workers found scarce employment in the opium fields, which fortuitously required nine times more labor than the traditional staple wheat.<sup>82</sup> In this devastated economy, moreover, opium merchants alone could accumulate capital rapidly to provide poor farmers with crop advances equivalent to over half their annual income—credit critical to the survival of many poor villagers.<sup>83</sup>

After capturing Kabul in 1996, the fundamentalist Taliban regime both taxed and encouraged opium cultivation while protecting exports to international markets.<sup>84</sup> The UN opium surveys showed that, during their first three years in power, the Taliban raised Afghanistan's opium production to 4,600 tons by 1999—equivalent to 75 percent of world illicit supply. The UN also noted that the regime's commitment to opium eradication "remains questionable, as it continues to collect taxes on the opium poppy crop that is harvested and the heroin that is manufactured."<sup>85</sup>

But in July 2000, as a devastating drought entered its second year and mass starvation spread across Afghanistan, the Taliban government ordered a sudden ban on all opium cultivation in an apparent bid for international recognition.<sup>86</sup> A UN crop survey of 10,030 villages found this prohibition cut the harvest from 3,300 tons in 2000 to only 185 tons in 2001—a 94 percent reduction.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 2001; *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Mar. 2000), 56; UN International Drug Control Programme, *Afghanistan: Annual Survey 2000* (Islamabad, 2000), 15.

<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, 26 Nov. 2001; Daniel Balland, "Nomadic Pastoralists and Sedentary Hosts in the Central and Western Hindukush Mountains, Afghanistan," in Nigel J. R. Allan, Gregory W. Knapp, and Christoph Stadel, eds., *Human Impact on Mountains* (Totowa, 1988), 265–70; Nigel Allan, "Modernization of Rural Afghanistan," in Louis Dupree and Linette Albert, eds., *Afghanistan in the 1970s* (New York, 1974), 117–18.

<sup>82</sup> UN Information Service, "Opium Production in Myanmar Declines" (UNIS/NAR/760), 27 Aug. 2002, <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2002/nar760.html>; UN International Drug Control Programme, *Strategic Study #4* (Islamabad, 1999), 2; UN, *Afghanistan: Annual Survey 2000*, 23; *New York Times*, 24 May, and 4 Dec. 2001.

<sup>83</sup> UN, *World Drug Report 2000*, 7–11; UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *Strategic Study #3: The Role of Opium as a Source of Informal Credit* (Islamabad, 1999), [http://www.odccp.org:80/pakistan/report\\_1999](http://www.odccp.org:80/pakistan/report_1999).

<sup>84</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, 2000), 118–20.

<sup>85</sup> UN, *World Drug Report* (1997), ii; UN, *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1999* (New York, 2000), par. 49, 370–71; Labrousse and Laniel, "World Geopolitics of Drugs," 62.

<sup>86</sup> UN, *Afghanistan: Annual Survey 2000*, iii; *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 2001.

<sup>87</sup> UN, *Afghanistan: Annual Survey 2000*, 21–23; UN International Drug Control Programme, *Afghanistan: Annual Survey 2001* (Islamabad, 2001), iii, 11, 15–17; *New York Times*, 23 Nov. 2001.

Just a year later, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA's second intervention in Afghanistan succeeded, in large part, because the Taliban had presided over this rapid opium eradication without any alternative livelihood for rural communities—in effect, economic self-evisceration through drug prohibition. As the United States began bombing the country in October 2001, the CIA shipped in \$70 million to mobilize its old coalition of tribal warlords for an attack on the Taliban regime, an expenditure that President Bush hailed as one of history's biggest “bargains.”<sup>88</sup> To capture Kabul and secondary cities, the CIA mobilized Northern Alliance leaders who had long dominated the drug traffic in the northeast and Pashtun warlords active as drug smugglers in the southeast, creating a postwar politics ideal for the resumption of opium cultivation.<sup>89</sup>

Once Kabul and provincial cities were captured, the CIA quickly ceded operational control to uniformed allied forces and civilian officials whose inept drug suppression soon left the heroin traffic's growing profits to the Taliban guerrillas. In the first year of U.S. occupation, the opium harvest surged from 185 to 3,400 tons, producing an extraordinary 62 percent of Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2003.<sup>90</sup> After nearly two years of disinterest in drugs, the White House was confronted, in late 2004, with troubling CIA intelligence that the escalating opium traffic was fueling a revival of the Taliban. Backed by President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell urged an aggressive counter-narcotics strategy with massive defoliation. But U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad resisted, seconded by his local ally Ashraf Ghani, then finance minister, who warned that eradication would mean “widespread impoverishment” without \$20 billion in foreign aid for “genuine alternative livelihood.”<sup>91</sup>

As a compromise, Washington relied on contractors, such as DynCorp, to train Afghani manual eradication teams. But by 2005 the government's effort had become, said the *New York Times*, “something of a joke.”<sup>92</sup> Two years later, as the Taliban insurgency and opium cultivation spread with seeming synergy, the U.S. embassy again pressed Kabul to accept the aerial defoliation used in Colombia. But President Hamid Karzai refused, leaving this critical problem unresolved.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, 15 Jan. 2002; Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York, 2002), 35, 139–43, 194, 253, 298–99, 317.

<sup>89</sup> *New York Times*, 15 Jan. 2002.

<sup>90</sup> Doris Buddenberg and William A. Byrd, *Afghanistan's Drug Industry* (Vienna, 2006), 25–28, [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Afgh\\_drugindustry\\_Nov06.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Afgh_drugindustry_Nov06.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> *New York Times*, 16 May 2007, and 11 Dec. 2004.

<sup>92</sup> *New York Times*, 17 Feb. 2006, and 16 May 2007.

<sup>93</sup> *New York Times*, 22 Oct., 28 May, and 3 Sept. 2006; Martin Jelsma and Tom Kramer, *Downward Spiral* (Amsterdam, 2005), 4–9; *New York Times*, 12 Aug., 8 Oct. 2007; *Guardian*, 7 Dec. 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/07/afghanistan.usa>.

Testifying to this policy failure, the UN's *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007* found the annual harvest was up 24 percent to a record 8,200 tons, accounting for 53 percent of the country's GDP and 93 percent of the world's illicit heroin supply. Significantly, the UN stated that Taliban "guerrillas have started to extract from the drug economy resources for arms, logistics, and militia pay."<sup>94</sup> A study for the U.S. Institute of Peace found the Taliban collected \$425 million in taxes on a 2008 harvest of 7,700 tons, and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime concurred. After each opium harvest, the Taliban gained the funds for a new crop of young male fighters from the villages, paying each guerrilla about \$300 a month, far more than their wages for agricultural labor.<sup>95</sup>

To contain this insurgency, in mid-2008 Washington was forced to commit forty thousand more combat troops, raising allied forces to seventy thousand.<sup>96</sup> Recognizing the role of opium revenues for Taliban recruitment, the U.S. Treasury formed the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, with sixty analysts embedded in combat units, who would often, reported one veteran analyst, "point to hawala brokers [rural bankers] as critical nodes within an insurgent group's network," leading to "shutting down the operation ... at the cost of upsetting an entire village" dependent on the lender for credit.<sup>97</sup>

Even after a massive surge in 2009 brought U.S. troop strength to 102,000 in a bid to cripple the Taliban, the guerrillas had, by the end of 2012, "weathered the biggest push the American-led coalition is going to make against them."<sup>98</sup> Midst the drawdown of allied combat forces in October 2014, the *New York Times* reported that the reduction in U.S. air operations had allowed the Taliban to resume mass-formation attacks in the north, northeast, and south, killing record numbers of Afghan army and police.<sup>99</sup> After months of relentless pressure on government forces in three northern provinces, the Taliban showed their strength by occupying the strategic city of Kunduz for two weeks in September 2015, forcing Washington to postpone its planned withdrawal of combat forces. Midst the rapid evacuation of its regional

<sup>94</sup> UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007* (UN, 2007), iii–iv, 7, 39, 60, 71, 77, 86, <http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan-Opium-Survey-2007.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> Gretchen Peters, *How Opium Profits the Taliban* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 23; UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008* (UN, 2008), 2–3; Brian Steward, "The New Afghan Battle Plan, Bribing the Taliban," *CBC News*, 27 Jan. 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-new-afghan-battle-plan-bribing-the-taliban-1.893983>.

<sup>96</sup> *New York Times*, 3 May 2008.

<sup>97</sup> J. Edward Conway, "Analysis in Combat," *Small Wars Journal*, 5 July 2012, <http://smallwars-journal.com/printpdf/12915>; U.S. Department of Treasury, Press Center, "Fact Sheet," 8 Sept. 2011, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1291.aspxm>.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Times*, 2 Oct. 2012.

<sup>99</sup> *New York Times*, 23 Oct. 2014.

offices, the UN released a map showing the Taliban had “high” or “extreme” control in over half the country’s rural districts.<sup>100</sup>

Offering an explanation for the Taliban’s survival, the U.S. special inspector for Afghanistan, John Sopko, reported that, despite U.S. expenditure of \$7.6 billion on drug eradication during the past decade, “production and cultivation are up, interdiction and eradication are down, financial support to the insurgency is up.” Indeed, the 2013 opium crop covered a record 209,000 hectares, raising the yield by 50 percent to \$3 billion and providing the Taliban an estimated \$320 million, over half their income. The U.S. embassy corroborated this dismal assessment, calling this illicit income “a windfall for the insurgency, which profits from the drug trade at almost every level.”<sup>101</sup> A month later, fresh UN figures for the 2014 harvest continued the dismal trend, with crop area rising to 224,000 hectares and opium production back up to 6,400 tons.<sup>102</sup>

As the Taliban seized the combat initiative in 2015, opium seemed ingrained in the fabric of its operations. The rebels’ new leader proclaimed that July, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, was, reported the *New York Times*, “among the first major Taliban officials to be linked to the drug trade ... and later became the Taliban’s main tax collector for the narcotics trade—creating immense profits.” The organization’s first operation under his command was an attack on the northern Kunduz Province, which had “the country’s most lucrative drug routes ... moving opium from the poppy prolific provinces in the south to Tajikistan ... and to Russia and Europe.”<sup>103</sup>

Significantly, the strongest attacks came in the heroin heartland of Helmand Province, where half the country’s poppy crop was grown and where, reported the UN Security Council, the Taliban had tapped “into the supply chain at each stage of the narcotics trade,” collecting a 10 percent tax on local opium cultivation and fighting for control of heroin labs.<sup>104</sup> By year’s end, the Taliban had come close to capturing the province’s opium-rich Marja district. In fertile poppy districts astride the Helmand River system,

<sup>100</sup> *New York Times*, 29 July, 2 Oct., 12 Oct., and 14 Oct. 2015.

<sup>101</sup> *New York Times*, 27 Oct. 2014; UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013: Summary Findings* (Kabul, 2013), 3–7, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghan\\_report\\_Summary\\_Findings\\_2013.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghan_report_Summary_Findings_2013.pdf); Liana Rosen and Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C., 2014), 1; Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, *Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C., 2014), 1–12, <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/Special%20Projects/SIGAR-15-10-SP.pdf>; Peters, *How Opium Profits the Taliban*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014: Cultivation and Production* (Kabul, 2014), 6–7, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan-survey-2014.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> *New York Times*, 5 Oct., and 2 Oct. 2015.

<sup>104</sup> UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015: Provincial Area Estimates Part I* (Kabul, 2015), 7, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan\\_Opium\\_area\\_estimates\\_part\\_1\\_Final\\_1.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_Opium_area_estimates_part_1_Final_1.pdf); UN Security Council, “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” 2 Feb. 2015, 9–10, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCE9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2015\\_79.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCE9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_79.pdf).



insurgents also won most of Sangin District and, in February 2016, forced government troops to retreat from nearby Musa Qala.<sup>105</sup>

In retrospect, it seems the outcomes of CIA operations in Afghanistan and Central America have been shaped by the degree of their congruence with the regional narcotics traffic. During the 1980s, the CIA's surrogate forces in Afghanistan and Nicaragua amplified their operational capacity by immersion in the local drug traffic, capturing a portion of its profits to sustain their decade-long insurgencies. By contrast, the conventional U.S. pacification of Afghanistan had failed, as of late 2015, to check the Taliban's flood of illicit income from opium and the corresponding flow of peasant fighters into its ranks.

If this analysis is correct, then an illicit commodity has contributed significantly to the defeat of military intervention by the world's sole superpower, demonstrating the covert netherworld can exercise sufficient autonomy to be treated as a significant factor in geopolitics. Indeed, the import of this netherworld and the imperative of capturing its volatile elements are evident in French postcolonial influence in West Africa.

#### TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL—FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

At the transnational level, Africa's rapid decolonization after 1960 fostered a mix of weak states, rebel movements, and dying empires that invited superpower contestation by clandestine means. By the 1970s, a half-dozen major and minor powers had launched covert operations along the continent's western coast that, combined with lucrative illicit traffics, would reverberate disastrously for decades—particularly in southern Angola where a civil war fueled by illicit commerce left five hundred thousand dead; eastern Congo where fighting driven by blood ivory and rare minerals caused an estimated three to five million deaths from 1998 to 2007;<sup>106</sup> and the Anglophone enclaves of Liberia and Sierra Leone whose brutal militia, sustained by blood diamonds, fought throughout the 1990s.<sup>107</sup> As Jean-François Bayart argued in 1999, "The process of criminalization ... has become the dominant trait of a sub-continent in which the state has literally imploded."<sup>108</sup> In effect, Sub-Saharan Africa, on

<sup>105</sup> *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 2015, and 20 Feb. 2016.

<sup>106</sup> *New York Times*, 30 July 2003; Associated Press, "Review of Congo War Halves Death Toll," *NBC News.com*, 20 Jan. 2010, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34958903/ns/world\\_news-africa/t/review-congo-war-halves-death-toll/#.Vs6BJcdlw28](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/34958903/ns/world_news-africa/t/review-congo-war-halves-death-toll/#.Vs6BJcdlw28); International Rescue Committee, *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (International Rescue Committee, 2007), ii, iii, [http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/2006-7\\_congoMortalitySurvey.pdf](http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/2006-7_congoMortalitySurvey.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> *Guardian*, 30 July 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/jul/31/guardianobituaries.westafrica>.

<sup>108</sup> International Campaign to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor Report 1999*, 117, <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/1999/>; Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, "From Kleptocracy to the Felonious State?" in Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, eds., *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Bloomington, 1999), 19, 22, 31.

an historical trajectory from colonial extraction to postcolonial plunder, drew these clandestine elements into an array that made the covert netherworld the dominant political domain for much of the continent, particularly in Francophone Africa.

After France conducted a rapid decolonization of its African empire in the early 1960s, the Gaullist government, working through its secret services, knitted the fourteen francophone states of West Africa into a clandestine nexus that merged metropolitan politics with neocolonial plunder. Even though the corruption was so massive that it merits the term plunder, this clandestine apparatus still constrained its graft within stable, state-mediated circuits that entrenched elites at both ends of this bilateral exchange. During his three terms as presidential adviser for Africa under Gaullist governments (1960–1974, 1986–1988, 1995–1997), the shadowy Jacques Foccart used the state’s clandestine agency, Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE), and a “parallel security force” called Service d’Action Civique (SAC) to maintain a deft, delicate synergy between metropolitan power and covert control of Francophone Africa.<sup>109</sup>

From its founding in 1959 to its abolition in 1982, the SAC provided the Elysée Palace with presidential security, a counterforce against mass demonstrations, and a covert apparatus for political violence. During the student riots of May 1968, Foccart mobilized SAC’s eight thousand members, which included much of French organized crime, to attack student demonstrators and secure key facilities such as the state broadcast service. Through ties to both Socialists and Gaullists, and immunity to police investigation through SAC, Corsican crime syndicates were able to dominate the trans-Atlantic heroin trade for a quarter century, from 1948 to 1974.<sup>110</sup>

Foccart also played a central role in enmeshing the fourteen new nations of Francophone West Africa into *Françafrique*, a neocolonial zone sustained through both formal alliance and an informal entente between the Elysée Palace and compliant African leaders who were installed by coups, stabilized by periodic military interventions, enriched by corporate payments, and rewarded with a safe haven for their illicit assets. At independence in 1960, Foccart bound these former colonies, save Guinea, to Paris by defense agreements that allowed it both military bases and the right of armed intervention, treaties that reserved strategic materials such as uranium for France, and preferential trade relations.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>109</sup> François Audigier, *Histoire du S.A.C.* (Paris, 2003), 7–22, 53–54, 65–66, 71–74.

<sup>110</sup> Audigier, *Histoire du S.A.C.*, 66–67, 122–39, 220–22, 239–47, 459–83; Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (New York, 2003), 67–68; Republic of France, Assemblée Nationale, Second Session Ordinaire de 1981–1982, *Rapport de la commission d’enquête sur les activités du Service d’action civique, no. 95, Tome I* (Paris, 1982), 66–69; *Telegraph* (London), 30 June 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11708389/Charles-Pasqua-French-minister-obituary.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Pierre Péan, *L’Homme de l’ombre* (Paris, 1990), 277–83.

According to the National Assembly's 1982 inquiry into SAC, Foccart, as President Charles de Gaulle's "close confidant," was tasked, first, "to preserve 'French interests' in francophone Africa on a path to decolonization," and, second, "to control the secret services, particularly the SDECE." Through this dual mission, he created "the Foccart network, still a reality in Africa ... whose implantation would not have been possible without SDECE and SAC."<sup>112</sup> For nearly forty years, 1959 to 1997, Foccart manipulated this clandestine fusion formally as state plenipotentiary for Africa, covertly through SDECE's Africa Section that employed some 150 agents, and informally through a web of personal connections extending from the underworld through the Elysée Palace to presidential palaces across West Africa, and back again.<sup>113</sup>

Under this postcolonial iteration of informal empire, French troops shuttled in and out of West Africa, conducting over forty military interventions between 1960 and 2002 and maintaining a permanent presence on the continent via arms delivery, defense treaties with fourteen nations, and a half-dozen military bases (including in Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Gabon). During these decades of *Françafrique*, this baker's dozen of client states shared autocratic leaders shrouded in vivid personality cults, systemic corruption that scholars labeled "kleptocracy," state terror of torture and extra-judicial killing by executive paramilitaries, and unblinking French complicity in all of the above. As late as 2001, Amnesty International cited ten of these Francophone states for human rights violations, and six of them as particularly egregious. Through a mix of foreign aid, corporate investment, military intervention, and covert manipulation, Paris nonetheless assured the long-term tenure of compliant dictators, including Jean-Bédél Bokassa for thirteen years in the Central African Republic (1966–1979), Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Ivory Coast for thirty-three years (1960–1993), and, above all, Omar Bongo in oil-rich Gabon for forty-two years (1967–2009).<sup>114</sup> While the rest of Africa suffered 188 coup attempts from 1956 to 2001, the readiness of the French military to quash any putsch, as they did in Gabon in 1964, provided what political scientist Crawford Young called

<sup>112</sup> Assemblée Nationale, *Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur les activités du Service d'action civique*, 53–55.

<sup>113</sup> Audigier, *Histoire du S.A.C.*, 364–65; Kaye Whiteman, "The Man Who Ran Françafrique," *National Interest* (Fall 1997), <http://nationalinterest.org/article/the-man-who-ran-franafrique-1005>; "Jacques Foccart," *Economist*, 27 Mar. 1997, <http://www.economist.com/node/367386>; *New York Times*, 20 Mar. 1997; Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services* (New York, 2003), 437–47; Péan, *L'Homme de l'ombre*, 261–329.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Aldrich, "When Did Decolonization End?," in Alfred W. McCoy, Josep M. Fradera, and Stephen Jacobson, eds., *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Madison, 2012), 223–27; Victor T. LeVine, *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder, 2004), 313–15, 318–21, 342; Sun Degang and Yahia Zoubir, "Sentry Box in the Backyard: Analysis of French Military Bases in Africa," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 5, 3 (2011): 82–104, 90–91.

an “effective inoculation against conspiracies,” reinforced by the “pervasive reach of French intelligence into the security apparatus of states within the Françafrique orbit, making plotting difficult without discovery.”<sup>115</sup>

The dictators reciprocated. In a February 1973 diary entry, Foccart wrote: “As for [Félix] Houphouët-Boigny [of Ivory Coast], who is fretting like many other African leaders about the French elections and their outcome, he has sent me quite a hefty sum of money ... to help us with the campaign. It’s not the first time he’s done it.” During the 1970s, President Valéry Giscard de Estaing became close to Emperor Bokassa of Central Africa, accepting gifts of diamonds, hunting trips, and business deals for his family, until the Emperor capriciously slaughtered one hundred schoolchildren in 1979, prompting a coup by SDECE and French paratroopers.<sup>116</sup>

With its lucrative oil concessions and full integration into Foccart’s network, Gabon was the exemplary state in Françafrique. At independence in 1960, the Francophile President Léon M’ba protected French interests—forestry concessions, uranium mines, Elf oil drilling, and one of the main military bases in Africa—until a February 1964 coup ousted him and installed his foreign minister, Jean-Hilaire Aubame. Within hours, Foccart, as presidential adviser on Africa, dispatched paratroopers from the French base at Dakar under the command of SDECE’s Africa chief, Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Robert. Within days, French forces, at the cost of two dead, had restored M’ba, arrested the coup leaders, and rounded up 150 leaders of the popular protests. Three years later, as M’ba lay dying of cancer in a Paris hospital, Foccart picked Omar Bongo, an SDECE veteran “with no political base,” as the ailing president’s running mate on a ticket that captured 99.5 percent of the vote, assuring Bongo’s succession, though still only thirty-one, at the president’s death six months later.<sup>117</sup>

As Gabon’s political opposition revived in 1971, Foccart’s office dispatched famed mercenary Bob Denard who moved freely about the capital Libreville as a “technical adviser” to President Bongo. When opposition leader Germain M’Ba arrived home from the movies, the assassin stepped from the shadows and fired fatally, also wounding his wife and child.<sup>118</sup> The Foccart network then secured Bongo’s rule, starting in 1975, by assigning SAC’s founder Pierre Debizet and the mercenary Denard, a sometime SDECE

<sup>115</sup> Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa* (Madison, 2012), 146–47, 348–49.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen W. Smith, “Nodding and Winking,” *London Review of Books* 32, 3 (11 Feb. 2010): 10–12.

<sup>117</sup> Péan, *L’Homme de l’ombre*, 304–18; Pierre Péan, *Nouvelles Affaires africaines* (Paris, 2014), 10; “Les éléments français au Gabon,” *État-major des armées*, 1 Jan. 2015, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces-prepositionnees/gabon/dossier/les-elements-francais-au-gabon>; *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1964; *Guardian*, 8 June 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/09/obituary-omar-bongo>.

<sup>118</sup> Pierre Péan, *Affaire africaines* (Paris, 1983), 5–17, 286–87; Douglas A. Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa* (Trenton, 1996), 122–23.

operative, to train a new Presidential Guard and to form a security force, the Société gabonaise de services, for protection of Elf oil facilities that provided about half the country's GDP. Adding another strand in this clandestine network, SDECE's former Africa chief Maurice Robert moved seamlessly from organizing Bongo's security, then directing intelligence for the Elf oil company, and finally serving as French Ambassador to Gabon in 1980–1981.<sup>119</sup>

After another opposition leader Joseph Rendjambé died mysteriously in May 1990 and angry demonstrators occupied Elf and Shell facilities, French troops again intervened to protect oil concessions that accounted for a quarter of Elf's global production. Simultaneously, presidential security fired indiscriminately into the crowds killing dozens. Responding to this populist pressure, Bongo resumed regular elections, winning rigged majorities in 1993, 1998, and another that reached 79 percent in 2005. Throughout, French officials enabled President Bongo's graft, making him a principal shareholder in Elf-Total and facilitating illicit payments—estimated at \$111 million per annum—that were exposed at the 2003 corruption trial of the company's chief executive.<sup>120</sup>

Bongo reciprocated, becoming a significant source of black funds for French presidential campaigns—notably \$4 million in the 1981 elections, largely for Jacques Chirac's unsuccessful bid; and \$1.5 million for Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in 1988. According to a cable from the U.S. embassy in Yaounde, much of the \$36.6 million Gabon officials embezzled from the Bank of Central African States were “at Bongo's direction, funneled ... to French political parties, including in support of French President Nicolas Sarkozy,” specifically €10 million for his 2007 campaign.<sup>121</sup>

When Bongo died in 2009 after a rule of forty-two years, London's *Telegraph* reported he had looted revenues from the nation's 2.5 billion barrel oil reserve to “become one of the world's richest men” who had “elevated corruption to a method of government.” His son Ali-Ben Bongo succeeded him as president, inheriting, along with his siblings, thirty-three luxury properties in

<sup>119</sup> Péan, *L'Homme de l'ombre*, 455–61; François Gaulme, “Gabon: From Timber to Petroleum,” *Review of African Political Economy* 19, 51 (July, 1991): 84–87, 85–86; François Soudan, “Maurice Robert,” *Jeune Afrique*, 6 Dec. 2005, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/129053/archives-thematique/maurice-robert/>.

<sup>120</sup> Yates, *Rentier State in Africa*, 65–66, 104–33; LeVine, *Politics in Francophone Africa*, 314–15; “Obituary: Omar Bongo,” *BBC News*, 8 June 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8088399.stm>; *Washington Post*, 9 June 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Péan, *Nouvelles Affaires africaines*, 93–102; *Guardian*, 30 Dec. 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/30/wikileaks-omar-bongo-nicolas-sarkozy>; ID: 215456, 7 July 2009, Source: Embassy Yaounde, Subject: Central Bank, Source: “Gabonese Stole \$40 Million, Funnelled some to French Politics,” Signed: [Ambassador Janet] Garvey, *El Pais Internacional*, 28 Dec. 2010, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/12/28/actualidad/1293490809\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/12/28/actualidad/1293490809_850215.html).

France worth \$190 million and a country that, despite its oil riches, had one of the world's highest infant mortality rates, a third of its population living on \$2 a day, and a woefully underdeveloped infrastructure.<sup>122</sup>

This neocolonial confection called *Françafrique* thus allowed the circulation of covert operatives and illicit income that produced synergies between legal and extra-legal power, metropole and periphery. Such influence facilitated French corporate investment in West Africa, exemplified by historic dominance of Elf-Total over oil drilling in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Republic of Congo. Apart from formal profits and royalties, these lucrative ventures allowed private payments to enrich African officials and illicit profits that provided off-the-books operational funds for both French intelligence and Gaullist political campaigns.<sup>123</sup>

Although President Jacques Chirac gestured toward reform of *Françafrique* after Foccart's death in 1997, as did his two successors, its legacy lingered, masked by the acronyms of international aid, mediated by continuing political collusion, and marked by French military interventions in Ivory Coast to save President Laurent Gbago in 2002, topple him in 2011, and, as of 2014, pursue al-Qaeda terrorists across Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.<sup>124</sup> Even as late as 2010, the French still had ten thousand expatriates amidst Gabon's population of 1.5 million, a garrison of a thousand soldiers, and a substantial share of local oil drilling. Throughout these decades, *Françafrique* was serious business, supplying the bulk of France's energy from uranium and oil in Congo, Gabon, and Niger, and absorbing 34 percent of French overseas investment in 1980 and 30 percent in 1995.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, Foccart's passing precipitated major changes, with military intervention largely internationalized under NATO, French investment in the region reduced, the Franco-African "piggy bank" Elf abolished in 2000 after exposé of its "petro-corruption," and his once powerful "network" split into rival Gaullist *reseaux* as "the pillage in Africa was democratized."<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> "Bongo a 'servi l'intérêt de la France' pas ses 'citoyens' pour Eva Joly," *Libération.fr*, 8 June 2009, <http://www.liberation.fr/depeches/0101572299-bongo-a-servi-l-interet-de-la-france-pas-celui-de-ses-citoyens-selon-eva-joly>; "Omar Bongo," *Telegraph* (London), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/5478816/Omar-Bongo.html>; Alex Perry, "Gabon Faces Bongo's Disastrous Legacy," *Time*, 10 June 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1903805,00.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Total Corporation, "Exploration and Production," <http://www.total.com/en/corporate-profile/organization/our-business-segments/upstream/exploration-production-promising-outlook>; François-Xavier Verschave, "Defining *Françafrique*," *Survie*, 18 Feb. 2006, <http://survie.org/francafrique/article/defining-francafrique-by-francois>.

<sup>124</sup> LeVine, *Politics in Francophone Africa*, 343–46; *New York Times*, 11 Apr. 2011; John Irish, "French Forces Launch Raid in Niger against al Qaeda Units," *Reuters*, 10 Oct. 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/10/us-sahel-france-idUSKCN0HZ11W20141010>.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, "Nodding and Winking."

<sup>126</sup> *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 2007; Smith, "Nodding and Winking."

In sum, for nearly forty years, Foccart, France's "man of the shadows," drew discreet clandestine circuits into a covert nexus reaching from the Marseille underworld to the Elysée Palace. This sub rosa convergence simultaneously extended the rule of conservative parties in France, sustained French geopolitical power through preferential access to Africa's resources, and entrenched compliant dictators in West Africa. Above all, the volatile illicit income entailed in resource extraction remained cosseted, and generally concealed, at both ends of this bilateral exchange. Through a seamlessly constructed, sedulously maintained covert netherworld that drew criminal, clandestine, and corrupt elements into tight, state-mediated circuits, Foccart's transnational network operated with hermetic secrecy for decades.

Absent later exposés by dissident journalists such as Pierre Péan and François-Xavier Verschave, *Françafrique* would have escaped the public notice and judicial scrutiny that finally came in 2009, after nearly half a century, when France's senior investigative magistrate, despite objections from the Elysée Palace, began probing the plundered Parisian assets of three presidents synonymous with *Françafrique*: Gabon's Omar Bongo, Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo, and Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema.<sup>127</sup> More broadly, the history of Francophone Africa in the forty years after independence illustrates the capacity of a covert netherworld, when carefully controlled, to move from society's margins to become a dominant force in shaping the destiny of both a major world region and its metropolitan hegemon.

## CONCLUSION

In assessing Cold War covert operations, particularly the proxy wars fought by local surrogates, we need to explain the wide variation in their impact. Why have some major clandestine operations proven an effective form of hegemonic force projection, changing regimes or consolidating control, while others skirted defeat if not disaster? Surveying several Cold War flashpoints for answers, it seems that the long-term consequences of clandestine intervention are shaped by the interplay of three factors: first, the character of a dominant power's covert operation; next, the hegemon's capacity to control the critical forces within an operational netherworld; and, finally, in the event of failure of such control, the relative autonomy of the clandestine elements, particularly the contraband commerce.

<sup>127</sup> "France Starts African Cash Probe," *BBC News*, 19 June 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6768197.stm>; Bruce Crumley, "The Enrichment of Africa's French Allies," *Time*, 8 May 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1896891,00.html>; *Guardian*, 9 Nov. 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/09/inquiry-african-leaders-france>; *Independent*, 12 July 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-parisian-treasures-of-african-tyrants-french-government-may-seize-mansions-and-luxury-cars-of-8706535.html>.

Application of these factors produces a spectrum of impact. At the pole of high efficacy, a relatively strong regime such as de Gaulle's Fifth Republic could mobilize a covert apparatus to contain the centrifugal forces of decolonization, thereby preserving its preferential access to West Africa's rich natural resources. Viewed comparatively, France, as a mid-sized postcolonial power, had focused its covert capacities upon a single region, Francophone Africa—cultivating long-term collaborators, containing black funds within the circuits of state power, and producing a surprisingly stable synergy of foreign and domestic clandestine controls.

At a similar point on this spectrum, the United States has intervened episodically as a global hegemon on four continents to contain challenges to its world order, often successfully, sometimes disastrously. In Central America, its closest analogue to *Françafrique*, Washington intervened during the 1980s through surrogate warfare that captured key elements within the covert netherworld to precipitate the defeat of a hostile regime in Nicaragua. Half a world away in Central Asia, the CIA, by allying with regional hegemon Pakistan and sanctioning its surrogates' opium trafficking, manipulated a mix of clandestine elements to force the Soviet Red Army out of Afghanistan. For both French and American conservative parties, these Cold War covert operations also produced political synergies, not only facilitating intervention at the imperial periphery, whether West Africa or Central America, but also fostering political control in the metropole, whether by mass incarceration, extra-legal force, or black campaign funds.

Moving to midpoint on this spectrum, the emerging Philippine state's attempt at securing its southern periphery through surrogate militia, conventional military, and sanctioned illegality has had a mixed outcome. While it has failed to curtail an Islamic insurgency that has persisted for nearly a half century, Manila, though lacking the coercive capacities of Paris or Washington, has nonetheless managed to prevent this attempt at regional secession and thus maintain its territorial integrity.

At the opposite pole of low performance, when Washington intervened in Afghanistan again after 2001 its conventional array of uniformed troops and international aid could not contain the volatile fusion of warlord power, Islamic insurgency, and opium trafficking. After the preceding twenty years of covert intervention and civil conflict had expanded the invisible interstice into a covert warzone that covered the entire country, conventional bilateral instruments and the weak Kabul government could not close the breach, allowing clandestine elements sufficient autonomy to compromise the U.S. military mission.

Although the Cold War was an historic high tide for covert action, fostering secret services of unprecedented power and extending the netherworld to whole countries and continents, this clandestine domain will likely remain a central—and growing—component of future geopolitical conflict. The



globalization that succeeded the Cold War's bipolar division has not been kind to Third World states, fraying their borders, compromising capacities, and enmeshing them in international economic circuits of corruption and illegality. To contain this erosion of state capacity, the United States has, since September 2001, enforced its writ through a worldwide aerospace shield, clandestine cyber attacks, and special operations strikes, shifting its force projection and geopolitical controls increasingly into this covert domain. If these trends continue, then this clandestine realm may become even more central to great power conflict in the twenty-first century than it was in the twentieth. This invisible interstice has thus become a significant dimension of international relations, and any analysis that fails to acknowledge its influence is likely to remain not only incomplete but inaccurate.

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Abstract: This essay explores a domain of geopolitical conflict called "covert netherworld" that has been a seminal in world politics for the past half century and likely to become more central in the century to come. During the Cold War and its aftermath, covert netherworlds formed worldwide through confluence of four essential elements: reliance of modern states on *covert methods* for power projection at home and abroad; the consequent emergence of a *clandestine social milieu* populated by secret services and criminal syndicates; a complementary *illicit economic nexus* that sustains non-state actors and sometimes state security; and finally, *spatial dimensions* that range from a narrow criminal or covert milieu to entire countries or continents. When these elements align, this netherworld can attain the sheer geopolitical power to shape the course of national and international events. To lend substance to these generic elements, the essay explores three arenas of widening geographical scope. At the *local* level in the southern Philippines, a regional netherworld fostered Islamic insurgency and state counterinsurgency, while *national* elections were sustained by an illegal lottery, shaping the character of an emerging polity. At the *transnational* level, France's postcolonial hold on the West African region dubbed *Françafrique* constrained corruption within state-mediated circuits and entrenched elites at both ends of this bilateral exchange. By contrast, U.S. covert operations in Afghanistan and Central America had divergent outcomes influenced by their degree of congruence with the narcotics traffic, demonstrating that the covert netherworld can exercise sufficient autonomy to be treated as a significant factor in world politics.