GANGS AND OTHER TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS (TCOs) AS TRANSNATIONAL THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Max G. Manwaring
Max.Manwaring@carlisle.army.mil

A new kind of war is being waged in various parts of the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and everywhere else around the world today.¹ Some of the main protagonists are those who have come to be designated as first-, second-, and third-generation street gangs, as well as the more traditional Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) such as Mafia families, Illegal Drug Traffickers, Warlords, Terrorists, Insurgents, etc. In this war, TCOs are not sending conventional military units across national borders or building an industrial capability in an attempt to “filch some province” from some country.² These nonstate actors are more interested in commercial profit and controlling territory (i.e., turf) to allow maximum freedom of movement and action. That freedom within countries and across national frontiers ensures commercial market share and revenues, as well as secure bases for market expansion. That freedom of action also allows these criminal organizations to expand their activities from drug smuggling, to smuggling people, body parts, weapons, and cars; along with associated intimidation, murder, kidnapping, and robbery; money laundering; home and community invasion; and a host of other lucrative societal destabilization activities.

What makes all of this into a new kind of war is that the national security and sovereignty of affected countries is being impinged every day, and TCO’s illicit commercial motives are, in fact, becoming an ominous political agenda.³ Thus, whether a gang or another TCO is specifically a criminal or insurgent type organization is irrelevant. The putative objective of all these illegal entities—the common denominator that links gangs and other TCOs—is to control people, territory, and government, to ensure their own specific ends. That is a good working definition of insurgency, and a serious political agenda.⁴
Thus, rather than trying to depose a government in a major stroke (golpe or coup) or a prolonged revolutionary war, gangs and other TCOs more subtly take control of turf one street or neighborhood at a time (coup d’ street), or one individual, business, or government office at a time. At the same time, instead of directly confronting a national government, sophisticated and internationalized gangs and their TCO allies use a mix of complicity, indifference, corruption, and violent intimidation to quietly and indirectly co-opt and seize control of a state, a portion of a state, or controlling institutions of a state.5

This indirect and primarily political-psychological approach in contemporary unconventional conflict is not well understood. To help leaders and opinion makers come to grips analytically with the most salient strategic aspects that dominate contemporary asymmetric gang and TCO-related violence, we, first, clarify the conflict context within which the worldwide gang phenomenon and other TCOs operate. With this as background, we can begin to answer the fundamental “What, Who, and Why?” questions, and set out to understand the adversary, and the type of conflict and threat we face. Second, we briefly examine selected cases from Central America, the Caribbean, and South America that demonstrate how differing types of criminal activities contribute to the instabilities that lead to the erosion of nation-state sovereignty and the processes of state failure. With these cases as background, we can more fully answer the necessary “Who, What, and Why questions, and begin to deal with the “How?” question. Then, as part of this section of the paper, we can advance our understanding of the political-psychological and military-police factors that lead to strategic success or failure in contemporary unconventional war—that is, the outcome. The explanation of outcome will answer the “So what?” question.

Third, on a positive note, we examine a seminal example of past counter-gang success. That discussion centers on the Italian government’s strategy that contributed to the failure of that country’s gang phenomenon, and the success of its counter-gang strategy. Finally, we conclude with a challenge to political and military leaders, and a succinct list of strategic-level tasks that can, if applied carefully and prudently, lead to success in contemporary irregular wars. All this is designed to lead to the broad
strategic vision necessary to understand and win such a political-psychological kind of war—not only
the battles, but the war itself.

CONTEXT

This challenge to rethink contemporary asymmetric conflict, as conducted by unconventional
“irregular” non-state actors, takes us to the direct linkage between gangs, other TCOs, and insurgents.
Although these various organizations may differ in terms of motives and modes of operation, each type
of non-state actor must eventually seize political power to guarantee the freedom of action, as well as
the ideological or commercial enrichment environments he wants. Additionally, the protean nature of the
gang phenomenon, organized crime, and contemporary insurgency does not accommodate complete
conformity to any prescribed definition. Thus, we maintain the position we took in 2005—that is, the
common denominator that defines gangs and TCOs as mutations of insurgents is the irrevocable need to
depose or control an incumbent government. As a consequence, the “Duck Analogy” applies. That is,
when second and third-generation gangs and other TCOs look like ducks, walk like ducks, and act like
ducks—although they may be a peculiar breed, they are, nevertheless, ducks!

The Theoretical Conflict Terrain in Which Gangs and TCO Allies Operate

Before examining the characteristics of the gang phenomenon, its links to transnational criminal
organizations and insurgents, it is useful to sketch the basic outlines of the larger picture of the current
conflict situation and the place of gangs and TCOs in it. First, Metz and Millen argue that four distinct
but interrelated battle spaces exist in the contemporary security environment. They are: 1) traditional
direct interstate war; 2) unconventional indirect non-state war; 3) unconventional intrastate war (which
tends to involve direct vs. indirect conflict between state and non-state actors); and 4) indirect interstate
war, which entails aggression by a nation-state against another through proxies.
Gangs and other TCOs operate most effectively in the second and third categories of non-state battle space. Non-state and intrastate wars involve criminal and terrorist actors who thrive among and within various host countries. In describing the gang phenomenon as a simple mutation of a violent act we label as insurgency, we mischaracterize the activities of non-state actors who are attempting to take control of a state. We traditionally tend to think of insurgency as a primarily a military activity, and we think of gangs and other TCOs as law-enforcement problems. Yet, all these non-state actors are engaged in a highly complex political act—“political war.” This type of conflict is often called “irregular war,” “insurgency war,” “asymmetric war,” “4th generation war,” and also “a complex emergency.”

This kind of war is defined as acting, organizing, and thinking differently from opponents to maximize one’s own advantages, exploit an opponent’s weaknesses, attain the initiative, and gain freedom of movement and action. In these terms, non-state war exploits—directly and indirectly—the disparity between contending parties to gain relative advantage, and uses terrorist and insurgent methods. Moreover, it can have political-psychological and physical dimensions, as well as lethal and non-lethal dimensions. Additionally, it can have both ideological-political objectives and commercial (search-for-wealth) motives—and it is constantly mutating. As a consequence, there are no formal declarations or terminations of conflict; no easily identified human foe to attack and defeat; no specific territory to take and hold; no single credible government or political actor with which to deal; and no guarantee that any agreement between or among contending actors will be honored. In short, the battle space is everywhere, and includes everything and everyone.

In this context, the harsh realities of contemporary instability and chaos are caused by myriad destabilizers. The causes include increasing poverty, human starvation, widespread disease, and lack of political and socio-economic justice. The consequences are seen in such forms as social violence, criminal anarchy, refugee flows, illegal drug trafficking and organized crime, extreme nationalism, irredentism, religious fundamentalism, insurgency, ethnic cleansing, and environmental devastation. These destabilizing conditions tend to be exploited by militant nationalists, militant reformers, militant religious fundamentalists, ideologues, civil and military bureaucrats, terrorists, insurgents, warlords, drug barons, organized criminals, and gangs working to achieve their own narrow purposes. Those who argue that instability, chaos, and conflict are the results of poverty, injustice, corruption, and misery may
well be right. We must remember, however, that individual men and women are prepared to kill and to destroy and to maim, and, perhaps, to die in the process, to achieve their self-determined ideological and/or commercial objectives. In the end, Zbigniew Brzezinski reminds us that, “behind almost every violent act lurks a political problem.”

Given that contemporary unconventional non-state war is essentially political war, one can see that insurgents, narco-terrorists, and gangs and their TCO allies are making careful coercive political-psychological preparations to ensure their desired level of freedom of movement and action. Conversely, one can also see that the targeted state and its international allies are busy putting people in jail and trying to conduct a conventional war of attrition. Thus, the power to deal with these kinds of adversaries is no longer combat fire power or more benign police power. It is the multilevel, combined political, psychological, moral, informational, economic, social, police, and military activity that can be brought to bear holistically on the causes and consequences, as well as the perpetrators of violence. Ultimately, then, success in contemporary unconventional conflict comes as a result of a unified effort to apply the full human and physical resources of the nation-state and its international allies to achieve the individual and collective well-being that can lead to societal peace.

Gang Evolution and the Linkage to other TCOs: Three Generations of Urban Gangs

The evolution of street gangs from small, turf-oriented, petty-cash entities to larger, internationalized, commercial-political organizations is often slow and generally ad hoc—depending on leadership, and the desire and ability to exploit opportunity. Thus, the development of gang violence from the level of “protection,” gangsterism, and brigandage--to drug trafficking, smuggling of people, body parts, armament, and other lucrative “items” associated with the global criminal activity--to taking political control of ungoverned territory and/or areas governed by corrupt politicians and functionaries can be uneven and incomplete. That is, some gangs never move beyond protectionism and gangsterism. Other gangs, from time to time, act as mercenaries for larger and better organized TCOs. And, as gangs expand their activities to compete with long-established TCOs, they expand their geographical and commercial parameters. As gangs operate and sometimes evolve, they generate more and more
violence and instability over wider and wider sections of the political map, and generate sub-national, national, and regional instability and insecurity. As a consequence, gangs are actually and potentially a threat to the national security and the effective sovereignty of the nation-state within which they operate.\textsuperscript{13} And, according to a former El Salvadoran Vice-Minister of Justice, Silvia Aguilar, “Domestic crime and its associated destabilization are now Latin America’s most serious security threat.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{First Generation Gangs: Organization, Motives, and Level of Violence.} An analysis of urban street gangs shows that some of these criminal entities have evolved through three generations of development. The first generation—or traditional street gangs—are primarily turf-oriented. They have loose and unsophisticated leadership that focuses on turf protection to gain petty cash, and on gang loyalty within their immediate environs (e.g., designated city blocks or neighborhoods). When first generation street gangs engage in criminal enterprise, it is largely opportunistic and individual in scope, and tends to be localized and operates at the lower end of extreme societal violence—gangsterism and brigandage. Most gangs stay firmly within this first generation of development, but more than a few have moved on to the second generation.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Second Generation Gangs.} This generation of street gangs is organized for business and commercial gain. These gangs have a more centralized leadership that tends to focus on drug trafficking and market protection. At the same time, they operate in a broader spatial or geographic area that may include neighboring cities and countries. Second generation gangs, like other more sophisticated criminal enterprises, use the level of violence necessary to protect their markets and control their competition. They also use violence as political interference to negate enforcement efforts directed against them by police and other national and local security organizations. And, as they seek to control or incapacitate state security institutions, they often begin to dominate vulnerable community life within large areas of the nation-state. In this environment, second generation gangs almost have to link with and provide services to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). As these gangs develop broader, market-focused, and sometimes overtly political agendas to improve their market share and revenues,
they may overtly challenge state security and sovereignty. If and when they do, second generation gangs become much more than annoying law enforcement problems.¹⁶

This point was made over ten years ago in the following report published by the West Indian Commission:

Nothing poses greater threats to civil society in [Caribbean] countries than the drug problem, and nothing exemplifies the powerlessness of regional governments more. That is the magnitude of the damage that drug abuse and trafficking hold for our Community. It is a many layered danger. At base is the human destruction implicit in drug addiction; but, implicit also, is the corruption of individuals and systems by the sheer enormity of the inducements of the illegal drug trade in relatively poor societies. On top of all this lie the implications for governance itself—at the hands…of the drug barons…who threaten governance from within.¹⁷

Third Generation Gangs. More often than not, these gangs continue first and second generation activities as they expand their geographical frontiers, as well as their commercial and political objectives. As they evolve, they develop into more seasoned groups with broader drug-related markets. They also develop into very sophisticated transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), in their own right, with ambitious economic and political agendas. In these terms, third generation gangs inevitably begin to control ungoverned territory with a nation-state and/or begin to acquire political power in poorly-governed space.¹⁸ This political action is intended to provide security and freedom of movement for gang activities. As a consequence, the third generation gang and its leadership challenge the legitimate state monopoly on the exercise of political control and the use of violence within a given geographical area. The gang leader, then, acts much like a warlord or a drug baron.¹⁹ That status, clearly and unequivocally, takes the gang into the battle space we call intrastate war (i.e., direct unconventional confrontation with a nation-state). Here, gang objectives aim to 1) control or depose an
incumbent government, or 2) to control parts of a targeted country or sub-regions within a country and create enclaves that are essentially para-states.  

**The Challenge and the Threat**

A government’s failure to extend a legitimate sovereign presence throughout its national territory—Colombia is one example—leaves a vacuum in which gangs, drug cartels, leftist insurgents, the political and narco-Right, and the government itself may all compete for power. In that regard, ample evidence clearly demonstrates that Central American, Caribbean, and South American governments’ authority and presence have diminished over large geographical portions of those regions. However, contrary to popular perceptions, such areas are not “lawless” or “ungoverned.” These territories are governed by the gangs, insurgents, warlords, and/or drug barons who operate where there is an absence or only partial presence of state institutions. In this sense, gangs’ activities are not simply criminal and commercial in nature. For their own preservation and expansion, the second and third-generation gangs—and sometimes even first generation gangs--have little choice but to challenge the state directly. This unconventional type of conflict pits non-state actors (e.g., gangs, warlords, drug barons, and/or insurgents) directly—rather than indirectly--against nation-states and requires a relatively effective “defense” capability.

The gang/TCO challenge to national security, stability, and sovereignty, and the attempt either to control or depose governments takes us to the “threat.” In this context, it must be remembered that crime, violence, and instability are only symptoms of the threat. The ultimate threat is either 1) that of state failure, or 2) the violent imposition of a radical socio-economic-political restructuring of the state and its governance. In either case, gangs contribute to the evolutionary state failure process. It is a process by which the state loses the capacity and/or the will to perform its fundamental governance and security functions. Over time, the weaknesses inherent in its inability to perform the business of the state are likely to lead to the eventual erosion of its authority and legitimacy. In the end, the state cannot control its national territory or the people in it.
But, just because a state fails does not mean that it will simply go away. (Haiti comes immediately to mind). In fact, failing and failed states tend to linger and go from bad to worse. The lack of responsible governance and personal security generate greater poverty, violence, and instability—and a downward spiral in terms of development. It is a zero-sum game in which the gang and its TCOs allies are the winners and the rest of the targeted society is the looser. Additionally, the longer failing and failed states persist, the more they and their spill-over effects endanger regional and global peace and security. Failing and failed states become dysfunctional states, rogue states, criminal states, narco-states, or new “people’s republics” or “democratic republics.”

The consistency of these lessons derived from relatively recent experience—from Asia’s Golden Triangle to the Middle East, to Mexico, and from Central America to Haiti and the rest of the Caribbean Basin, and to the White Triangle coca-producing countries of South America’s Andean region—inspires confidence that these lessons are valid.

FROM CAUSE TO EFFECT: FINDING ORDER IN THE CHAOS OF THE CASES

In this global security environment, governments, military and police forces, and other agencies responsible for various aspects of national security have little choice but to rethink security as it applies to “new” unconventional threats that many political and military leaders have tended to ignore or wish away. Probably the most significant unconventional threats facing leaders today are those generated by the gang phenomenon. First-, second-, and third-generation gangs are engaged in perpetrating destabilizing and devastating violence all over the world, but contemporary leaders are confused regarding what this phenomenon is and what it is not. Their confusion is demonstrated by the various names being attached to such violence. Some call it “terrorism,” others call it “criminal anarchy,” “narco-terrorism,” or “complex emergency situations.” Widespread confusion is also shown by the various names that have been attached to the perpetrators of gang violence. They have been and are called “technicals” in Somalia, “soldiers” in Sierra Leone, “Tontons Macoutes” in Haiti, and “pseudo-militaries” in Colombia. Regardless of the names of these groups, political, military, and police leaders
would be well advised to take an important step toward understanding and dealing with the gang phenomenon by following the advice of Sun Tzu. He explained, “What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy.”

Even though no standardized organizational charts or well-thought-out published statements of purpose and strategy for mutating gangs exist, some very instructive common patterns of behavior have been observed empirically. Thus, moving from broader to more specific examples, this part of the chapter examines the strategic architecture of selected first- and second-generation gang activities that are not explicitly political in Central and South America and the Caribbean. That architecture focuses on ways, means, and ends (i.e., motives and vision, organization and leadership, programs of action, and results). The following cases and architecture center on specific territorial and commercial enrichment activities with relatively subtle political implications.

**The Basics of the Situation in Central America**

The consensus among those who study this phenomenon is that many transnational gangs in Central America originated in Los Angeles, California, during the early 1990s. They were formed by young immigrants whose parents had come to the United States to avoid the ongoing instability and insurgencies in Central America during the 1980s. Once in the United States, many of the young immigrants were exposed to and became involved with gangs in the rough neighborhoods where they grew up. The gangs began moving into all five Central American republics in the 1990s, primarily because convicted felons were being sent from prisons in the United States back to the countries of their parents’ origins. These gangs include the famed *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13), *Mara*–18, other smaller gangs in El Salvador, and an estimated 63,700 kindred spirits in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. It is noteworthy that the word *mara* is a slang term for “gang” and is derived from the name of a type of ant known for its ferocity. Literally, *trucha* means “trout” and is also a slang term for “shrewd Salvadoran.” Thus, *Mara Salvatrucha* means a gang of shrewd Salvadorans. Additionally, *Mara*–18 is the designation for the 18th Street Gang.
What the Maras Do

Even though gangs in each country have some unique characteristics and can be bitter rivals for control of neighborhoods and other disputed territory or “turf,” their origins, motives, and patterns of action are similar. These similarities begin with the various Central American gangs and their activities being intricately linked across international borders. Virtually all of them have flourished under the protection and mercenary income provided by larger and older TCO networks. The basis for those alliances is the illegal drug trade that is credited with the transshipment of up to 75 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States. In addition to trafficking in drugs, Central American gangs are engaged in trafficking in human beings and weapons and are responsible for kidnappings, robberies, extortion, assassinations, and other illicit profit-generating activities.28

The root causes of gang activity in Central American countries and Mexico are also similar. They include gang members growing up in marginal areas with minimal access to basic social services; high levels of youth unemployment, compounded by insufficient access to educational and other public benefits; overwhelmed, ineffective, and often corrupt justice systems; easy access to weapons; dysfunctional families; and high levels of intra-familial and intra-community violence. It must be remembered, again, that it is not poverty, injustice, or misery that willfully kill, maim, and destroy. It is individual men and women—and, sometimes, boys and girls—who are prepared to implement all kinds of horrible and coercive “intimidations” and “instabilities” in their search for status and well-being.29

Thanks to the activities of disaffected youth gangs, overall crime rates have increased dramatically throughout the Central American region. Honduras has a murder rate of 154 per 100,000 population—double that of Colombia, even though that country is fighting three different insurgencies as well as its various drug cartels. In El Salvador, the homicide rate is about 40 per 100,000 inhabitants; Guatemala’s murder rate has risen 40 percent from 2001 to 2004 and is now approximately 50 per 100,000; and the murder rate in Mexico is estimated to be about 14 per 100,000. The Mexican figure is low by Central American standards but is considered “epidemic” by the World Health Organization.
(WHO). Additionally, as if these statistics were not grim enough, Mexico has the highest incidence of kidnapping in the entire world—with an estimated 3,000 kidnappings in 2004.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{The General Results of Central American Gang Activity}

The impact of gang violence on regional economies is significant. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimates the cost of violence throughout all of Latin America to be 14.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).\textsuperscript{31} Despite the fact that the data required to calculate these costs is admittedly vague and inconsistent, the governments of all five Central American countries and Mexico have expressed serious concerns. For example, Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico recently signed a multilateral agreement committing their governments to combating “narco-terrorism” and criminal gangs.\textsuperscript{32} In the meantime, El Salvador and Honduras unilaterally continue to pursue hard-line anti-gang policies. They include stronger law enforcement efforts and longer prison sentences.

Clearly, Central American gangs, their activities, and impacts are linked across borders. An instability threat is definitely spilling out of the region into neighboring countries—including the United States. This is a regional problem that requires regional solutions, but for further analytical clarity we will take a closer look at the situation by briefly examining the two major gangs in El Salvador.

\textbf{El Salvador}

As noted above, the roots of the maras’ presence in El Salvador are traced to Southern California in the 1980s and 1990s. In the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, police determined that local gangs—including a little-known group of Salvadoran immigrant youth known as the \textit{Mara Salvatrucha}—had carried out most of the looting and violence. In response, California passed strict, new anti-gang laws. Then, with the subsequent “three strikes and you’re out” legislation of 1994, the prison population in that state increased dramatically. Additionally, in 1996, the U.S. Congress passed a “get tough” approach to immigration law. As a result of these successive pieces of legislation, thousands of convicted felons have been deported to El Salvador over the past several years. Significantly, until
very recently, the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s rules prohibited U.S. officials from informing El Salvadoran officials of the deportees’ backgrounds. The results were disastrous for El Salvador. The deportees, also called “returnees,” many of whom had never lived in El Salvador, arrived with their outlandish tattoos, their “Spanglish” language, and their arrogant attitudes. They quickly introduced the California gang culture, illegal drugs with their related “crack dens” and “crack babies,” extortions, car-theft rings, burglaries, and contract killings. At first, Salvadoran officials had no idea what was happening—and when they began to understand the depth and seriousness of the problems brought by the gangs, they did not have the knowledge, experience, organization, or resources to deal with them. Given its momentum, the gang problem in El Salvador is thought to have escalated faster than in any other Central American country, and that country now “is captive to the growing influence and violence of gangs.”

Organization

The two main gangs, MS-13 and MS-18, boast 10,000 to 20,000 members. The Salvadoran National Council on Public Security calculates 39,000 members—22,000 in MS-13, 12,000 in MS-18, and another 5,000 in other gangs. However, regardless of the lack of precise figures, both of those estimates are foreboding numbers in a country with a population of only 6.5 million. Like the estimated membership numbers, gang organization is not perfectly clear. Nevertheless, there appears to be a hierarchical pyramid structure that is common among Central American, Caribbean, and South American gangs.

At the top of the pyramid are the international bosses. Then, a second layer of international/transnational gang leadership exists. These second-level individuals oversee well-connected cells that are engaged primarily in trafficking global arms, drugs, and human beings. At the third level, gang cell members are involved in lower-level national vs. international trafficking of all kinds. Despite their national orientation, third-level members are in touch with upper-level as well as second-level members. This third level of gang membership contains centralized command and control elements that
manage operational planning, finances, strategy, and provide some administrative support to the higher
and lower echelons. Thus, they may be considered parts of a “Hollow Corporate Model.” Additionally,
national third-level gang cell members may manage geographically distributed “project teams.”

The fourth level of the generalized gang pyramid comprises the “neighborhood” gang members. This is a series of decentralized cliques (clickas) or cells that are responsible for specific neighborhoods or areas. Fourth-level individuals are not full-fledged MS-13 or MS18 members. They make up three distinct levels at the lowest level of the gang pyramid—“sympathizers,” “aspirants,” and “nobodies,” who do the drudge work in the barrios (neighborhoods/slums). They also act as “soldiers” for higher-level cells and project teams, or they may act as contracted mercenaries for other TCOs. As might be expected, this fourth-level group represents the largest segment of the total gang population, and their ages range from 8 to 18.

Program of Action to Maximize Profits

The gangs’ multi-level organization indicates a substantial enterprise, designed especially for conducting large-scale and small-scale business all the way from the transnational (global) level down to specific streets in specific barrios. This type of organization is also designed for quick and effective decision making and implementation of decisions. In short, the first priority of the Salvadoran MS-13 and MS-18 gang organizations is operating a successful business, along with its promotion and protection. More specifically, this type of organization permits continuous, protean operations over time. It allows for diversification of activities, diffusion of risk, and flexibility, in that quick adjustments to correct mistakes or to exploit developing opportunities may be made. The organization also provides a coherent mechanism for enforcing discipline and safeguarding operations at all levels. Additionally, it provides a planning facility that can deliberately expand operations and increase profits.

Regarding expansion of operations, the Salvadoran gangs are positioned to negotiate the establishment of their own trafficking corridors through Central America and Mexico. They are positioned to organize friendly or unfriendly takeovers of small cartels. They have also become
sophisticated enough to begin to prohibit members from getting new tattoos and to discipline severely (execute) members who break rules related to the consumption of crack and cocaine. All this indicates an evolution from first-generation well into second-generation gang status. Nevertheless, the current organization of MS-13 and MS-18 also reflects that these gangs maintain a first-generation focus on turf. The gang members at that level of development operate under loose leadership, engage in a broad range of opportunistic, petty cash-type criminal activity, and are involved in serious inter-gang rivalry.  

The second-generation part of the MS-13 and MS-18 organizations is interested in market protection and expansion and focuses its illegal activities on drugs as a business. As the generalized pyramid organization suggests, the upper echelons are more cohesive, and leadership is more centralized. This second-generation group does not retain a specific turf orientation. Drug selling becomes a group rather than an individual activity, and the gangs exploit both violence and technology to control their competition and absorb new markets. Thus, both generations of gang members currently exist within the overall organization. The turf part of the gang is more prevalent, but the “marketers” are more productive and powerful. As MS-13 and MS-18 continue to evolve in their internationalization and sophistication, they are more and more likely to develop explicit political aims that would truly challenge nation-states. This cautionary corollary takes us to the “Bunker Cocktail.”

**Results of Salvadorean Gang Activities**

John Sullivan and Robert Bunker outline a pragmatic “cocktail mix” of nonmilitary methods by which a transnational nonstate actor, such as a second-generation gang, can challenge the *de jure* security and sovereignty of a given nation. This “Bunker Cocktail” has proved to be the case in no less than fifteen municipalities in El Salvador and in other political jurisdictions in neighboring Central American republics, Mexico, and Brazil. Here is how it works:

If the irregular attacker—criminal gangs, terrorists, insurgents, drug cartels, militant environmentalists, or a combination of the above—blends crime,
terrorism, and war, he can extend his already significant influence. After embracing advanced technology weaponry, including weapons of mass destruction (including chemical and biological agents), radio frequency weapons, and advanced intelligence gathering technology, along with more common weapons systems, the attacker can transcend drug running, robbery, kidnapping, and murder and pose a significant challenge to the nation-state and its institutions.

Then, using complicity, intimidation, corruption, and indifference, the irregular attacker can quietly and subtly co-opt individual politicians and bureaucrats and gain political control of a given geographical or political enclave. Such corruption and distortion can potentially lead to the emergence of a network of government protection of illicit activities, and the emergence of a virtual criminal state or political entity. A series of networked enclaves could, then, become a dominant political actor within a state or group of states. Thus, rather than violently competing directly with a nation-state, an irregular attacker can criminally co-opt and seize control of the state indirectly.

This is an example of a second-generation gang developing secure support bases through the application of coercive physical-psychological-political measures. In creating those secure support bases, gangs dominate local populations and erode the will of the system to resist their commercial enrichment efforts. This kind of “mix” of nontraditional activities is also a good example of the gang phenomenon expanding its role while staying under the threshold of state concern and counter-action. Even though there may be no explicit political agenda, control of territory (turf) and the people in it are keys to the achievement of minimal goals. In these terms, gangs must eventually take or control political power to guarantee the kind of environment they want.

As a consequence, the non-state gang/TCO actor represents a triple threat to the authority and sovereignty of a government and those of its neighbors. First, murder, kidnapping, intimidation, corruption, and impunity from punishment undermine the ability of the state to perform its legitimizing
security and public service functions. Second, by violently imposing their power over bureaucrats and elected officials of the state, gangs and their allies compromise the exercise of state authority and replace it with their own. Third, by taking control of portions of a given national territory and performing the tasks of government, the gang phenomenon can \textit{de facto} transform itself into states within a state.

\textit{Response to the Gangs}

In 2003, El Salvador’s Flores administration passed hard-line (\textit{mano dura}) law aimed at making it easier to jail gang members involved in criminal activity. However, that legislation was not strong enough. As a result, in 2004, new legislation was passed approving the new president’s anti-gang program, called Super Mano Dura (Super Firm Hand/or super hard line). This law provided stiffer penalties for gang membership—up to five years in jail for gang membership and up to nine years for gang leadership. President Saco’s government reported that this “get tough” program reduced the number of murders that year by 14 percent. The following year, in 2005, new legislation tightened gun ownership laws and began a complementary effort of prevention and rehabilitation called Mano Amiga (Friendly Hand).\textsuperscript{43}

Unfortunately, the hard-line approach sent the message to the Salvadoran public that law enforcement is the only effective way to deal with the gang problem; thus, prevention and intervention programs have received much less attention and fewer resources than necessary to make them effective. Then, unanticipated second- and third-order consequences resulted in straining the capacities of the already overcrowded prison system. Moreover, the judicial and police systems became saturated; there were not enough properly trained personnel in those systems to manage the gang problem. By the end of 2005, a total of 12,073 prisoners were held in 24 prison facilities with a combined design capacity of 7,312. Unfortunately, the gang problem has worsened significantly, and the only thing Salvadoran leaders agree on is that prison only provides a “graduate education” for gang members, and that something must be done.\textsuperscript{44} In sum, neither the Salvadoran government nor the United States has officially raised the level of the gang threat to the level of a threat to national security. To date, the Maras are viewed simply as a problem for law enforcement and the judicial system.
Jamaica

Similar to other countries in the Circum-Caribbean and elsewhere in the world, Jamaican posses (gangs) are the byproducts of high levels of poverty and unemployment rates as well as lack of upward social mobility. Among other things, the posses also represent the consequences of U.S. deportation of Jamaican criminals back to the island, and—significantly—of regressive politics in Jamaica. Unemployment and criminal deportation speak for themselves, but the political situation in Jamaica requires some elaboration.

Given the shift from the production of commodities toward knowledge-based products and the reduction of the costs of transport, goods, and labor under “globalization,” the Jamaican government has experienced a loosening of control of its traditional resource bases. As a result, the government no longer has the income to provide public services in a welfare-type state. If anything, the Jamaican government has tended to “outsource” delivery of services to private and semi-private organizations. Under these conditions, local posses have taken on “social investment” in the areas they control. An important part of posses’ programs of action is what is called “shared government, with a welfare aspect.” As a result, gang-controlled communities in Jamaica are considered to be among the safest in the country, and the posses are helping the people in their “jurisdictions” with education, public health, and employment problems. Thus, as the state has reduced its traditional security and service functions, posses have stepped in to fill the vacuum.

Organization

The posses are Jamaican in origin and composed primarily of members of Jamaican descent. It is estimated that there are at least 85 different posses operating on the island with anywhere between 2,500 to 20,000 members. Each posse operates within a clearly defined territory or neighborhood. The basic structure of a Jamaican posse is fluid but cohesive. Similar to the Salvadoran organizational pyramid, it comprises the all-powerful “don” or “area leader” at the apex of the organization, an upper
echelon, a middle echelon, and the “workers” at the bottom of the social ladder. The upper echelon coordinates the posse’s overall drug, arms, and human trafficking efforts. The middle group manages daily operational activities. The lower echelon performs street-level sales, purchases, protection, mercenary functions, and other acts of violence as assigned. When posses need additional workers, they prefer to use other Jamaicans. However, as posses have expanded their markets, they have been known to recruit “outsiders” as mules and street-level dealers. African-Americans, Trinidadians, Guyanese, and even Chinese immigrants are given tasks at the worker-level. They are kept ignorant of gang structure and members’ identities. If outsiders are caught, the posse is not compromised; if they are not, the revenue continues to come in.\textsuperscript{48}

Program

Jamaican posses are considered to be extremely self-reliant and self-contained. They have their own aircraft, water-craft, and crews for “pick up and delivery” and their own personnel to run legitimate businesses and conduct money-laundering tasks. In that connection, posses have expanded their operations into the entire Caribbean Basin, the United States, Canada, and Europe. The general reputation of Jamaican posses is one of high efficiency and absolute ruthlessness in pursuit of their territorial and commercial interests. Examples of swift and brutal violence include—but are not limited to—fire bombing, throat slashing, and dismemberment of victims and their families. As such, Jamaican posses are credited with the highest level of violence in the English-speaking Caribbean and 60 percent of the crime in the entire region.\textsuperscript{49}

This example of the gang phenomenon fits very well into the typology description of second-generation gangs. They are organized for business and commercial gains. They have a more hierarchical leadership structure than more politically oriented and security-conscious third-generation gangs. Members tend to focus on drug trafficking and market protection first and on market expansion second. They use the level of violence necessary to protect their markets and control their competition. They also use violence as political interface to negate law-enforcement efforts directed against them by police and other security organizations. And, as they seek to control or incapacitate national and international
security institutions, they dominate community life and territory. In this environment, posses are almost forced to link with and provide services to other posses and to other TCOs from time to time.\textsuperscript{50}

Domination of posses’ respective turf in the confined area that is Jamaica generates a stability based on constant cooperation and negotiation with other gangs and transnational criminal organizations, as well as with the state. That kind of cooperation was demonstrated in May 2006 with a month-long series of civic activities called a “Safe Communities Campaign,” a government initiative to assist selected communities—including the posses in them—to think and act in terms of reggae icon Bob Marley’s message of “love, peace, and unity.”\textsuperscript{61} When these kinds of efforts fail, as this one did, the result is conflict and a level of violence commensurate with the level of importance of the issue(s) involved. In that context, one can see the rise of private, “don”-controlled, enclaves that coexist in delicate—often symbiotic—relationships with the Jamaican government and its security institutions. That, in turn, blurs the line between criminal and political violence and makes the posses increasingly immune to state intervention.\textsuperscript{52} As a further consequence, the effective sovereignty of the state and the personal security of citizens are being impinged every day, and the posses’ commercial motives for controlling people and territory are, in fact, an implicit political agenda.\textsuperscript{53}

This, again, is an almost classic example of first- and second-generation gang activity and development. The generic evolution of urban street gangs illustrates that this is a compound-complex issue that has implications at three different levels of analysis. First, all three generations of gangs generate serious domestic instability and insecurity. Of course, as gangs evolve, they generate more and more violence and instability over wider and wider sections of the political map and create regional instability and insecurity. Second, because of their internal (intrastate) criminal activities and their international (transnational) commercial and political alliances and actions, they exacerbate the confusion regarding the traditional distinctions between police law enforcement functions and military national security functions—to the extent that very little that is effective or lasting has been done to control or eliminate them. Third, thus, first- and second-generation gangs tend to erode the effective sovereignty of the nation-states within which they operate.
Within the context of that frustration, some contemporary civilian, military, and police leaders appear to recognize that this modern global world is much too interrelated, complicated, and dangerous for them to advocate a strictly law-enforcement solution—or even a strictly military solution—to provide any viable response to contemporary security, stability, and sovereignty threats. What is required is a unified civil-military effort to apply the full human and physical resources of the nation-state—and the international community—to generate effective multilateral solutions to transnational issues.\textsuperscript{54} Nevertheless, this type of unified international effort has not been forthcoming.

\textit{Response}

The Organization of American States (OAS), the United States, and the various Caribbean governments have been unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the gangs that permeate the region. The OAS affirmed in 2003 that gang-related “threats, concerns, and other challenges are cross-cutting problems that may require hemispheric cooperation” and that “the traditional concept and approach [to security threats] should be expanded to encompass new and non-traditional threats. . . .” The final result of this affirmation was the \textit{condemnation} of “transnational organized crime, since it constitutes an assault on institutions in our states and negatively affects our societies.”\textsuperscript{55} Nevertheless, the OAS has been reluctant to go beyond its diplomatic “condemnation.” The United States has not done a great deal more. To be fair, however, it must be noted that for 2006, the United States allocated $10 million for the ongoing anti-drug and anticrime efforts outlined in the “Third Border Initiative” and is providing other benefits under the Caribbean Basin Initiative.\textsuperscript{56} Given the entire scope of the issue, however, this clearly is not enough.

The democratically elected governments in the Caribbean argue that criminal gangs, such as the Jamaican posses, have been able to profit from their globalized operations to the point where they have succeeded in putting themselves beyond the capability of most countries in the region to destroy them or even seriously disrupt their operations. Today, as only one example, it is estimated that the Colombian drug cartel earns more money in one year from its activities than most of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean generate in taxes in a year. Thus, most governments in the region are simply
outmatched by the gang phenomenon. The gangs have more money, better arms, and more effective organizations than the states.

Additionally, gangs and other TCOs are gradually supplementing the brute violence of previous generations with the brain-power of a new generation of members who are computer savvy and MBA business-school trained. Many of this new generation—like the older generations—are also recipients of “graduate educations” from North American and other prison systems. In all, increasing gang effectiveness, violence, and impunity have fueled doubts in the citizenry about the problem-solving ability of their elected leaders. Thus, citizen support and allegiance tends to go to the posses rather than the government. As a consequence, elected governments in the Caribbean in general and Jamaica in particular are not doing much more than the OAS or the United States to deal with the gangs.

Colombia’s Unholy Hobbesian Trinity of TCOs

The problem in Colombia is that that country, and its potential, is deteriorating because of three ongoing, simultaneous and, interrelated wars involving the illegal drug industry, various insurgent organizations (primarily the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC), and paramilitary vigilante groups (the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia – AUC—parts of which are now mutating into street gangs called “pseudo-militaries”). This unholy trinity of non-state TCO actors is perpetrating a level of corruption, criminality, human horror, and internal (and external) instability that, if left unchecked at the strategic level, can ultimately threaten Colombia’s survival as an organized democratic state, and undermine the political stability and sovereignty of its neighbors. The critical point of this argument is that the substance, or essence, of the long-continuing Colombian crisis centers on the general organization, activities, and threats of these major violent stateless “sovereignty free” TCO non-state actors at work in that country today.

The equation that links illegal narcotics trafficking to insurgency and to the paramilitaries in Colombia—and elsewhere—turns on a combination of need, organizational infrastructure development, ability, and the availability of sophisticated communications and weaponry. For example, the drug industry (narcos) possesses cash and lines of transportation and communication. Insurgent and
paramilitary organizations have followers, organization, and discipline and arms. Illegal drug traffickers consistently need these kinds of people to help protect their assets and project their power within and among nation-states. Insurgents and paramilitaries are in constant need of logistical and communications support—and money.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Internal Objectives.} The narco-insurgent-paramilitary nexus is not simply individual or institutional intimidation for financial or criminal gain. And, it is not just the use of insurgents and AUC groups as “hired guns” to protect illegal drug cultivation, production, and trafficking. These are only business transactions. Rather, the long-term objective of the alliance is to control or substantively change the Colombian political system.\textsuperscript{60}

Narcos may not seek the overthrow of government as long as the government is weak and can be controlled to allow maximum freedom of movement and action.\textsuperscript{61} The insurgents, on the other hand, seek the eventual destruction of the state as it exists. Whether or not the insurgents are reformers or criminals is irrelevant. Their avowed objective is to take direct control of the government and state.\textsuperscript{62} Likewise, the paramilitaries want fundamental change. It appears that they are interested in creating a strong state that is capable of unquestioned enforcement of law and order. Whether or not the vigilante groups are “democratic” or authoritarian is also irrelevant. For their own self-preservation, they have little choice but to take direct or indirect control of the state.\textsuperscript{63} The common narco-insurgent-paramilitary government change or overthrow effort, therefore, is directed at the political community and its institutions. In this sense, the nexus is not simply criminal in nature. It is more; it is a major political-psychological-moral-military entity. At the same time, the countryside ceases to be a simple theater for combat, and becomes a base from which to build or destroy (depending on what side of the equation one is on) substantive power.

The Latin American security dialogue does not generally refer to the narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance in terms of their individual identities—at least in the sense of a business organization striving to control the price of drugs, weapons, or general protection. Rather, it tends to refer to the whole entity as greater than the sum of its parts. The security dialogue has identified and is concerned
about a political-economic-military force—a narco-terrorist force— that has become a major national and transnational non-state actor. That actor threatens stability, development, and the future of the democratic system not only in Colombia but in the entire Western Hemisphere. To be sure, this is a loose and dynamic merger subject to many vicissitudes, but the “marriage of convenience” has lasted and appears to be getting stronger. The logic is simple—if all else fails, the nexus—that is, the Hobbesian Trinity—may be able to out-resource the Colombian government, and, through the purchase of high-tech military equipment and “guns-for hire”, buy its way to victory.

Where the Hobbesian Trinity Leads. Threats from the Hobbesian Trinity at work in Colombia and the rest of the Hemisphere today come in many forms and in a matrix of different kinds of challenges, varying in scope and scale. If they have a single feature in common, however, it is that they are systemic and well-planned attempts to achieve political ends. In that connection, we briefly explore two of the many consequences the narco-insurgent-paramilitary union has generated. First, we examine the erosion of Colombian democracy; then, we consider the erosion of the state.

The Erosion of Colombian Democracy. The policy-oriented definition of democracy that has been generally accepted and used in U.S. foreign policy over the past several years is probably best described as “procedural” democracy. This definition tends to focus on the election of civilian political leadership and, perhaps, on a relatively high level of participation on the part of the electorate. Thus, as long as a country is able to hold elections it is considered a democracy—regardless of the level of accountability, transparency, corruption, and ability to extract and distribute resources for national development and protection of human rights, liberties, and security.

In Colombia we observe important paradoxes. Elections are held on a regular basis, but leaders, candidates, and elected politicians are also regularly assassinated. As an example, literally hundreds of governmental officials, considered unacceptable by the nexus, have been assassinated following their election. Additionally, intimidation, direct threats, and the use of relatively minor violence on a person and his family play an important role prior to elections. And, as a corollary, it is important to note that although the media is free from state censorship, journalists and academicians who make
their anti-narco-insurgent-paramilitary opinions known through the press—or too publicly—are systematically assassinated.\textsuperscript{57}

Consequently, it is hard to credit Colombian elections as “democratic” or “free”. Neither competition nor participation in elections can be complete in an environment where armed and unscrupulous non-state actors compete violently with the government to control the government—before and after elections. Moreover, it is hard to credit Colombia as a democratic state as long as elected leaders are subject to control or vetoes imposed by vicious non-state actors. As a consequence, Ambassador David Jordan argues that Colombia is an “anocratic” democracy. That is, Colombia is a state that has the procedural features of democracy, but retains the features of an autocracy where the ruling elites face no scrutiny or accountability. Professor Eduardo Pizarro describes Colombia as a “besieged democracy” and writes about the “partial collapse of the state.” And, Ambassador Curtis Kaman states “without fear of contradiction,” that about 70 per cent of the Colombian Congress “is bent.”\textsuperscript{68} In any event, the persuasive and intimidating actions of the narco-insurgent-paramilitary alliance in the electoral processes have pernicious effects on democracy, and tend to erode the ability of the state to carry out its legitimizing functions.

The Partial Collapse of the State. The Colombian state has undergone severe erosion on two general levels. First, the state’s presence and authority is questionable over large geographical portions of the country. Second, the idea of the partial collapse of the state is closely related to the non-physical erosion of democracy. Jordan argues that corruption is key in this regard, and is a prime-mover toward “narco-socialism.”\textsuperscript{69}

In the first instance, the notion of partial collapse refers to the fact that there is an absence or only partial presence of state institutions in many of the rural areas and poorer urban parts of the country. Also, even in those areas that are not under the direct control of narco, insurgent, or paramilitary organizations, institutions responsible for protecting citizens—notably the police and judiciary—have been coerced to the point where they are unable to carry out their basic functions. Indicators of this problem can be seen in two statistics. First, the murder rate in Colombia is among the
highest in the world. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the proportion of homicides that end with a conviction is less than 4 per cent. These indicators of impunity strongly confirm that the state is not adequately exercising its social-contractual and constitutional-legal obligations to provide individual and collective security within the national territory.

In the second instance, non-physical erosion of the state centers on the widespread and deeply entrenched issue of corruption. As one example, in 1993 and 1994 the U.S. government alluded to the fact that former President Ernesto Samper had received money from narcotics traffickers. Later, in 1996, based on that information, the U.S. withdrew Mr. Samper’s visa and decertified Colombia for not cooperating in combating illegal drug trafficking. Subsequently, the Colombian Congress absolved Samper of all drug charges by a vote of 111 to 43. In that connection, and not surprisingly, another indicator of government corruption at the highest levels is found in the Colombian Congress. For example, the Senate—in a convoluted legal parliamentary maneuver--decriminalized the issue of “illicit enrichment” by making it a misdemeanor that could be prosecuted only after the commission of a felony. Clearly, the reality of corruption at any level of government favoring the illegal drug industry mitigates against responsible governance and the public well-being. And, in these terms, the reality of corruption brings into question the reality of Colombian democracy, and the reality of effective state sovereignty.

Thus, even though Colombia and its U.S. ally have recently achieved a series of tactical successes against the “narco-terrorists”, Colombia’s violent non-state actors remain relatively strong and ever more wealthy. At the same time, Colombia becomes more and more fragile. As a consequence, positive political sovereignty, democracy, socio-economic development, territory, infrastructure, stability, and security are quietly and slowly destroyed.

**Key Points and Lessons**
What makes the above cases or situations and their implications significant beyond their own domestic political context is that they are situations from which contemporary lessons of irregular urban political warfare can be learned. Additionally, these cases are harbingers and results of much of the ongoing political chaos of the Postmodern Era of the twenty-first century. They stress the following:

? Gangs and other TCOs contribute significantly to national, regional, and global instability. As they evolve, they generate more and more terror, violence, and instability over wider and wider sections of the political map.

? Gangs, with their TCO allies, are far from being apolitical and unique. They are becoming more and more similar to their politicized insurgent and warlord cousins. They maintain a practical logic that non-state and intrastate wars are a continuation of regional politics by other means.

? Gangs and other TCOs use highly sophisticated political-psychological, as well as purely violent ways and means to achieve their objectives.

? These objectives are, primarily, freedom of movement and action within and across national boundaries. The unintended or intended results impinge on the effective sovereignty and security of countries and peoples.

? The primary motives of gangs and other TCOs center on group survival and personal gain. Beyond this there are no rules.

? Gangs and other TCOs tend not to be considered as serious challenges to national security and sovereignty. As a result, they are normally treated as low-level law-enforcement problems.

? As transnational crime and unconventional intrastate and non-state war become more and more indistinguishable, gangs and other TCOs become serious national security issues—that, paradoxically, must be dealt with as local threats.

? To dismiss the above realities as too difficult or impossible to deal with is to accept the inevitability of unattractive alternatives.

The gangs/TCO phenomenon has been with us for several years. In that time, violence and destruction perpetrated against the various states in the Western Hemisphere by this unholy trinity of non-state actors have varied like a sine curve from acute to tolerable. However, just
because a conflict situation improves to the point of being “tolerable” does not mean that the problem has gone away, or should be ignored. Sun Tzu reminds us that, “For here has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.”

**From Failure to Success? More Lessons.**

In post-Napoleonic Europe, Italy was defined simply as a “geographic expression.” In post-World War II Europe, Italy had only advanced to the status of “the sick man of Europe.” That “sick” country had experienced virtually every symptom of “failing state” status. Productivity was down; gross domestic product (GDP) was down. The Italian currency was down and moving further downward. The only statistics moving upward on the charts were labor strife, poverty, immigration, and crime. In that socio-economic milieu, chronic political instability was illustrated by the succession of 39 governments over the 35 years between the promulgation of the 1948 Constitution and 1983. This state of affairs adversely affected societal relations and increased Italy’s vulnerability to criminal and subversive efforts. As a result, from 1968 through 1982, literally 297 different “leftist” groups, along with several additional militant rightist, separatist, pacifist, anarchist, and monarchist organizations mobilized and conducted a “terror” campaign to radically change the Italian state. Thus, this is a good example from which to learn how a government might ultimately control—or succumb to—the strategic challenges of the gang/TCO phenomenon.

*The Strategic Challenge of Unconventional Intrastate War in Italy.* Over the ten-year period from 1968 to 1978, the Italian government considered the consistently increasing non-state/TCO violence to be only a little more serious than normal criminal behavior. Thus, the terrorist violence and stated objective of destroying the “moribund Italian state” was not considered to be a national security issue. Nevertheless, after the shocking kidnapping and murder of former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro—and 2,497 other terrorist incidents during 1978—it was finally agreed that Italy was involved in an unconventional political-insurgency war for survival. The logic of the situation showed that the assault on the Italian state was dividing, corrupting, destabilizing, and destroying Italian society—and that the government was finding it more and more difficult to conduct the business of governance, and to
perform its legitimizing functions. As a consequence, the concept of national security was expanded to allow the government to confront the unconventional non-state threat to national stability, security, and meaningful sovereignty.76

Response. This challenge, along with the broadened definition of national security, required rethinking the problem of revolutionary insurgency, terrorist tactics, and unconventional war. In these terms, it was generally agreed that the unconventional threat comes in many forms, both direct and indirect. The most visible form of the direct threat to the state comes in the form of public violence (terrorism) against leading officials who are considered symbols of something TCO leadership defines as “bad” or some form of “threat” to their movement. The indirect threat comes in the form of the progressive discrediting of public institutions. That discrediting erodes the ability and the will of those institutions to perform their mandated functions for society—and erodes the basic public trust that government can and will provide individual and collective security, along with other legitimizing duties prescribed in the commonly acknowledged social contract. But, because of the continuing absence of a homogeneous and solid parliamentary majority, accompanied by endemic governmental instability, the Italian government could not micro-manage the problem. Fortunately for Italy, the factious government was limited to the promulgation of foundational measures that would facilitate an adequate response to the political war at the legislative, police, and intelligence levels.77

First, at the legislative level, it was agreed that the moral legitimacy of the republic that emerged out of World War II was strong enough to allow the planning, public dissemination, and implementation of a coordinated and legitimized counterinsurgent/terrorist policy. State legitimacy was also considered to be strong enough to allow the promulgation of a modern criminal code and “hard law” legislation directed specifically against the various violent TCOs. This legislation brought the pre-World War II Criminal Code of 1930 up to date. And, the new code specifically addressed conspiracy, and actions taken for the purposes of terrorism and the subversion of the democratic order.78

Second, at the national security level, it was generally understood that unconventional political-insurgency war is, in fact, a series of “wars” within a general war against the state. These wars
represent the major strategic dimensions that determine the outcome of the general war, and take into account the so-called “forgotten” political-psychological-socio-economic-moral dimensions of conflict that make the difference between winning the battles—or winning the war itself.\textsuperscript{79} Both Carl von Clausewitz and Niccolo Machiavelli covered these dimensions in their treatises on conducting war, and both philosophers taught that war was not a strictly military effort.\textsuperscript{80} Machiavelli, for example, argues that good laws and good arms allow the leader with \textit{virtu} to master \textit{fortuna} to take—or maintain—effective control of a state. Superior \textit{virtu} consists of six related elements: 1) a well-disciplined and trained security force; 2) careful planning for the application of that force before and after power is achieved; 3) the skillful use of spies (intelligence); 4) isolation of the enemy from his sources of support; 5) \textit{unison} (unity) of political-military effort; and 6) perceived moral rectitude (self-restraint and justice).\textsuperscript{81} Italian leaders also understood that this particular conflict was an internal affair (intrastate war). It was Italian vs. Italian. As a result, there was no way this confrontation could be allowed to degenerate into a simple military or “Dirty War.” This war would have to be fought with \textit{prudenza} (prudence) so as to avoid, as much as possible, any damage to the future state of peace, prosperity, stability, and security of the country.\textsuperscript{82}

Thus, third, the conduct of the diverse wars within the general war could not be left to the discordant elements of the state bureaucracy working separately and with their own agendas. There would also have to be 1) a strong attempt to achieve a certain level of “unity of effort” (\textit{unison}, in Machiavelli’s terms) that would be made effective by 2) a unified intelligence capability, and 3) a unified planning and control element. As a consequence, the Italian government created a temporary Counter-Terrorism Task Force. That organization was given the primary responsibility for intelligence collection and counterterrorist operations, and placed under the control of Carabinieri general Carlo Alberto della Chiesa.\textsuperscript{83} The paramilitary Carabinieri know how to plan and coordinate action, and have the full police power throughout the entire Italian national territory. Thus, intelligence, operational planning, and multi-organizational coordination essentially fell to that organization. As a result, the regular Italian armed forces generally took over routine, inconspicuous, and unobtrusive police functions. This measure allowed local police, State Police, and the national Carabinieri freedom to concentrate on the counter-insurgency mission. Under Carabinieri leadership, long-term and short-term mutually supportive
objectives were determined and pursued, and the war was discreetly and surprisingly brought under control within an unprecedented three to four-year period (1978-1982).\textsuperscript{84}

This case demonstrates that success in countering terrorism and asymmetric war of all kinds in the “new world disorder” will be constructed on the same theoretical bases that supported favorable results in the past. Even though every conflict is situation specific, it is not completely unique. Throughout the universe, there are analytical commonalities at the strategic level. Seven dimensions or dependent variables, each composed of multiple independent variables—very similar to those advocated by Machiavelli—determine the success or failure of an asymmetric, irregular, intrastate war. As already noted, they may be considered “wars within the general war.” They are: 1) the more traditional police-military war against the gang/TCO phenomenon; 2) a political-psychological war for legitimacy and the moral right of the incumbent democratically elected regime to exist; 3) a war to unify a multi-dimensional political-social-psychological-police effort within the fragmented Italian bureaucracy; 4) an information war to convince the Italian people of the moral rectitude of the counter-gang/TCO campaign; 5) a war to isolate the various TCOs from their internal support; 6) a war to isolate the TCOs from their external support; and 7) an intelligence war to locate and neutralize the men and women to lead, plan, and execute violent destabilizing actions.\textsuperscript{85} In that connection, it should be emphasized that this paradigm has power and virtue in part because of the symmetry of its application—both for a besieged government and its allies, and for a violent internal challenger and its allies. That is to say, no successful strategy—on either side of the conflict spectrum—has been formulated over the past 50 years that has not explicitly or implicitly taken into account of those strategic dimensions, or “wars within the war.”\textsuperscript{86}

Key Points and Lessons

As demonstrated in the carefully chosen variables utilized in the Italian counter-terrorism/TCO campaign, the conscious positive or negative choices that a government makes about how to conduct national security and stability efforts will define the future of the state. There is very little glamour, only a few sound bites, and not many career enhancement opportunities inherent in making and implementing
those positive choices. But, they do have potential for directing progress toward national and global stability, democracy, and sustainable peace.

? In 1978-1983, the Italian gang/TCO phenomenon included over 300 politically diverse organizations motivated to the violent replacement of a “moribund” state. The resultant anti-government campaign relied on internal urban terrorist tactics and strategies from which to develop a support base, and to act as an ideological substitute for conventional war.

? The primary “terrorist” TCO, the Red Brigades, utilized a vigorous, broad, and violent set of terrorist tactics to implement its objective of bringing down the Italian state. The Red Brigades were a theoretical equivalent to a third-generation gang, and illustrate the general lack of differentiation between insurgents, “terrorists”, international criminal organizations, and gangs.

? The Italian government—once it made the political decision to treat the increasing levels of violence and instability generated by the Red Brigades and their militant allies as a national security problem—planned, organized, and implemented a soft multilayered political-paramilitary response. That approach to attacking the violent opposition’s terrorist strategy was successful, and brought “terrorism” under control within a surprisingly short three year period.

? As a corollary, it was recognized the unwillingness or inability of a government to develop a long-term, multi-dimensional, and morally acceptable strategy to control violent internal non-state actors is a threat to the stability and sovereignty of the state itself. In these terms, the government has the clear responsibility to take legitimate measures to confront such violent political actors and avoid the intended destruction of the state.

These hard-won lessons learned from the Italian experience with the gang/TCO phenomenon are all too relevant to the “new” political challenges of the 21st century. Sun Tzu maintained, “Those skilled in war subdue the enemy’s army without battle.” In that context, he also
argued that “the reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy whenever they move, and their achievements surpass [and surprise] those of ordinary men is foreknowledge…What is called ‘foreknowledge’ cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation [and strategy].”

The Challenge, Threat, and Main Tasks for Now and the Future

A multi-polar world in which one or 100 actors are exerting differing types and levels of asymmetric power within a set of cross-cutting alliances is extremely volatile and dangerous. The security and stability of the global community is threatened, and the benefits of globalism could be denied to all. Thus, it is incumbent on the United States, the West, and the rest of the international community to understand and cope with the governance challenges exacerbated by the destabilizing and devastating political violence generated by the gang phenomenon and its TCO allies.

The challenge, then, is to come to terms with the fact that contemporary security, at whatever level, is at its base a holistic political-diplomatic, socio-economic, psychological-moral, and military-police effort. The corollary is to change from a singular military or law-enforcement approach to a multidimensional, multi-organizational, multicultural, and multinational paradigm.

The ultimate threat is that, unless and until leaders at the highest levels recognize what is happening strategically, reorient thinking and actions appropriately, and are able to educate and lead their various constituencies into the realities of the postmodern world, it is only a matter of time before the destabilizing problems associated with gangs and other TCOs will cause the failure of one vitally important actor or another.

The main tasks in the search for security now and for the future are to construct national and international stability and well-being based upon the lessons—negative and positive—learned from present and past cases. The consistency of those lessons is impressive. That consistency warrants confidence that success in countering a gang or another TCO phenomenon and its associated violence
will be achieved as a result of understanding results that have been achieved in the past. They are encompassed in the “wars within the war” of Italian experience and include: (1) a realistic strategic vision to counter an irregular/unconventional challenge to the state; (2) a management structure to plan, unify, and implement that vision; and (3) the use of appropriate instruments of state and international power the conduct the multidimensional wars within the general war. This is nothing radical. It is basic security strategy and national asset management.89

Notes


4 *Check USMC definition.


6 Manwaring, 2005.


10 A very sobering and interesting analysis of this type of conflict may be found in Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, Unrestricted Warfare, Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publish House, 1999, p. 109.


12 Ibid.


16 Ibid.

17 This statement is taken from Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, Drugs and Security in the Caribbean: Sovereignty


30 See <www.seguridadpublicaenmexico.org.mx>.


34 Ibid.


36 AID Paper, 2006; Author Interviews.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.


42 Ibid.


Ibid.; also see Fishel and Grizzard, 2005; Griffith, 1997; Manwaring, 2005; and Rapley.

“Anti-crime community initiative to be launched,” Jamaica Gleaner, February 6, 2006.

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