



Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs

Vanda Felbab-Brown

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Most policymakers see counterinsurgency and counternarcotics policy as two sides of the same coin. Stop the flow of drug money, the logic goes, and the insurgency will wither away. But the conventional wisdom is dangerously wrongheaded, as Vanda Felbab-Brown argues in *Shooting Up*.

Counternarcotics campaigns, particularly those focused on eradication, typically fail to bankrupt belligerent groups that rely on the drug trade for financing. Worse, they actually strengthen insurgents by increasing their legitimacy and popular support.

Felbab-Brown, a leading expert on drug interdiction efforts and counterinsurgency, draws on interviews and fieldwork in some of the world's most dangerous regions to explain how belligerent groups have become involved in drug trafficking and related activities, including kidnapping, extortion, and smuggling. *Shooting Up* shows vividly how powerful guerrilla and terrorist organizations — including Peru's Shining Path, the FARC and the paramilitaries in Colombia, and the Taliban in Afghanistan — have learned to exploit illicit markets. In addition, the author explores the interaction between insurgent groups and illicit economies in frequently overlooked settings, such as Northern Ireland, Turkey, and Burma.

While aggressive efforts to suppress the drug trade typically backfire, *Shooting Up* shows that a laissez-faire policy toward illicit crop cultivation can reduce support for the belligerents and, critically, increase cooperation with government intelligence gathering. When combined with interdiction targeting major traffickers, this strategy gives policymakers a better chance of winning both the war against the insurgents and the war on drugs.

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