Donor efforts to tackle electricity crises in conflict-affected states in the Middle East have failed. Despite billions of dollars of international support for electricity infrastructure in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen, electricity supply remains unreliable. This CSIS report proposes a new approach for donors in conflict-affected environments. In some circumstances, renewables can both combat corruption and improve the supply of reliable, low-cost power.

KEY POINTS

• Large-scale international efforts to enhance electricity provision, often focusing on major power plants after fighting has ended, have failed to ensure reliable or affordable supplies of electricity in any Middle East and North Africa (MENA) country that has experienced conflict in recent decades.

• Elites in conflict-affected states such as Lebanon and Iraq have an interest in prolonging electricity sector dysfunction as a means for profiting, rewarding allies, and undermining rivals.

• International donors eager to improve living conditions often fall into patterns of elite exploitation by funding infrastructure that creates major and ongoing opportunities for graft.

• Advances in renewables are creating new opportunities to change patterns of abuse and supply electricity throughout fragile states. More widely distributed systems of renewable electricity undermine aspiring monopolists’ ability to gain power and influence.

• Earlier in a conflict than many might think, donors can build more resilient, sustainable, and equitable systems of electricity provision that deliver wide-reaching benefits for improving governance and stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Condition support for central electricity infrastructure on reforms that facilitate the integration of renewable technologies on a smaller scale.

• Experiment with alternative models of electricity provision, building on local adaptations.

• Spread awareness of successful models to demonstrate what is possible in challenging environments.

• Encourage other donors and private sector actors to collaborate with local communities to replicate and scale up successful initiatives.