



Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs

By 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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Editorial Review

Review

"The connection between drug trafficking and terrorism has emerged as one of the central problems of our time. *Shooting Up* offers the best set of case studies on the complex relationship between the two phenomena and presents unorthodox and insightful conclusions about how the U.S. government should deal with them." —Peter Reuter, professor of public policy and criminology at the University of Maryland

"Felbab-Brown deftly describes how our current antidrug policies are frequently at odds with our counterinsurgency efforts. Her chilling conclusion —that the U.S. strategy for fighting drugs internationally is actually emboldening the enemies of freedom —offers one of the most compelling arguments yet for rethinking the current war on drugs." —John Carnevale, former chief of the Office of Planning, Budget, and Evaluation, Office of National Drug Control Policy

"For those unaware of the extent to which the war on drugs runs parallel to the war on terrorism, the vast financial resources committed by the US government, and the various strategic approaches employed thus far to disable narco-states (including eradication, suppression, and laissez-faire), *Shooting Up* is a meticulous, albeit condensed, account of the last twenty years of this failed war." —Virginia Konchan, *ForeWord Reviews*

"*Shooting Up* is a clearly written, deeply researched account of the symbiotic relationship between insurgents and the drug trade from the coca fields of Colombia to the poppy fields of Afghanistan. It makes important points about how governments' counternarcotics efforts can actually help the insurgents." —Peter Bergen, author of *Holy War, Inc.* and *The Osama bin Laden I Know*

"Vanda Felbab-Brown's intelligent survey of the steamy relationship between drugs and insurgency is a must-read. In debunking the theory that crop eradication undercuts the influence of narcoguerrillas, *Shooting Up* points American policymakers and generals toward a more effective strategy in Afghanistan and elsewhere." —Wendy Chamberlin, president of the Middle East Institute and former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan

" *Shooting Up* is an important and timely book that challenges the conventional wisdom about counternarcotics and counterinsurgency. Rather than complementing one another, Felbab-Brown persuasively demonstrates, these two policies are in fact at odds." —Bruce Hoffman, professor of security studies at Georgetown University and former adviser on counterterrorism to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq

About the Author

Vanda Felbab-Brown is a fellow in the Foreign Policy Program and a member of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings Institution. She also teaches in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. An expert on international and internal conflict issues, including counterinsurgency, she has published widely on the interaction between illicit economies and military conflict and has testified before Congress about her work. The research on which this book is based received the American Political Science Association's Harold D. Lasswell Award for the Best Dissertation in the Field of Public Policy.

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