On Gangs, Crime, and Terrorism

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This paper discusses the dynamics of the gang-crime-terrorism continuum and its relationship to "generations of warfare" within the contemporary spectrum of conflict. The focus is to explore the potential for gang-terrorist interaction in the current and emerging conflict environment. The concepts of third generation street gangs (3G2), netwar, and fourth generation warfare (4GW) are applied to investigate the typologies and relationships of third generation street gangs and terrorist groups.

Anyone who has studied non-state actors such as gangs and terrorist groups finds that the more one studies them, the more complex they are. Gangs are dynamic, flexible and ever changing (Sanders, 1994). The same holds true for terrorist groups and terrorism. There is no universally accepted definition for terrorism. Much of the literature contends that the word terrorism is a pejorative term. According to Brian Jenkins what is called terrorism depends in a large part on

one's point of view. One man's terrorist can be is another man's freedom fighter and to another the freedom fighter or terrorist may be a criminal or "gang banger" (Hoffman, 2006).

Since the 1990's, Western law enforcement agencies are seeing an increasing reliance by terrorist networks around the world on criminal activity. Funding sources from the Persian Gulf, charities and other non-governmental fronts are receiving intense scrutiny. This development coupled with the arrests of several high-ranking coordinators and financiers of terrorist operations in Europe and North America are forcing *jihadi* networks to adapt and diversify their funding streams. "Traditional criminal" activities like drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, and smuggling are rapidly becoming the main source of revenues for both terrorist groups and gangs (Mili, 2006). "Global terrorist groups operate in widely dispersed and decentralized networks. What is less well understood is how closely connected terrorist groups are with other non-state 'bad actors.' Such as transnational criminal organizations and drug traffickers (Zaccor, 2005)."

Despite law enforcement's vigilance in looking for interaction between transnational criminal organizations or gangs (transnational or otherwise) and international terrorist groups within the United States few investigators have identified any tangible direct association in open sources. Those who have describe the connections as speculation supported by little evidence. Suspected associations focused on credit card fraud, sales of drugs, weapons, and false identification. Nevertheless, a small number of investigators observed conditions, indicators, and warnings related to a gang-terrorist connection (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2005).

The 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment reports that many security threat group (STG) inmates have ties to terrorist groups, and those who do not may be susceptible to recruitment by terrorists. For example, the Administrative Maximum Security Prison in Florence, Colorado, houses 27 STG inmates who may have ties to al-Qaeda, Hamas, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Eighteen of these STG inmates have formal terrorist training (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2005). Clearly more research is needed to explore both actual and potential linkages between criminal and terrorist enterprises.

Non-state bad actors (i.e., gangs, terrorists, and criminals) along with private armies are altering the ontology of both crime and conflict. In many cases, non-state actors (terrorists and gangs) are intertwined or come into close proximity. These non-state actors share a common propensity for violence and represent a pernicious threat to global security and civil society (Sullivan & Weston, 2006). Dr Max G. Manwaring in, Street Gangs: The New Urban Insurgency, argues that gang-related crime is now a national security problem in many nations. This places terrorism, crime, and gangs in the same operational space.

During the 1990's the gang phenomena, evolution and typology emerged as more discrete waypoints along the spectrum of conflict. Additionally, two traditionally separate phenomena, transnational crime and terrorism, are demonstrating analogous and parallel modus operandi and organizational characteristics. Understanding the gang-crime-terror continuum and its relationship to the "generations of warfare" is important to achieving insight into gangs and terrorist groups and how that dynamic and parallelism impacts national security.

Today the distinction between war, crime, and peace is blurred almost to the vanishing point thanks to a host of non-state bad actors. This is described in the military literature as fourth generation warfare or 4GW (Lind, 2004, van Creveld, 1991). In the spectrum of conflict we find violent gangs and terrorists occupying much of the same operational space and filling vacuums. This is brought about by circumstance and alliances of convenience as street gangs evolve in much the same way as warfare.

These evolving gangs are coined "third generation street gangs" (3 GEN Gangs or 3G2) by Sullivan and often abbreviated as "third generation gangs." Martin van Creveld notes that "future war will not be waged by armies but by groups whom today we call terrorists, guerillas, bandits, and robber, but who will undoubtedly hit upon more formal titles to describe them themselves" (van Creveld, 1991). These "formal titles" are now dotting the globe such as MS-13, 18th Street, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, D Street Gang, etc. The global operational environment is said to be nonlinear or asymmetrical having no definable battlefields or front lines.

The battlefield distinction between 'civilian' and 'military' is also disappearing. Everything and everybody is "targetable" by non-state actors such as terrorists and criminal gangs. Non-state actors have and continue to challenge nation-states and their high-tech conventional forces much like criminal gangs challenge modern law enforcement agencies. Non-state terrorist and insurgent actors with their propensity for violence and criminality ironically find a parallel with third generation gangs and their localized violence and criminality (Sullivan, 2001).

Third Generation Gangs (3G2), Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), and Netwar

The interplay among third generation gangs, fourth generation warfare and netwar is discussed in the following sections. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt developed the concept of netwar and observe that the information revolution favors networked forms of organization. Advances in communications technology play a larger role in shaping the character and outcomes of conflict. Similarly William Lind and TX Hammes have observed changes in the nature of modern land warfare. These observations have been published extensively in their works on the "generations of warfare (Lind 1989, Lind, 2004, Hammes, 2004). Non-state actors (gangs, terrorists, cartels, clans) and netwarriors adopt diffuse and dispersed characteristics that give them certain advantages in a fourth generation warfare environments such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Beirut, and Somalia.

Third Generation Street Gangs (3G2)

The third generation gang (3G2) concept was introduced by John P. Sullivan in the late 1990s. Sullivan and his associate, Dr. Robert Bunker, have substantially built on the third generation gang perspective within the complimentary constructs of both fourth generation warfare and netwar (Bunker, 2005). The following is Sullivan's definition and typology of the generations of gangs, which is used widely by law enforcement and national security communities (Sullivan, 1997, Sullivan, 2000, Sullivan, 2001, Sullivan, 2006). Sullivan's examination of urban street gangs in those papers revealed that some gangs evolved through three generations—transitioning from turf gangs, to market-oriented drug gangs, to a third generation that mixes political and mercenary elements. He identified three factors: politicization, internationalization, and

sophistication that determined the evolutionary potential of these criminal actors. Sullivan found that third generation gangs exhibited many of the organizational and operational attributes found within net-based triads, cartels and terrorist entities. The three generations of gangs can be described as follows:

- First Generation Gangs are traditional street gangs with a turf orientation. Operating at the lower end of extreme societal violence, they have loose leadership and focus their attention on turf protection and gang loyalty within their immediate environs (often a few blocks or a neighborhood). When they engage in criminal enterprise, it is largely opportunistic and local in scope. These turf gangs are limited in political scope and sophistication.
- Second Generation Gangs are engaged in business. They are entrepreneurial and drugcentered. They protect their markets and use violence to control their competition. They have a broader, market focused, sometimes overtly political agenda and operate in a broader spatial or geographic area. Their operations sometimes involve multi-state and even international areas. Their tendency for centralized leadership and sophisticated operations for market protection places them in the center of the range of politicization, internationalization and sophistication.
- Third Generation Gangs have evolved political aims. They operate or aspire to operate at the global end of the spectrum, using their sophistication to garner power, aid financial acquisition and engage in mercenary-type activities. To date, most third generation gangs

have been primarily mercenary in orientation; yet, in some cases they have sought to further their own political and social objectives.

Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW)

First generation warfare reflects tactics of the era of the smoothbore musket, the tactics of line and column. Second generation warfare was a response to the rifled musket, breechloaders, barbed wire, the machinegun, and indirect fire. Tactics were based on fire and movement, and they remained essentially linear. Massed firepower replaced massed manpower. Second generation tactics *remained* the basis of U.S. doctrine *until* the 1980s, and they are still practiced by most American units in the field.

Third generation warfare was also a response to the increase in battlefield firepower. However, the driving force was primarily ideas. Aware they could not prevail in a contest of materiel because of their weaker industrial base in World War I, the Germans developed radically new tactics. Based on maneuver rather than attrition, third generation tactics were the first truly nonlinear tactics.

Fourth generation warfare is a gray area phenomenon where war, crime, and peace blur manifesting themselves as threats to the stability of nation states by non-state actors (gangs, terrorists, militias, cartels, clans, tribes, pirates, criminal enterprises) and non-governmental processes and organizations (Manwaring, 1993). In Fourth Generation war, the state loses its monopoly on war. Nation state militaries find themselves fighting non-state opponents such as

al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and FARC. Fourth Generation warfare is also marked by a return to a world of cultures in conflict not just nation-states. As Martin van Creveld has said, what changes in fourth generation warfare (4GW) is not merely how war is fought, but who fights and what they fight for. What 4GW forces actually do is something more powerful than politics; they pull opposing states apart at the moral level (Lind, 2004).

Netwar

Netwar is defined as unconventional decentralized warfare: nontraditional warfare carried out by dispersed groups of activists without a central command, often communicating electronically. According to Arquilla and Ronfeldt "netwar" is an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, involving measures short of war, in which the protagonists use networked forms of organization, doctrine, strategy and communication (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1997).

Arquilla and Ronfeldt note how networks can prevail over our bureaucratic hierarchies in the postmodern operational space where power is migrating to small, non-state actors (i.e. gangs and terrorist groups) who can organize into sprawling networks more readily than can traditionally hierarchical bureaucratic-nation-state actors. Senior law enforcement officer and gang analyst John P. Sullivan posits that netwar may result in a distinct and perhaps "refined form of terrorism" where "inter-netted' transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), triads, cartels, cults, terrorists, gangs and other entities replace their more state-oriented predecessors (Sullivan, 2000; Bunker 2005).

Consortium of Convenience: Networks, Gangs, Crime, and Terrorist Groups

Max Manwaring warns that global security issues today are extremely volatile and dangerous. In his view, special attention needs to be paid to the threat imposed by third generation street gangs that are engaged in destabilizing and devastating violence which is more and more being called "terrorism", "criminal anarchy", "narco-terrorism", or "complex emergency situations." Third generation gangs like MS-13 and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda while vastly different do rely on networks and in fact share several common characteristics. They have a propensity for indiscriminate violence, intimidation, coercion, transcending borders, and targeting nation-states. Both Lind and Sullivan have recognized that gangs are evolving "generationally" and in parallel with fourth generation warfare and netwar (Lind, 2004a). Sullivan and Bunker observe that the nature of crime and conflict has changed and continues to evolve as more actors in the form of hooligans, anarchists, cartels, and warlords take up positions in the spectrum of conflict (Sullivan, 2001, Sullivan & Bunker, 2002). Manwaring and Knox suggest Central and South American third generation street gangs like MS-13 have come center stage and pose significant national security threats. A look at MS-13 is instructive in evaluating the gang-crime-terrorist dynamic (Manwaring, 2005, Knox, 2000).

MS-13 or Mara Salvatrucha is both a regional and transnational gang (or *mara*) phenomenon. MS-13, reportedly has 20,000 members in the United States, 4,000 members in Canada, and is estimated to have a total of 96,000 in the hemisphere. Probably their most defining characteristic is the use of violence. From initiation, to ascension into leadership positions, to discipline, everything is based on violence (Bruneau, 2005)

The violence and criminal activity of MS-13 has escalated to where M-13 is now considered a national security threat and listed as a terrorist group in El Salvador and Honduras. Carlos Mauricio Pineda Cruz, a former Salvadoran Diplomat, feels that despite MS-13's status as a regional security threat, MS-13 constitutes an unlikely ally for al-Qaeda or any other sophisticated and secretive terrorist network (Cruz, 2005). While Cruz feels MS-13 is an unlikely ally for al-Qaeda, Bruneau is reluctant to dismiss the idea of a third generation gang co0perating with a terrorist group, even an Islamic one.

According to Bruneau (2005), a Distinguished Professor of National Security Affairs in the Naval Postgraduate School's Department of National Security Affairs:

There is nothing definitive from a cultural perspective on their side to prevent their taking money from Islamic Jihadists to smuggle terrorists or WMD into the United States. Some might say that these are Hispanics and thus Christian, and wouldn't cooperate with Muslims in terrorism. Christians are not supposed to rob and murder, and the maras do so routinely. Despite tattoos and names to the contrary, they don't seem to care about religion. In light of the barbaric acts they regularly engage in, it seems likely that many of them are totally pathological, with absolutely no values or notion of right and wrong. In sum, I don't see anything in their culture or values (or absence of same) to prevent them from working with

international terrorists. Whether Islamic Jihadists would work with them is another matter entirely.

Maras as typified by MS-13 are a transnational gang phenomena that meet the third generation gang criteria of politicization, internationalization, and sophistication. Third generation gangs have the potential to reach a crossover threshold with terrorist groups though when and if they do secrecy will be a paramount consideration for a host of reasons (Sullivan & Bunker, 2002). This crossover threshold of gangs and terrorists may follow a path where a mara is linked to organized crime and organized crime is in turn linked to a terrorist organization. For an example, Bruneau refers to Colombia where terrorism, in the form of FARC, ELN, and AUC are linked to organized crime via the narcotics trade. Bruneau also points out the training FARC received from the IRA in urban terrorist techniques. One can begin to see how third generation gangs, drug cartels, and terrorist groups begin to blend together leveraging their skills and connections in trafficking people, weapons, and drugs across borders, particularly those of the United States (Bruneau, 2005).

Gang-Crime-Terrorist Equation

Western law enforcement agencies have noted an increasing reliance on criminal activity by terrorist networks around the world. Funding sources from the Persian Gulf, charities and other non-governmental fronts have been placed under pressure. This development, compounded by the arrests of several high-ranking coordinators and financiers of operations in Europe and North America such as Abu Doha and Fateh Kamel, have compelled *jihadi* networks to adapt and

diversify their funding sources. Consequently "traditional" criminal activities like drug trafficking, robbery and smuggling are rapidly becoming the main source of terrorism funding (Mili, 2006).

In 1996 there was a series of deadly armed robberies in the French town of Roubaix. Police initially assumed criminals motivated purely by money perpetrated these crimes. Following the attempted bombing of a G-7 meeting, French authorities discovered that the Roubaix gang was in fact a small Islamic militant organization that had also committed robberies in Bosnia to fund the jihad. The direct relationship of gangs and terrorists is unclear in the Roubaix incident but raises the question are gangs a legitimate analog for terrorist groups (Mili, 2006).

The Advanced Concepts Group (ASG) of Sandia National Laboratories observed that gangs are a legitimate analog for terrorist and terrorist-like groups. Both street gangs and terrorist groups are non-corporate groups. They are not organized as formal (legal) entities, so group leaders operate in different environments and with different kinds of authority than do those in charge of corporate legal actor. As a different type of actor, street gangs and terrorists also have different sets of actions available to them. Both terrorist groups and street gangs often are self-identified, that is, legitimacy and identity are not conferred upon them by some external body (they do not need to be 'recognized' by a larger community in order to act) but rather are self-proclaimed. Membership in both gangs and terrorist organizations is an active proposition. One does not become a member by virtue of (e.g.) birth, ethnicity, or residency, although there may be exclusionary criteria (that is, there may be criteria which determine [in] eligibility for membership). Rather, one becomes a member through some voluntary act, some act of choice.

Both types of groups (gangs and terrorist organizations) engage in criminal and, often, violent behavior. They thus operate in an extra-legal environment and maintain an adversarial relationship with peacekeeping interests (Sandia, 2002).

Today terrorist groups and third generation gangs that operate in an extra-legal environment have similarities. Third generation gangs and terrorist groups use violence as their primary modus operandi for achieving many of their goals. Terrorist and third generation gangs find themselves seeking political goals as well as money, and weapons in challenging nation-states.

The relevance of third generation street gang typology, netwar, and fourth generation warfare may seem questionable. Gangs are typically criminal in nature and seen solely as a law enforcement concern. Terrorists groups on the other hand are a national security threat and seen increasingly as a military concern. Nevertheless, third generation gangs, fourth generation warfare, and netwar entities are waypoints along the spectrum of conflict where opportunity gives rise to a consortium of convenience and networks for transnational gangs, criminals, and terrorists.

The notion that terrorists engage in a variety of non-terrorist planning activities and criminal conduct prior to the commission of any terrorist act has been documented extensively in the research literature (Smith, Damphousse, & Roberts, 2006). Sullivan, Bunkers, Hammes, and Lind point to this "hurly burly" being created by a gang-crime-terrorist equation and they feel warrants serious concern. Knox (2000) concludes:

Some hard historical facts remain undisputed about the role of gangs and higher levels of violence. Some of these facts remind us of how pitifully little we have done about the gang problem; and of how scant the answers are to major gang questions like "how many gang members are there in America?". The two top Catholic leaders of Mexico were gunned down in 1993 in Guadalajara, Mexico near the airport because their car resembled that of a rival drug lord targeted for assassination. The shooters that killed Mexico's Cardinal on May 24th, 1993 were American street gang members hired by a Mexican drug lord to hit a rival. The facts show that important linkages have been made between foreign groups and American gangs: Islamic terrorist groups and the El Rukns, the Yakuza and the Latin Kings, and the above instance of a Mexican drug lord and the 30th Street Gang in San Diego. It would seem gangs may be expected to figure prominently in such future scenarios unless our society confronts this problem most forthrightly.

Conclusion: "Strategic Criminals"

The intersection of crime and terrorism is characterized by an increasing interdependence of terrorists and transnational criminals and gangs. While these non-state actors have divergent motivations (politics v. profit) they can exploit the benefits of cooperation (and interlocking "plug and play" network connections to further their individual and collective goals. As such these entities share a common role as "strategic criminals" whose lawlessness and violence threaten a range of state security interests (Zaccor, 2005).

Evidence continues to indicate that gangs are a prominent component in the crime-terrorism dynamic. For example, Dawood Ibrahim is India's godfather of godfathers who runs criminal gangs from Bangkok to Dubai. Ibrahim's gang syndicate is called *D Company* and engages in strong-arm protection, drug trafficking, extortion, and murder-for-hire. The U.S. Treasury Department designated Ibrahim a "global terrorist" for lending his smuggling routes to al-Qaeda, and supporting jihadists in Pakistan (Kaplan, 2005). According to David Kaplan (2005):

Understanding Dawood's operations is important, experts say, because they show how growing numbers of terrorist groups have come to rely on the tactics and profits of organized criminal activity to finance their operations across the globe. An inquiry by U.S. News, based on interviews with counterterrorism and law enforcement officials from six countries, has found that terrorists worldwide are transforming their operating cells into criminal gangs.

Using the constructs of third generation gangs, netwar, and fourth generation warfare to investigate the prospect that gangs are an analog to terrorist groups adds to the knowledge base of both terrorism and crime. Street gangs and street gang violence has been studied for years by law enforcement, behavioral, and social scientists. Applying gang data to the study of terrorist groups is an important undertaking. The third generation street gang typology has been applied

to Iraq's fourth generation warfare environment where terrorism and insurgency represent mainstream violence (Haussler, 2005). Gang and netwar constructs are well suited to illuminate the street-level dynamics and violence of terrorists.

To most people M-13 remains just a violent street gang because of the dearth of evidence to directly link MS-13 to terrorist groups. However, it is important to note that in Central America, MS-13 is considered a terrorist group. Perhaps third generation street gangs will cross the threshold to future war with terrorists. The door to a fifth generation of modern warfare (5GW) is opening. Third generation gangs and terrorists are potentially approaching new levels of cooperation and violence that may drive innovation in both of their individual and collective realms.

To be sure, some will scoff. Claiming that gangs and terrorism are always separate issues and should not be conflated. That is largely true (for first and second generation gangs), however third generation gangs share many characteristics with traditional terrorist and insurgent entities. Recall the lack of imagination before the 9-11 attacks. Many never imagined terrorists armed only with box cutters turning commercial airlines into improvised cruise missiles. "As one observer said, our failure was not an intelligence failure but a failure of imagination" (Sandia, 2002). The contours of emerging conflict blur the distinctions between war and crime. Utilizing third generation gang theory is a valuable analytical tool for exploring the nature of conflict and the intersection between war and crime and crafting responses to strategic crime.

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