

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY NETWORK

VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS AND NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY



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Phil Williams



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INTRODUCTION

Even a cursory global survey suggests that violent non-state actors (VNSAs) have become a pervasive challenge to nation-states. In Europe, jihadist terrorist organizations have carried out dramatic and well-publicized attacks in Madrid and London and have only been prevented from further actions by proactive intelligence and law enforcement. In Mexico, drug-trafficking organizations are challenging the Mexican state in a particularly brutal manner, and have killed a series of high-ranking policemen in retaliation for the Calderon administration's efforts to disrupt their activities and reduce their power. In the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, drug traffickers and, more recently, militias provide rudimentary forms of governance in urban areas where the state is absent. In Central America and the United States, youth gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) have a massive and highly-disruptive presence. In Colombia, the state has beaten back the political challenge from the FARC insurgency but the guerillas have largely been transformed into a major drug-trafficking organization that in some regions, cooperates with former right-wing paramilitary organizations turned drug traffickers. In Albania, Italy and many parts of the former Soviet Union, criminal organizations not only intimidate businesses, corrupt politicians and launder their proceeds, but also engage in a variety of activities that challenge and undermine state sovereignty. In many African countries as well as Central Asia and Afghanistan, warlords are major players in the political system and the economy. In Iraq, insurgents, terrorists, militias and criminal organizations operate in a common opportunity space, intersecting and overlapping in ways that make the restoration of a legitimate and effective central state particularly difficult. In short, in many parts of the world, the Westphalian state is under siege from VNSAs.

The domination of the world by nation-states, each of which had a legitimate monopoly on the use of force within its sovereign territory, was never as absolute as it appeared. Latin America, unlike Europe, did not benefit (or suffer from the state-building impetus of the total wars of the 20th century), the elites never relinquished power to the state apparatus to the same extent as elsewhere. In Africa, many states were the artificial creation of colonialism and, in Robert Jackson's felicitous phrase, were little more than "quasi-states." Even

accepting that the state was never as dominant as it appeared in the great power conflicts of the 20th century, in the 21st century, the state monopoly of the use of force is increasingly being reduced to a convenient fiction. Relatively few of the sovereign states represented in the United Nations can truly claim a monopoly of force within their territorial borders. This is a fundamental change that has been under-appreciated as a global phenomenon partly because the violent challengers have taken different forms in different parts of the world. These forms include tribal and ethnic groups, warlords, drug-trafficking organizations, youth gangs, terrorists, militias, insurgents and transnational criminal organizations. In many cases these groups are challenging the state; in others they are cooperating and colluding with state structures; in some, the state is a passive by-stander while they fight one another. In several instances they are both fighting one another and confronting state structures that seek either to destroy them or to bring them under control. Despite their divergent forms, however, these non-state violent actors share certain characteristics. They also represent a common challenge to national and international security, a challenge that is far greater than the sum of the individual types of group, and that is likely to grow rather than diminish over the next several decades.

This has already been recognized by a number of analysts and commentators. Moreover, some efforts have been made to identify the major actors themselves. As one study observed, "the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), the Non-State Actors Working Group (NSAWG) of the International Committee to Ban Landmines (ICBL), and the Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research...are in the forefront of identifying, categorizing and analyzing armed groups as important actors in contemporary global politics. And they are only the beginning of what appears to be growing awareness that armed groups are no longer minor players in a world once dominated by states." The Federation of American Scientists refers to these groups as "para-states" since they are entities which challenge the state's "monopoly on the use of violence within a specified geographical territory." It lists 387 such organizations.

This paper seeks to explore this phenomenon of violent non-state actors, while recognizing that there are various sub-species, each with its own

distinct characteristics. The analysis identifies factors, trends and developments that have contributed to the emergence of VNSAs. The focus then switches to the groups themselves, looking at different kinds of VNSAs. The paper draws on the pioneering work been done by Troy Thomas and various collaborators as well as an important study by Shultz, Farah and Lockard that argues very persuasively that armed groups have become a “tier-one” security threat.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE RISE OF VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

In a sense, VNSAs have been around for millennia. Even Rome, at the height of its power, had to contend with roaming criminal bands that preyed on its citizens as well as with maritime pirates. During the 20th century, however, such groups were relatively insignificant, dwarfed by the process of state consolidation and the contest among powerful nation-states. VNSAs became a critical part of the decolonization process, but this was essentially because they wanted to control the state themselves rather than being subservient to foreign and distant rulers. In the 21st century, however, VNSAs appear to be major challenge to the Westphalian state. Although they have re-emerged in large part because of the growing weakness of many states, they seek to perpetuate and intensify this weakness.

The notion of weak states, of course, is inherently relative. It suggests a lack of certain qualities that have become widely accepted as critical components of the modern Westphalian state. Different authors, however, emphasize different aspects of the state with some focusing on legitimacy and others on capacity, some emphasizing the notion of collective interest and others shared identity. In fact, all these dimensions are important. Perhaps the best way to understand contemporary states, therefore, is in terms of a strong-weak continuum across certain key dimensions. These include:

Legitimacy. This has been emphasized by K J Holsti among others. The more legitimate the state, the more it relies on consent rather than coercion and on authority rather than power or brute force. As one study noted:

Strong and healthy states are those that exhibit several common characteristics or measures of legitimacy ... there is an implicit social contract between state and society, the latter being comprised

of all ethnic, religious, political, and economic groupings. In other words, there is agreement on the political ‘rules of the game’. There is loyalty to the state, the political principles upon which it is based, and its institutions.

In the absence of such an agreement, loyalty and allegiance are typically directed elsewhere.

Capacity. Strong and effective states have a significant extractive capacity but match this with the provision of collective goods ranging from the maintenance of security and order to health care and welfare. In addition, they engage in sound management of the economy, which includes not only fiscal prudence but also the creation of a degree of resilience that enables the economy to absorb the disruptive consequences of exogenous shocks. States that are highly extractive but do not match this with collective provision, are typically seen as exploitative – which undermines their legitimacy. States that control the extraction of raw materials typically become “rentier” states, in which the political elite benefits but the mass of the population is deprived; in the long-term this almost inevitably undermines legitimacy. States with limited extractive capacity are inherently weak, experiencing frequent economic and political crises. Moreover, states with capacity gaps tend to develop functional holes (that is they are unable to carry out the normal functions of the modern state) that offer opportunities to non-state actors. In some cases, these actors simply exploit the permissive space created by functional holes such as the lack of effective criminal justice; in others they become the proxy for the state, thereby further challenging its authority and legitimacy.

The primacy of the collective interest over individual interest. An agreed notion of the collective interest of the state and its citizens constrains and restrains political competition. In states where this is present, procedural and substantive norms are widely accepted; although there is opportunity for the expression of individual and group interests within well-defined limits. There is general acceptance of the political process and widespread agreement on what is or is not permissible behavior. Pluralistic democracies are typically based on this notion of collective interest and constrained (if vigorous) competition. Moreover, there is a common expectation that those in office will use their position for the public good rather than for private gain. In cases where

individual interests take priority over the collective interest then corruption runs rife or the state becomes fragmented. When control of the state becomes the prize of politics, then obligations to the collective interest are subordinated to the pursuit of individual or factional interests.

Inclusiveness rather than exclusivity. In effect, this means that “no group is excluded from seeking political influence or receiving a fair share of resources and services because of its affiliation” or its identity. The collective is truly comprehensive rather than partial. Minority populations are given full rights as citizens and treated with dignity. They are also full recipients of the collective goods provided by the state. On the other side, exclusion can be social, political or economic or, more often than not, a combination of all of these. While a degree of exclusion for some and preferential treatment for others might be unavoidable, when it becomes overly stark and pronounced, it can provoke insurrection or ethnic conflict. In the final analysis, states are rather like Caesar’s wife – they not only have to be fair but they have to be seen to be fair.

In sum, strong states are characterized by high levels of legitimacy and authority, adequate levels of provision of collective goods, sound economic management, the primacy of the collective, and a high degree of inclusiveness. Weak states, in contrast, suffer from deficits in legitimacy, capacity, provision of public goods and inclusiveness. In most instances, weaknesses along the various dimensions are mutually reinforcing, while in rather fewer instances weakness in some areas are offset by strengths elsewhere. When there are multiple dimensions along which the state is weak, the prospects for the rise of VNSAs are considerably increased.

Although the patterns of causation are not always clear, there is a correlation between state weakness and the emergence of one or another kind of VNSA. States with low legitimacy, for example, are unable to create or maintain the loyalty and allegiance of their populations. In these circumstances, individuals and groups typically revert to or develop alternative patterns of affiliation. This often means that family, tribe or clan becomes the main reference points for political action, often in opposition to the state. As David Ronfeldt has argued, “as a society degenerates...the more its state, market, and civil-society systems falter and fall apart—people are

sure to revert to the tribal form. It again becomes the driving form.” Given that tribalism often emphasizes exclusiveness and different codes of behavior towards outsiders, a reversion to tribalism can feed into the rise of VNSAs.

In a similar vein, states that are low in legitimacy and high in repressiveness, relying on coercion rather than consent, typically provoke opposition. In other words, what Thomas and Kiser call “extreme coercive action” by the state can contribute to failure by provoking violent opposition. Something similar can occur when states exclude parts of their population – either through neglect, lack of capacity or some form of discrimination. The result is often the creation of “no-go” zones or spaces in which VNSAs emerge as a form of alternative governance. Moreover, where states with low capacity are unable to meet the demands of their citizenry for security and other public goods, other actors fill the gap. When there is a security deficit in particular, VNSAs come into existence to provide security or, where they already exist, become more important, in the provision of security. The difficulty is that often such groups are not only protective but also predatory.

VNSAs are inherently “illegitimate vis-à-vis the classical state system in part because the essence of being a state is having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.” Yet, they often provide alternative governance, offering services and supplying collective goods that the state is unable or unwilling to offer and provide. This is why the notion of ungoverned spaces, which has become a widely-used term in the United States military, is in most instances inappropriately applied. The concept of ungoverned spaces assumes that because the state is absent there is no governance. In a few cases this might be true, but most so-called ungoverned spaces are, in reality, alternatively governed spaces. Yet, this too is an inherent challenge to the state as it further undermines legitimacy and public support. In other words, VNSAs develop out of poor state governance but, in turn, further undermine governance by the state.

Another important factor in understanding the rise of VNSA is globalization. Not only has globalization challenged individual state capacity to manage economic affairs, it has also provided facilitators and force multipliers for VNSAs. Global flows of arms, for example, are no longer under the exclusive control of states. Illicit arms dealers

have become important transnational players and have few if any scruples about their customers; the only requirement for receiving armaments is the capacity to pay for them. Arms dealers like Victor Bout, Leonid Minin and Monzer Al Kassar have contributed to a diffusion or democratization of military power that has provided VNSAs with weapons capabilities that allow them to challenge government forces. In a similar vein, globalization has allowed VNSAs to develop what might be termed transnational social capital and to create alliances and generate support outside the immediate area of their operations. Globalization, along with the rise of the illicit global economy, has also provided funding opportunities for VNSAs. For some groups, the proceeds derived from exploitation of these opportunities are an end in themselves; for others, the profits from illicit activities provide the funding that enables them to pursue political and military agendas. Whatever the exact nature of the group, however, it is clear that just as globalization has, in some respects, diminished state control it has also augmented and empowered VNSAs.

If inadequate governance on the one side and globalization on the other provide conditions that facilitate the emergence of VNSA, they do not guarantee that such an emergence will occur. Indeed, “for mobilization into a VNSA to actually occur, there must be transformational process” that occurs partly at the level of the individual citizen and partly at the group level. From the perspective of the individual, “first, the state must fail him. As the legitimate governing authority, the state is the recipient of his expectations for education, employment and security. This failure can take the form of incapacity to provide basic services or effectively allocate resources and/or it can manifest as an excessively coercive response. Second, there must exist identity cleavages to redirect and absorb his searching loyalties. Finally, there must be some sort of catalyst to mobilize an identity group, possibly transforming it into a full-fledged VNSA.” This catalyst is typically provided by what Tomas and Kiser refer to as “identity entrepreneurs” who “create” or “reinforce” the identity that now stands opposed to the state. The more successful these identity entrepreneurs, the more followers they have.

Another way of understanding this process is in terms of Malcolm Gladwell’s notion of tipping points. From this perspective, the rise of VNSAs can be understood as a political and social epidemic in

which, among other things, there is a great deal of imitative behavior. Gladwell identifies several factors that account for such a phenomenon. He rightly emphasizes the importance of context, an emphasis that accords fully with the problems of weak and dysfunctional states, as discussed above. He also refers to the law of the few – those key individuals who play a critical role in mobilizing support for a cause. In the case of VNSAs, these “identity entrepreneurs” are typically charismatic leaders who attract loyalty and passion, give their followers a sense of common purpose, and create what appears to be a viable organizational structure for achieving that purpose. In effect, VNSAs often provide psychological empowerment for the disempowered, marginalized and disenfranchised. Moreover, several developments will feed the rise of VNSAs over the next several decades. Particularly important are urbanization and demographic trends, most significantly a continued or even intensifying “youth bulge” in many developing countries.

Urbanization has multiple dimensions. One of the most important is the emergence of a small but growing number of meta-cities with a population of over 20 million people. In the next decade or so Tokyo, currently the only state in this category will be joined by Mumbai, Delhi, Mexico City, New York, Sao Paulo, Dhaka, Jakarta and Lagos. The sheer size of such cities will generate immense law and order and security problems especially in poorer areas and impose additional burdens on urban infrastructures that are already under stress. In some cases, these stresses and strains will prove overwhelming, leading to weak, failing and collapsed cities. Other trends likely to contribute to growing urban disorder include the growth in the number of mega-cities with populations over 10 million as well as the rapid growth in the number of cities between 5 and 10 million and in the number of cities with populations between 1 and 5 million. By 2015, there will be 23 megacities, 19 of them in the developing world, and 37 cities with populations between 5 and 10 million. Many of these cities are likely to become increasingly ungovernable. Some will be transformed into what Richard Norton terms “feral cities.” Norton defines a feral city as “a metropolis with a population of more than a million people in a state the government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city’s boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system.” He offers a compelling description of the

conditions in a feral city, noting that “social services are all but nonexistent, and the vast majority of the city’s occupants have no access to even the most basic health or security assistance. There is no social safety net. Human security is for the most part a matter of individual initiative. Yet a feral city does not descend into complete, random chaos. Some elements, be they criminals, armed resistance groups, clans, tribes or neighborhood associations, exert various degrees of control over portions of the city.”

The problem, of course, is not simply urbanization but the way in which this interacts with other problems, including a surfeit of young men, large numbers of whom will be unemployed. This creates enormous volatility and the growth of crime becomes the only available career path. When there is ready access to weapons, the result is high rates of violent crime. Often the criminal activities will be part of something more organized. Indeed, “underemployed, urbanized young men are an especially volatile group that can easily be drawn into organized crime.” They also provide a vibrant and expanding recruiting pool for other VNSAs. The result is that cities will increasingly be among the most disorderly areas of the world, characterized by high levels of violence and the emergence of VNSAs that contribute to this violence while simultaneously providing a degree of order and predictability and even rudimentary forms of governance.

Against this background, it is clearly useful to treat VNSAs as a distinct species of actors in international relations: the commonalities are obvious including the way in which these actors provide an alternative to state governance and challenge the state’s monopoly of violence. At the same time, there are important variations among VNSAs. Accordingly the next section of this paper identifies the dimensions along which VNSAs can vary. The subsequent section examines the different kinds of VNSAs.

DIMENSIONS OF VNSAs

To understand the ways in which VNSAs differ from one another, it is necessary to identify several key dimensions of these actors. These include:

- *Motivation and purpose.* It is important to know what drives these actors, to understand their goals and to consider the ways in which they seek to achieve these goals.
- *Strength and scope.* Not all VNSAs are created

equal. Some are relatively small and operate in a circumscribed geographical area, while others have a wider transnational scope. Their reach can extend from local to national to transnational.

- *The ways in which they obtain funding or access to resources.* In many cases, funding is subservient to larger goals and no more than a means to an end; in other instances the acquisition of wealth is a central goal. Examining the funding of VNSAs often requires looking at their relationship with the illicit economy at national, regional and global levels.
- *Organizational structure.* There is no single structure for VNSAs: some are hierarchical and centralized; others are networked and distributed; and some can be understood as hybrids of networks and hierarchies. Moreover, organizational structures are not static; they adapt and change over time in response to opportunities and constraints in the environment and the actions of their adversaries.
- *The role of violence.* Although the definition of VNSAs has violence at the core – violence is what distinguishes VNSAs from the NGOs and advocacy networks that are increasingly considered as part of global civil society – different organizations not only use different levels and forms of violence, but also use it for different purposes.
- *The relationship between VNSAs and state authorities.* In many cases, the relationship is one of hostility; yet for some kinds of VNSAs the relationship is more complex with a degree of connivance or tacit cooperation between state structures and VNSAs.
- *The functions VNSAs fulfill for members and supporting constituencies.* A key part of this is the extent to which the VNSA becomes an alternative form of governance and fulfils functions normally the responsibility of the state. In terms of the discussion above, it is important to determine what kinds of capacity gaps and functional holes are filled by VNSAs. These can include the provision of state functions such as imposing and maintaining security and order and can extend to what might be described as paternalistic forms of social welfare. Indeed, for VNSAs filling functional spaces is often even more important than filling territorial spaces.

This analytical framework is helpful in considering a wide variety of VNSAs. It is suggested here that several different kinds of groups require particularly careful analysis. These include warlords, terrorist organizations, organized crime groups both domestic and transnational, transnational youth gangs, militias and insurgencies. The analysis here excludes private military companies (PMCs).

Although PMCs reflect what might be termed the privatization of violence, they differ from other VNSAs in that they are, to a significant degree regulated by states and generally act on behalf of states. This is not case with most other VNSAs that, in effect, operate outside the law. The analysis also excludes maritime pirates. Although there has been both a resurgence of piracy in recent years – especially in the seas off Somalia and West Africa – and a growth in its lethality, pirates for the most part are little more than a nuisance to global trade. They rarely challenge state authority and legitimacy and, although their actions increase the prospect of some kind of maritime disaster (for example, a collision in the Straits of Malacca), their significance is inherently limited.

TYPES OF VNSAs

Warlords

The distinguishing features of warlords have been elucidated by numerous scholars who are broadly in agreement that they are charismatic individuals, (most of whom have had some military background or experience) able to exercise control over certain territories in large part through their military power. They sometimes co-exist with a state but typically try to ensure that the writ of the state does not extend to the territory under their control – even if this requires the use of force. They are also willing to use force against their rivals. As one analysis states, warlords share certain characteristics: they command private military forces; they rule a specific territory, usually linked to their ethnic community; they have a degree of legitimacy and a symbiotic economic and military relationship with the local population; they participate in the global economic system, engaging in one or more forms of illicit or informal economy; and they challenge, privatize or supplement the state functions, resources and instruments on their territories. At the same time, coercion is rarely absent and is often used to impose taxes on licit and illicit business alike. As William Reno has shown, warlords put their individual interest above any notion of collective interest. One result of this is that warlord alliances are inherently temporary; they tend to fluctuate in response to both threats and opportunities.

In terms of their objectives, warlords typically seek power and resources. They want political power at least over a portion of state territory and seek to exploit the resources of that territory, sometimes engaging in looting of natural resources and sometimes providing protection and support for activities such as opium cultivation.

Examples include, “warlord mining economies in contemporary collapsed states, such as Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo,” as well as warlord involvement in the opium economies in Burma in the 1980s and 1990s and in contemporary Afghanistan. When illicit drugs are involved, violence and the threat of violence are used “to sustain illicit economic networks, to compete for control of trade routes, and to guarantee fulfillment of transaction contracts within the opium network.”

Warlords typically exert hierarchical forms of leadership and control, although they tend to operate through trusted subordinates rather than a formal structure. In some cases, warlord rule is overlaid on existing tribal structures; in others, it transcends these structures. In both cases, however, charismatic authority is reinforced by patronage systems in which the warlords “bestow favors and recognition on those who support them.”

In terms of their relationship with the state, warlords are pragmatic – within limits. In effect, they want to maintain their autonomy and usually oppose any initiatives by the state that seek to curtail this. On occasion, however, they ostensibly collaborate with the state in an effort to determine the future of the relationship and circumscribe state power. In Afghanistan, for example, warlords have used “state building and democratization processes to legitimize their positions within the local and international political system,” in effect, creating a “warlord democracy.” It is a democracy in form rather than function, and power is shared among groups, all of whom retain the right to use violence. This is not surprising: warlords have a vested interest in ensuring that the central state remains too weak to challenge their position and prerogatives. Support for the central state, therefore, at best can only be limited, qualified and ambivalent.

As for the functions fulfilled by warlords, scholars are sharply divided.

Clearly, “most warlords do not engage in projects of public interest; they limit their activities to distributing cash, gifts, property and arms to the community of supporters.” For many observers, therefore, “they are VNSAs without redeeming social value, championing nothing beyond the accumulation of localized power and wealth for their own group.”

Yet, it is hard to dispute the notion that warlord

coercion provides a degree of predictability and stability, while ensuring that those in the territory they control are not subject to coercion by rivals. Marten goes a step further and, drawing on Mancur Olson's notion of "stationary bandits," notes that warlords have a vested interest in the provision of security within their territories, as this "encourages local investment by their subjects and in turn increases their own wealth." Indeed, it is important to recognize that warlords provide a very local form of governance that, for all its imperfections, has a closer relationship with – and perhaps even a higher degree of responsiveness to – the community, than does the state. Moreover, self-interest dictates that they exhibit restraint in their rule and in their external relationships with one another as they do not want to be so repressive or fractious that those under their control defect and seek alternatives. This was perhaps the single most important lesson learned by Afghan warlords from the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. None of this is intended to suggest that warlord rule is desirable. This has been particularly obvious in Somalia, where warlords contributed enormously to the demise of the state; yet even here it is worth noting that warlords are one of the few guarantors of security in a very insecure environment.

Militias

Militias are in some respects very similar to warlords, albeit without the charismatic leader. A militia can be understood as an "irregular armed force operating within the territory of a weak and/or failing state. The members of militias often come from the under classes and tend to be composed of young males who are drawn into this milieu because it gives them access to money, resources, power and security. In many instances, they are forced to join; in others, joining is seen as an opportunity or a duty. Militias can represent specific ethnic, religious, tribal, clan or other communal groups. They may operate under the auspices of a factional leader, clan or ethnic group, or on their own after the break-up of the states' forces. They may also be in the service of the state, either directly or indirectly. Generally, members of militias receive no formal military training. Nevertheless, in some cases they are skilled unconventional fighters. In other instances they are nothing more than a gang of extremely violent thugs that prey on the civilian population." Militias are "outside the formal security sector and central government command," and outside the law. Because they often come into existence to provide security where the central

government – for whatever reason – has failed to do so, however, "militias are often considered legitimate entities" filling the gap resulting from "the absence of effective national, provincial, or local security institutions." If they fill a functional hole left by the state, however, this in turn further challenges the legitimacy of the state. Moreover, the potential for conflict is very real. Militias "do not support state institutions. Loyalties lie within the militia organization."

Militias are particularly prevalent where particular factions or religious groups feel that they do not receive adequate protection from the state. This helps to explain why they have started to appear in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. In one highly publicized case, militia members tortured a journalist; at the same time, some favela residents have acknowledged that they feel more secure as a result of the militia presence. This highlights what Reno has described as the dual role of militias as both protectors and predators – a duality that has been equally evident in Iraq where militias have played a major role since the United States invasion in March 2003. In fact, Iraq has both long-standing militias (the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Badr organization) and newer militias such as the Mahdi Army, which is the armed wing of the Sadrist movement, and one linked to the Fadhila party, which is more representative of the traditional elites in the oil rich southern province of Basra.

Although much is made of the insurgency and terrorism in Iraq, in the southern province of Basra most of the violence has been between Fadhila, the SIIC's Badr organization and the Mahdi Army. Much of this violence appears to be over the control of oil – both legal exports and oil smuggling. The Fadhila party controlled the Iraq Oil Ministry until May 2006, but has increasingly been challenged by the Jaish al Mahdi militia, which dominates the local police, the Al Basra port authority and the Abu Flus port, which has long been used for illegal exports of crude oil. SIIC's Badr militias are also a powerful force in Al Basra. In effect, the three groups share power in an environment where the rules are unclear and the profits are immense. Moreover, each group has a capacity and a willingness to use violence to maintain or enhance its position in the competition. It has even been suggested that the parties behave more like "criminal gangs than political forces" and the gap between political and criminal activity has been blurred. Tensions among the competing groups

have periodically erupted into violence, while the “web of different security forces with allegiances to different factions or militias” undermine law enforcement and extend clashes between the militias into the police and other agencies. Police units have even fought one another on behalf of their respective militias. Turf wars, attacks on party headquarters and armed clashes have all become common in Al Basra. In March 2008, however, the Iraqi government intervened militarily and restored a degree of order in the city – although ironically many of the government troops deployed to the city were members of the Badr militia who had been integrated into the Iraqi Army. If taming the militias has become an imperative of the Iraq government, this task has become even more complex as a result of the Anbar Awakening and the creation of Sunni militias by the United States. Even without this added wrinkle the task is a formidable one.

Part of the reason is the dual nature of the militias. On the one hand, the militias have created death squads and played a major role in sectarian cleansing. They have also infiltrated government departments, with Mahdi Army members having a pervasive presence in the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Interior. At the same time, militias have become very important in filling governance gaps in Iraq, going beyond filling only the security gap to also filling some of the service gaps. This is particularly true of Jaish-al-Mahdi, with its support base in slum areas in Baghdad and Al Basra. The difficulty is that service provision is not politically neutral. Alternative service providers are a particular challenge to the post-Saddam Iraqi state, which has not yet succeeded in establishing high levels of legitimacy or support.

Indeed, one observer has even suggested that service provision is a form of warfare through welfare. “Groups reap three main benefits from providing public goods through their social welfare arms. First, the creation of a social welfare infrastructure highlights the failure of the state to fulfill its side of the social contract, thereby challenging the legitimacy of the state. Second, non-state social welfare organizations offer the population an alternative entity in which to place their loyalty. Third, a group that gains the loyalty of the populace commands a steady stream of resources with which it can wage battle against the regime.”

The provision of services in the first place, of course, requires considerable resources and this in turn

encourages militias to engage in illicit activities for fundraising. Jaish-al-Mahdi (JAM) has excelled in this. Many of Iraq’s gas stations, for example, are under the control of JAM, which controls not only black market sales in their forecourts but also dominates “the Shia trade in propane-gas canisters, which Iraqis use for cooking.” In addition, JAM controls Jamila market which is “the most important wholesale center in Baghdad, the receiving point for millions of dollars of market-bound goods into the capital.” The extortion or taxing of merchants in the market is another lucrative revenue stream. If JAM is heavily involved in extortion and black market activities, however, its activities are tempered by the need to maintain the support of its constituency. This is reflected in the fact that “sometimes the militiamen sell the propane at a premium, earning healthy profits; at other times they sell it at well-below market rates, earning gratitude from the poor and unemployed.” Moreover, in late 2007 and early 2008 JAM clamped down on rogue elements or factions engaged in predatory behavior exceeding the limits of what was regarded as permissible.

Although the militias in Iraq have linkages elsewhere in the region, especially with Iran, they are essentially sub-national organizations that came into existence to protect certain groups. Yet they use violence not only for defensive or protective purposes but also in offensive ways against rivals and sectarian enemies. Imposing stability and re-establishing effective governance, therefore, requires consistent and effective efforts to establish sufficient security and provide other necessary services so that the militias are no longer necessary. Doing this, however, is easier said than done.

Paramilitary forces

The distinction between militias and paramilitary forces is not entirely clear. One possible distinguishing characteristic is that paramilitary forces are, initially at least, an extension of government forces. They come into existence with the tacit consent and often the active encouragement of the government or the state’s military forces. Sunil Dasgupta, one of the most authoritative analysts of paramilitary forces or “parallel military formations” describes them as “armed formations outside regular military and police commands.” He also suggests that paramilitaries are often “poorly trained, lightly equipped, highly fragmented, frequently reorganized, but politically recruited and operated,

enabling them and the regimes that control them to hold territory inexpensively.” The difficulty with paramilitary forces, however, is that once created, they often prove difficult to control.

This was certainly true of perhaps the most notorious paramilitary organization, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The group that came into existence to help the Colombian government and army fight left-wing insurgency organizations was involved in many atrocities, engaged in fairly extensive drug-trafficking, and infiltrated both the army and the government. Paramilitary forces in Colombia came into existence in the late 1960s after legislation was passed permitting “the formation of local self-defense groups.” Initially, such groups were fragmented. In 1997, however, the AUC was established, under the leadership, of Carlos Castana to bring these groups together. Within three years the AUC had an estimated membership of 80,000.

Although the initial impulse for the formation of the AUC was security, the organization became involved in multiple criminal activities, ranging from drug-trafficking to oil theft, extortion and kidnapping. As one report notes, “While paramilitaries liked to position themselves as a necessary counter to Colombia’s leftist insurgents, ordinary Colombians were often victimized – instead of protected by – the paramilitaries. The armed groups displaced indigenous communities from their land, massacred civilians and kidnapped political figures. As human rights groups have documented, some paramilitaries even charged “taxes” in local areas and regulated how citizens could dress.” Here again the parallels between paramilitary forces and militias are obvious.

In 2003, President Uribe signed a peace agreement with the AUC and initiated a process of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR). Like most other examples of the DDR process, however, this has proved only a partial success. Although some members of the AUC have been reintegrated in society, many have created new armed groups. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the process has been wholly inadequate. As a result, Colombia is witnessing “the continuity or re-emergence either of old style paramilitary groups or a federation of new groups and criminal organizations based on the drug trade.” Estimates of the membership of these “new

illegal armed groups” range from 3,000 to 9,000. The groups include the Black Eagles in Norte de Santander, the Organización Nueva Generación in Nariño, and the Contrainsurgencia Wayúu in Guajira. Although the groups differ in size and cohesiveness – with some displaying considerable factionalism – all of them “are involved in some way with illegal activities such as drug-trafficking and smuggling, and thus seek a tight grip on seaports and poorly-controlled border crossings, especially to Ecuador and Venezuela.” Some are more overtly criminal than others, while some cooperate with their former enemies – the left-wing insurgents – even as others continue the fight against them. Nevertheless, it is clear that the emergence of these new groups is adding a novel and destabilizing element to the economy and society of Colombia and calling into question some of the political and military gains the Uribe government has made in recent years.

Insurgencies

An insurgency has been defined by the United States Department of Defense as “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.” More elaborately, it has been described as an “organized, armed political struggle whose goal may be the seizure of power through revolutionary takeover and replacement of the existing government. In some cases, however, an insurgency’s goals may be more limited. For example, the insurgency may intend to break away from government control and establish an autonomous state within traditional ethnic or religious territorial bounds. The insurgency may also only intend to extract limited political concessions unattainable through less violent means.”

Insurgents typically operate within a defined territory and seek to deprive the existing government of legitimacy while establishing themselves as a viable and legitimate alternative. Insurgents seek a transformation in governance with the existing incumbents overthrown and replaced by the insurgent group, which espouses different values, whether they stem from national identity or from concerns about social justice. While insurgencies often use terror tactics their activities go well beyond this and in areas they control they typically establish alternative forms of governance to that provided by the state. Similarly, although insurgencies can develop transnational

links, especially with diaspora communities, their objectives are territorially-bounded.

For insurgents control of the state is the prize. They are almost invariably dissatisfied with and hostile to the existing state and want to replace it with one based on the principles they espouse. These principles can range from an independent state based on national self-determination (sought by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam or LTTE in Sri Lanka), to the creation of a state based on a socialist or Maoist ideology (the Maoist insurgents in Nepal who are now part of the government), or even Shariah law (espoused by the Taliban). In the case of Iraq, the Sunni insurgency was partly an effort to expel the United States (and in this objective there was considerable overlap with the Shia militias) and partly an attempt to ensure that Sunni tribes had an established and respected place in the new political order in Iraq.

Even though insurgents typically espouse high ideals this does not stop them from using terror tactics both to coerce the existing government and to provoke it into harsh measures that might further undermine its legitimacy and support among the population. Nor does it prevent them from resorting to criminal activities as funding mechanisms. Insurgents may also establish links to both criminal and terrorist organizations, in an attempt to advance their agenda.

One of the most fascinating insurgent groups has been the FARC in Colombia. What began as a left-wing idealistic movement to bring about social justice in a country dominated by a narrow elite, was gradually transformed from an “ideological” or “spiritual insurgency” to a “commercial insurgency.” Initially FARC protected and taxed coca farmers and drug traffickers, but some fronts, most notably the Sixteenth Brigade, became more deeply involved in the business supplying cocaine to the Arellano Felix Organization in Mexico and the Costa organization in Brazil. Several high-ranking FARC members have even been arrested for cocaine-trafficking in the United States as they attempted to move into the more lucrative downstream market. In 2007 and 2008, however, FARC suffered a series of major reverses, leading to speculation that it might cease to be a dangerous insurgency challenging the Colombian government. Even if the FARC insurgency is finally defeated, however, it seems likely that groups within FARC will continue to be

prominently involved in the drug trade. Moreover, as suggested above, one emergent phenomenon in Colombia is collaboration between FARC and new criminal organizations created by the former right-wing paramilitaries that made up the AUC.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency is similarly being funded in large part by profits from the opium trade, although in this case there are few if any indicators of a transition from the cause to the crass commercialism of the kind that has characterized FARC. The use of narcotics-trafficking by insurgents is not particularly new to Central Asia. In the late 1990s, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan became involved in the opium and heroin trade as a means of funding itself. Some observers even suggested that its annual offensives were designed largely to cover and protect the IMU’s trafficking activities and that the group was more of a criminal organization than an insurgency. In the event, however, many members of the group fought alongside the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan against the United States. This suggests that the desire for profit had not become more important than the cause in the way that it had done for FARC. Indeed, some insurgencies appear to maintain their political objectives while using the proceeds of criminal activities as a major funding mechanism. This has certainly been true of the LTTE. For this group, however, the profits from their own criminal activities have been supplemented by money from the Tamil diaspora – particularly in Canada – which includes legitimate donations, as well as donations obtained from coercion and extortion, and the proceeds of crimes such as credit card theft and fraud and drug-trafficking.

Insurgencies vary in structure. Some of them – particularly the more traditional insurgencies based on Maoist notions – are organized around a core leadership with a degree of hierarchy. Yet even these groups are sometimes operationally decentralized. This was certainly the case with the FARC, which had multiple fronts, each of which had a degree of autonomy, but within an overall hierarchical structure. The insurgency in Iraq in contrast is much more networked and diffused. Bruce Hoffman has characterized it as a “loose, ambiguous, and constantly shifting environment” in which “constellations of cells or collections of individuals gravitate toward one another to carry out armed attacks, exchange intelligence, trade weapons, or engage in joint training and then

disperse at times never to operate together again.” Insurgencies are very cooperative, reaching out for allies in the worlds of both crime and terrorism. FARC, for example, sought the bomb-making expertise of the IRA, while the Sunni tribal insurgents in Iraq initially worked with al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), before becoming disillusioned with their ally. The rift was provoked in part by AQI’s efforts to take control of black market activities that were tribal prerogatives and partly by the familiar al-Qaida tactic of marrying into the local power structure. While this latter approach had worked in the Philippines, it created considerable resentment in Iraq.

Terrorist organizations

As discussed above, some VNSAs use terror as a tactic. For terrorist organizations, in contrast, the use of indiscriminate violence against civilian targets is not only central to their strategy but is also their defining characteristic. These groups seek political change through the use of violence. At the same time, terrorist organizations differ enormously in terms of origins and objectives. Each of the four waves of modern terrorism identified by David Rapoport – anarchist, anti-colonial, left-wing and religious – has had its own set of militant organizations seeking change and using violence to bring it about. Yet, the dominance of one kind of terrorist organization does not mean the absence of others. The successors of anti-colonial terrorist organizations, for example, are groups dissatisfied with the outcome of decolonization, seeking national self-determination and see a terrorist campaign as the only way to achieve their objectives. For these groups the state remains the dominant frame of reference and they typically want a state of their own. When such groups have popular sympathy, a degree of legitimacy and some territorial control, they typically develop into an insurgency. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the early 21st century, the most dangerous terrorist organizations are not nationalist groups of this kind but rather those groups rooted in militant Islam.

Although terrorism has a long history, the events of 11 September 2001 gave it an unprecedented prominence. Since then most attention has been given to al-Qaida, the terrorist organization responsible for the destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon. Led by Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaida’s major objectives appear to be the replacement of

regimes in the Middle East with new governments that espouse Shariah law and are religious rather than secular in outlook. The existing regimes (especially the Saudi royal family and that of President Mubarak in Egypt) are regarded as the “near enemy” while the United States is designated the “far enemy” because of its support for the status quo in the Middle East.

Unlike the warlords, militias and insurgencies – all of which are nationally-based – al-Qaida’s has a transnational global presence. In effect it is a distributed, transnational network organization. At the same time its relationships with states vary considerably. While it targets certain states, al-Qaida also tries to maintain sanctuaries in countries that have sympathy for its aspirations and are willing to accept its presence. The organizational structure of al-Qaida has changed over time. Prior to 2001, al-Qaeda was a concentric network with the leadership group in Afghanistan at the core and cells dispersed throughout Western Europe at the periphery. The cells were typically overseen by intermediaries who provided guidance while insulating the core. After the United States intervention in Afghanistan and the removal of al-Qaida’s safe haven, the network appeared to become more horizontal. Subsequently, many observers argued that al-Qaida had transformed from terrorist network to social movement, inspiring sympathetic individuals and groups but not controlling them. The Madrid bombings, in particular seem to have been carried out by a local cell in what was a bottom-up phenomenon. At the same time, key members of the cell had contacts with the broader global jihad and even with key figures in al-Qaida. In the bombings that occurred in London on 7 July 2005, the al-Qaida link seems to have been stronger with at least two of those involved going to Pakistan probably for training. Key to the survival of al-Qaida in the face of a global United States offensive designed to destroy it has been the ability to adapt and morph. Moreover, there are some indications that what is increasingly referred to as “al-Qaida central” is reestablishing itself in its new sanctuaries in Pakistan.

One area in which there has been considerable change since 2001 is fundraising. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, efforts were made to regulate Islamic charities to ensure that funds were not diverted to support terrorist organizations. As a result of these and other efforts, attacks such as

Madrid have become reliant on local funding, often obtained through criminal activities. The Madrid bombings, in particular, were funded by a group of Moroccan drug traffickers who had become radicalized and merged into a local terrorist group. The traffickers provided all the funding, much of the know-how, and the connections that enabled the bombers to obtain the explosives.

This reliance on criminal activities is not new. The IRA was one of the pioneers in this area and it is perhaps not surprising that, with the peace process in Northern Ireland, the IRA transformed from a terrorist organization to a continuing criminal enterprise. Criminal activities once used to fund the cause were now used to get rich. The pattern of using crime as a funding mechanism has also characterized Hamas and Hezbollah along with their supporters outside the Middle East. Terrorist supporters in the United States as well as in the tri-border region of South America where Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay come together, for example, have sent the proceeds from cigarette smuggling, counterfeiting and other criminal activities, to Hamas and Hezbollah. For both organizations the funds have been critically important. Hamas and Hezbollah – unlike many terrorist groups which focus almost exclusively on attacks – have also provided services to key constituencies. In the Palestinian territories where poverty and corruption have been endemic, Hamas has stood out for its lack of corruption as well as its provisions of schools and hospitals. As Levitt has noted, “...economic, social and health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are truly miserable, leaving a void that groups like Hamas are all too eager to fill.” In the event, Hamas proved so successful in filling some of the capacity gaps and functional holes that, in January 2006, it won a majority of seats in the Parliament. Similarly, in Lebanon, Hezbollah, which started as a militia, operates hospitals, clinics and schools and is heavily involved in the provision of social welfare and other services. Although Hamas and Hezbollah are clearly also terrorist organizations, their activities belie an exclusive label or identity of this kind and they have become major political players in their respective societies.

Such examples notwithstanding, for the most part, terrorist organizations are the weakest of all the groups discussed here in terms of their challenge to state integrity and legitimacy. Driven by dissatisfaction with the status quo, most terrorist

groups do not have the capacity to mount an insurgency campaign but seek to discredit the state and undermine its authority through provoking increasing repression in response to acts of violence. At the same time, it also has to be acknowledged that there is sometimes a very thin line between terrorism and insurgency, in particular.

Criminal organizations and youth gangs

Of all the VNSAs considered here, criminal organizations are the most ubiquitous. Although some criminal organizations remain local, more and more of them have responded to the opportunities of globalization by becoming transnational in scope. They have also become increasingly diverse with more traditional organized crime groups such as the Chinese Triads, Italian Mafia organizations and the Japanese Yakuza increasingly sharing the spotlight with Nigerian drug traffickers and financial fraudsters, Russian and Albanian criminal organizations, Outlaw Motor Cycle Gangs, and Mexican drug-trafficking organizations among others. Almost all of these organizations are transnational in their activities and, therefore, are referred to here as transnational criminal organizations or transnational organized crime.

Transnational criminal organizations are essentially rational actors and can even be described as Clausewitzian: crime for them is simply a continuation of business by other means. The aim of transnational criminal organizations is to derive as much profit as possible from their activities – within the limits of acceptable risk. In some instances they will accept higher risk for higher profits; in others, they will avoid risk and accept lower profits.

Criminal organizations differ enormously in size and scope and in their portfolios of activities. Groups from Latin America, for example, are typically focused fairly narrowly on the drug business, while groups from elsewhere typically have a much broader set of criminal activities. For Russian, Chinese and Albanian organizations, for example, the range of activities include extortion, trafficking in human beings, especially women for commercial sex, cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting. Nigerian organized crime is somewhere in between with a lot of drug-trafficking, trafficking in women from West Africa to western Europe (especially Italy), and the infamous 419 (or advance fee) frauds that have become ubiquitous, as emails

have replaced letters and faxes and lowered the transaction costs.

There is no single structure of criminal organizations. Some are hierarchical organizations; others are networked and yet others use some kind of mixture of hierarchy and network. The virtue of the network structure is that it is highly-adaptable and resilient and is actually harder to target than more straight-forward hierarchies. In Mexico, for example, the Gulf Cartel's hierarchical structure has made it a far easier target for the Calderon government than Chapo Guzman's Sinaloa Cartel, which is more networked, with a far less formal structure than its rival. Moreover, as criminal organizations have become more transnational so the network structure seems particularly well-suited to them.

Criminal organizations also vary in their power and in the threats they pose to states. Many are very small, try to stay below the radar and pose little or no challenge to the state. Others, however, are much larger, more formidable and pose a serious challenge, particularly to weak states, but even to well-functioning democracies. The larger criminal organizations typically concentrate illicit power, in ways that can challenge or undermine the political and judicial processes. Moreover, the manner in which criminal organizations use corruption to maintain a low risk, highly permissive environment has debilitating effects on the rule of law and on the integrity of state structures. Some of the activities engaged in by transnational criminal organizations – especially trafficking in nuclear material, in weapons, and in human beings – threaten international, national and human security.

If organized crime has a vested interest in perpetuating the weakness of weak states, however, it has no interest in state collapse. Conditions of chaos are generally not conducive to good business. At the same time, when states collapse but some semblance of order is maintained then organized crime flourishes in the emerging opportunity space. This is certainly the case in Iraq where criminal organizations have been heavily involved in kidnapping, oil smuggling, drug-trafficking and a series of other crimes – sometimes cooperating with more politically-oriented VNSAs and sometime competing against them as these groups themselves engage in criminal activity to fund their political and military agendas.

Violence is a key part of organized crime. Yet, for the most part, this violence is very focused and selective rather than broad and indiscriminate. Violence and the threat of violence are used to maintain internal discipline, to protect or enlarge market share, and to deal with threats, whether from rivals or from government and law enforcement agencies. During the 1990s, Russian organized crime appeared to be particularly violent and was characterized by hundreds of contract killings, sometimes targeting rivals, sometimes investigative journalists and reformist politicians and sometimes obdurate businessmen who blocked organized crime efforts to obtain control over specific businesses. In effect, violence was a finely-honed instrument. As the criminal order in Russia has been consolidated and agreement reached on particular spheres of influence and control, the violence has diminished.

Indeed, in 2008 the most violent organized crime seems to be in Mexico. Several factors account for this. First, Mexico has developed its own local drug markets and some of the violence reflects a struggle for control of these markets. Second, higher level violence among major cartels stems partly from personal animosity perpetuated and deepened by killings of family members in rival organizations. It also results from the desire to control strategic locations for moving drugs into the United States. This is why border cities such as Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana have been the focus of intense fighting among rival organizations. Since the advent of the Calderon administration in 2006 and its offensive against the drug-trafficking organizations, the traffickers have responded by ratcheting up the level of violence, killing both law enforcement and military personnel. In one week in May 2008, five police chiefs were assassinated including the acting Chief of the Federal Police. This marked a frontal assault on the Mexican state.

There are two precedents for this – the war on the Colombian state declared by Pablo Escobar and the Mafia's attacks on the Italian state, both of which occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In both cases, the state fought back and emerged victorious from the confrontation. Many observers are concerned that the challenge to the Mexican state is more formidable than in these earlier cases and that the state does not have the same level of capability to fight back.

In Central America, the preoccupation is less with the drug-trafficking organizations than with youth

gangs popularly known as maras. These gangs are violent and seem to be in large part about belonging and status by young men who are alienated from society and family. The maras “emerged from conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua during the 1980s. Thousands of people fled north, including a large number of young men who had fought on the governments’ side or with the insurgents. Many of these young men went to Los Angeles, but because they were poorly-educated, few were able to find work.” As a result many drifted into the gang scene and began to develop gangs of their own simply for self-preservation. The United States subsequently deported many of the gang members back to Central America. All this succeeded in doing though was transplanting the problem, giving it a transnational dimension and facilitating its growth. Estimates suggest that there are about 70,000 maras in Central America – with 36,000 in Honduras, 14,000 in Guatemala, 11,000 in El Salvador, 4,500 in Nicaragua, 2,700 in Costa Rica, and 1,400 in Panama – with another 20,000 in the United States.

One analysis contends that “the existence of maras can be viewed as the failure of the state to provide some service deemed to be essential. In the United States, maras can be viewed as the result of a lack of adequate training programs, or youth services, designed to move disadvantaged teens onto a path with a prosperous future.” This argument is compelling and accords fully with the argument developed throughout this paper suggesting that the rise of VNSAs is intrinsically linked to deficiencies, shortcomings and failures of states. As with other VNSAs, however, they also pose challenges to the state. According to one assessment, the maras in Central America “overwhelm the governments, the police and the legal systems with their sheer audacity, violence and numbers.” Moreover, they are becoming more professionalized and are developing in ways that increasingly resemble well-established criminal organizations. Their traditional motivations appear increasingly to be overlaid by a desire for criminal profits – whether through contracting out to more established criminal and drug-trafficking organizations or through direct involvement in for-profit criminal activities. According to Saltsman and Welch, the maras are “becoming increasingly involved in the trafficking of narcotics, weapons and smuggling of human beings between Latin America and their US-based branches. They are also involved in auto theft, and the kidnapping

of business leaders.” Some observers have even argued that maras could well develop cooperative links or even alliances with terrorist organizations, although given differences in culture, outlook and motivation such a development appears less likely than often suggested. Nevertheless, it is clear that as they stand at present they pose a serious challenge to the security of states in Central America.

CONCLUSION

One of the most striking features of VNSAs is their sheer variety. This suggests that there is some danger in lumping them together under a single rubric. Yet, it is clear from the preceding analysis that they do have certain things in common: they all emerge in response to inadequacies, deficiencies or shortcomings in many states and to one degree or another seek to compensate for those shortcomings. At the same time, there are important differences in motivation, purpose, power structures and the like. One of the dangers, however, is that they will increasingly form alliances with one another. There are certainly examples of linkages between organized crime and terrorist networks, although these are based on temporary convenience rather than real affinity.

One surprising theme to emerge from the preceding review is that in some cases there is a transformation of one kind of VNSA to another. The Madrid example shows how a criminal organization can morph into a terrorist group. The case of the IRA illustrates the opposite kind of transformation. It also appears that FARC, along with other right-wing paramilitaries, has morphed from a political into a criminal organization. For their part, the maras might be evolving into more traditional criminal organizations. Whether they will follow the traditional pattern of organized crime evolution from the purely predatory to parasitic relationships with local power structures and ultimately to the creation of symbiotic relationships at the state level remains uncertain. Yet, even where there is not a clear-cut transformation from one kind of VNSA into another the boundaries between them are blurring. Part of the reason for this blurring is that criminal activities have become the common denominator. To put it simply criminal activities are no longer the exclusive prerogative of criminal organizations. Terrorists, insurgents, warlords, militias and paramilitary forces all engage to one degree or another in criminal activities. Indeed, these activities, their involvement in the illegal

global economy, and the connections that they make have made them much more formidable challengers to the state. In effect, crime has increased the relative power of VNSAs compared with the state.

At the same time, it is clear that challenges to the dominance of the Westphalian state have become more prevalent as the state itself has become increasingly deficient. The implication of both the relative and absolute decline of the state is that those involved in national and international security in the 21st century will need to understand the threats from VNSAs. It also seems likely that some states will seek alliances with various VNSAs in an effort to advance their own interests – the links between Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence and Daewood Ibrahim’s D-Company (which was predominantly a criminal organization but was also involved in the Mumbai bombings of 1993) or between Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez and FARC are instances where this has already happened. This phenomenon is likely to increase in frequency and significance over the next few decades. VNSAs will continue to challenge some states but will increasingly align with others to create a complex and confusing set of geopolitical and organizational rivalries that will often prove difficult to disentangle.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 6-7.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. p. 7.
- ⁶² *US Army & Marines Field Manual*, FM 3-24, (Final Draft, June 2006), <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24fd.pdf>.
- ⁶³ *US Army & Marines Field Manual*, FM 100-20 /AFP 3-20, "Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflicts."
- ⁶⁴ Steven Metz, *The Future of Insurgency* (December 10, 1993). This study is available at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/metz.pdf>
- ⁶⁵ See Tamara Makarenko, "Terrorism and Drug Trafficking Threaten Security in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 12 No. 11, (2000) pp.28-30
- ⁶⁶ Hoffman, Bruce. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004.
- ⁶⁷ See <http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/Rapoport-Four-Waves-of-Modern-Terrorism.pdf>.
- ⁶⁸ For a fuller analysis see Phil Williams, "In Cold Blood: The Madrid Bombings" in *Perspectives on Terrorism: Special Issue on Under-Investigated topics in Terrorism Research*, June 2008, available at <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com>
- ⁶⁹ See John Horgan and Max Taylor, "Playing the 'Green Card'- Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 1," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 11, No.2 (Summer 1999) pp. 1-38 and John Horgan, "The Provisional IRA in 2005: The Final Moments of an Increasingly Irrelevant Movement?" Paper prepared for International Workshop on Global Terror and the Imagination, University of Pittsburgh, March 24-27, 2005.
- ⁷⁰ Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 5.
- ⁷¹ Steven C. Boraz and Thomas C. Bruneau, "Are the Maras Overwhelming Governments in Central America" *Military Review*, Nov-Dec 2006, pp. 36-40 at p. 36.
- ⁷² Ibid. p. 37.
- ⁷³ Terry W. Saltsman and Ben J. Welch III, "Maras in Central America." Available at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com>.
- ⁷⁴ Boraz and Bruneau, p. 38.
- ⁷⁵ Saltsman and Welch.
- ⁷⁶ This point about relative and absolute decline of the state was made to the author by Professor Paul Kan of the US Army War College.

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