Chapter Sixteen

A COMMENT ON THE ZAPATISTA "NETWAR"*

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AN INSURGENCY BECOMES A NETWAR

On New Year's Day 1994, some two to four thousand insurgents of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) occupied six towns in Chiapas, declared war on the Mexican government, proclaimed radical demands, and mounted a global media campaign for support and sympathy. Through its star-quality spokesman "Subcomandante Marcos," the EZLN broadcast its declarations through press releases, conferences, and interviews, and invited foreign observers and monitors to Chiapas.

The Mexican government's initial reaction was quite traditional. It ordered army and police forces to suppress the insurrection, and downplayed its size, scope, and sources, in keeping with official denials in 1993 that guerrillas existed in Chiapas. The rebels were characterized as "just 200 individuals with vague demands," and foreign influences from Guatemala and other parts of Central America were blamed. The government tried to project a picture of stability to the world, claiming this was an isolated, local conflict.

But during the few days that the EZLN held ground, it upstaged the government. It called a press conference and issued communiques

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to disavow Marxist or other standard ideological leanings. It denied all ties to Central American revolutionaries. It clarified that its roots were indigenous to Mexico, and its demands were national as well as local in scope. It appealed for nation-wide support for its agenda—which included respect for indigenous peoples; a true political democracy, to be achieved through the resignation of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the installation of a multi-party transition government, and legitimate and fair elections; and the enactment of social and economic reforms, including repeal of revisions in 1992 to Article 27 of the Constitution governing land tenure, and, by implication, the reversal of NAFTA. In addition, the EZLN called on civil society to engage in a nation-wide struggle for social, economic, and political reforms, but not necessarily by taking up arms. The insurgents denied that they had a utopian blueprint, or had figured out exactly how to resolve Mexico's problems. They also soon denied that the EZLN itself aimed to seize power. Finally, they called on international organizations (notably, the Red Cross) and civil-society actors (notably, human-rights groups) from around the world to come to Chiapas to monitor the conflict.

Meanwhile, the government mobilized the army and other security forces. Within days, the number of troops in Chiapas expanded from two to twelve thousand. Air and ground attacks were mounted in rebel-held areas. Reports of casualties grew into the low hundreds. Reports also grew of human-rights abuses (including by EZLN forces). As the EZLN withdrew into the jungle, army and police units retook the towns, and detained and interrogated people suspected of ties to the Zapatistas. Reports of tortures, executions, and disappearances at the hands of army and police units spread in the media. Meanwhile, government agents reportedly tried to prevent or at least delay some journalists and human-rights monitors from entering the conflict zone; some were accused of meddling in Mexico's internal affairs. This generally hard-line response reflected traditional practices, whether one refers to the suppression of the student-led protest movement in 1968, to operations against urban terrorist and rural guerrilla movements in the 1970s, or to the occasional, less severe policing of violent electoral protests in the 1980s.

The EZLN's insurrection and the government's response aroused dozens if not hundreds of representatives of numerous human-rights, indigenous-rights, and other types of activist nongovernmen-

tal organizations (NGOs) to "swarm"—electronically as well as physically—out of the United States, Canada, and elsewhere into Mexico City and Chiapas.[1] There, they linked up with Mexican NGOs to voice sympathy if not solidarity with the EZLN's demands. They began to press nonviolently for a cease-fire, military withdrawal, government negotiations with the EZLN, democratic reforms, and for access by the NGOs to monitor conditions in the affected zones.

This active response by a multitude of NGOs to a distant upheaval—the first major case anywhere—was no anomaly. It built on decades of organizational and technological groundwork, and shows how the global information revolution is affecting the nature of social conflict. The NGOs formed into vast, highly networked, transnational coalitions to wage an information-age *netwar* to constrain the Mexican government and support the EZLN's cause.

The Zapatistas are insurgents. But the widespread argument that they are the world's first post-Communist, postmodern insurgents makes a point that misses a point: Their insurgency is novel; but the dynamics that make it novel—notably, the links to transnational and local NGOs that claim to represent civil society—move the topic out of a classic "insurgency" framework and into an information-age "netwar" framework. Without the influx of NGO activists, starting hours after the insurrection began, the dynamics in Chiapas would probably have deteriorated into a conventional insurgency and counterinsurgency—and the small, poorly equipped EZLN might not have done well. Transnational NGO activism attuned to the information age, not the EZLN insurgency per se, is what changed the framework—but it took Marcos' sense of strategy to make the change work.

THE ADVENT OF NETWAR—ANALYTICAL BACKGROUND

The information revolution is strengthening network forms of organization, and this in turn is altering the nature of conflict. Here we focus on the implications for militant social conflicts that involve activist NGOs—in this case a conflict that bears directly on Mexican security and military issues. We explore the challenges that a social netwar, and its potentially liberalizing political effects, may pose for an authoritarian regime. But first, a brief overview about the nature and advent of netwar.[2]

The term *netwar* refers to conflict (and crime) at societal levels where the protagonists rely on network forms of organization, and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies. The term was coined (Arquilla & Ronfeldt 1993) to focus attention on the likelihood that network-based social conflict and crime, involving measures short of war, would increase and become a major, widespread phenomenon in the decades ahead. Thus the term is both a tool and a prediction. It reflects assessments that the information revolution is about organizational design as well as technological prowess, and that this revolution favors whoever can master the network form.

In an archetypal netwar, the protagonists may consist of diverse, dispersed, often small groups ("nodes") who share a set of ideas and interests, and agree to communicate, coordinate, and act in a highly Internetted ("all-channel") manner.[3] Ideally, this actor (or set of actors) has no single central leadership, headquarters, or command—no precise heart or head that can be targeted. The overall organizational design is flat and non-hierarchical—it is heterarchical, both polycephalous and acephalous. It functions as what might be termed a "panarchy" in that all members subscribe to a common doctrine that reflects their shared ideals and objectives, and guides their strategies. Tactical decisionmaking and operations are decentralized—they may involve mutual consultation, but they emphasize local initiative.

The result is a distinctive, flexible, adaptable design, with strengths for both offense and defense, that differs from traditional designs for conflict (or crime) in which the protagonists prefer hierarchical organizations, doctrines, and strategies, as in efforts to organize centralized mass movements, unions, and eventually parties along Leninist lines. In short, netwar is about Mexico's Zapatistas more than Cuba's Fidelistas, Hamas more than the PLO, and the Asian Triads more than the classic Sicilian Mafia.

In many respects, the archetypal netwar design resembles a "segmented, polycentric, ideologically integrated network" (SPIN). The SPIN concept was proposed by anthropologist Luther Gerlach and sociologist Virginia Hine as a result of their research on U.S. social movements in the 1960s and 1970s:

> By segmentary I mean that it is cellular, composed of many different groups. . . . By polycentric I mean that it has many different leaders or centers of direction. . . . By networked I mean that the segments and the leaders are integrated into reticulated systems or networks through various structural, personal, and ideological ties. Networks are usually unbounded and expanding. . . . This acronym [SPIN] helps us picture this organization as a fluid, dynamic, expanding one, spinning out into mainstream society (Gerlach 1987: 115, based on Gerlach & Hine 1970).

The SPIN concept is a precursor of the netwar concept. Indeed, Gerlach and Hine anticipated two decades ago many points about network forms of organization that are just now coming into vogue.[4]

Actors across the spectrums of conflict and crime around the world—including terrorists, fundamentalists, ethnonationalists, militant single-issue groups, and criminal organizations—are evolving in the direction of netwar . Some netwar proponents still fit standard notions of low-intensity conflict (LIC), operations-other-than-war (OOTW), and crime. But other actors do not fit standard notions: The spectrum increasingly includes a new transnational generation of militants who espouse information-age ideologies that are just now taking shape, and in which identities and loyalties may shift from the nation-state to the level of "global civil society." And new netwar actors—e.g., anarchistic or nihilistic leagues of computer "hackers"—are appearing.

Some actors may be inherently antagonistic to U.S. and other nations' interests (e.g., terrorist organizations), but others may not (e.g., NGO activists). Many variations are possible. In any case, the spread of netwar will add to the challenges facing the "nation-state" as its roles and structures, its sovereignty and authority, get transformed by information-age trends.

In a *social* netwar, where a network of activist NGOs may challenge a government or rival NGOs in some public issue area, the "battle" is mainly about "information"[5]—about who knows what, when, where, and why. Netwar generally involves seeking "topsight" (total intelligence) about one's own and the opponent's situation, while keeping that opponent in the dark about oneself and about its own situation. Netwar means affecting what the opponent knows, or thinks it knows, not only about its challenger but also about itself

and the world around it. Among other things, this may mean trying to shape images, beliefs, and attitudes in the social milieu in which both are operating. Thus a social netwar is likely to involve battles for public opinion and for media access and coverage, at local and international levels. It may revolve around propaganda campaigns and psychological warfare, not only to inform but also to disinform, deceive, and manipulate. In other words, netwar is much more about a doctrinal leader like Subcomandante Marcos than a lone, wild computer hacker like Kevin Mitnick.

A social netwar may be progressive or regressive, violent or nonviolent, mass or sectarian, public or covert, threatening or promising for a society—it all depends. The United States is fraught with divisive social netwars. This is seen in the behavior of militant activists battling over abortion, the environment, immigration, education, gun control, and myriad other issues. The militias and related right-wing extremist groups, especially those that subscribe to a doctrine known as "leaderless resistance," seem designed for waging violent netwar (see Stern 1996).

Mexico too is being affected by netwar. The paramount example appears in the decentralized, dispersed cooperation among the numerous Mexican and transnational NGO activists who support or otherwise sympathize with the EZLN, and who aim to affect Mexico's policies on human rights, political democracy, and other major reform issues.

EMERGENCE, EVOLUTION, AND EFFECTS OF THE ZAPATISTA NETWAR

In retrospect, Mexico and Chiapas were ripe for social netwar in the early 1990s. Mexico as a whole—its society, state, and economy—was (and still is) in flux and in a deep, difficult transition. Ingrained clannish and hierarchical patterns of behavior continued to rule the Mexican system. But that system was also opening up, in part because Presidents Miguel de la Madrid and Carlos Salinas de Gortari resolved to liberalize Mexico's economy and, to a much lesser degree, its polity. Thus Mexico began adapting, with great difficulty, to modern market principles. At the same time, independent civil-society actors, including a range of Mexican NGOs, began to gain

strength, and to find openings to challenge the state for lagging at democratization and neglecting social welfare issues.

Chiapas, once an isolated backwater, was becoming awash with outside forces. It was still characterized by tremendous gaps between the wealthy and the impoverished, by *caciquismo*, and by the plight of indigenous peoples who wanted their lives improved and their cultures respected. Many analysts have observed that neoliberal economic reforms, especially those instituted by the Salinas administration, made matters much worse for many *indigenas*, setting the stage for the formation and rise of the EZLN.[6]

The economics are important; but, more to our point here, Chiapas was increasingly subjected to all manner of transnational influences. During the 1980s and early 1990s, it became a crossroads for NGO activists, Catholic liberation-theology priests and Protestant evangelists, Guatemalan migrants and refugees, guerrillas coming and going from Central America, and criminals trafficking in weapons and narcotics. This exposure to transnational forces was stronger and more distinctive in Chiapas than in two other nearby states—Oaxaca and Guerrero—that were often thought to be likely locales for guerrilla insurgencies (and had been in the past). And this helps explain why Chiapas, and not another state, gave rise to an insurgency that became a netwar.

To understand fully why a social netwar emerged in Mexico, the analyst must also look outside—at trends in North and Central America. Activist NGOs are not a new phenomenon.[7] But their numbers, diversity, and strength have increased greatly around the world since the 1970s. What is new, mainly since the 1980s, is the development of organizational and technological networks for Internetting the NGOs. Their ability to mobilize in support of the Zapatistas stemmed from a confluence of infrastructure-building efforts at regional, global, and local levels.

Around Mexico, these efforts took hold in the 1970s and 1980s, when numerous, small NGOs got involved in the conflicts in Central America. Their activities varied from providing humanitarian relief and monitoring human-rights abuses, to providing alternative sources of information to the U.S. and international media and opposing U.S. policy. The key network-building organization was the

innovative Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), whose affiliates included a range of peace, human-rights, and church organizations. Activists who had access to the insurgents in El Salvador could sometimes get news of a human-rights abuse into the media faster than U.S. ambassadors or State Department officers could learn about it from their own sources. Indeed, the spread of fax machines and e-mail systems enabled the NGOs to move news items out of El Salvador and into the media, to inundate U.S. government in-boxes with protests and petitions, and to challenge what the NGOs regarded as disinformation. CISPES was a seminal effort to build a transnational network to conduct a netwar.[8]

After the conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua receded as front-burner issues, the proposal for NAFTA suddenly appeared. This reanimated the NGO networks that had been taking shape and provided the catalyst for a new round of infrastructure-building. In addition to holding numerous face-to-face conferences, NGOs across North America—mainly from Canada and the United States, but also with nascent Mexican participation[9]—communicated with increasing ease via faxes, e-mail, and computer conferencing systems like Peacenet. The participants included militants who had worked with CISPES, but the coalitions broadened to include center-left moderates who were concerned with North American labor and environmental issues. In the end, the diverse sets of participants coalesced around a single objective: to oppose fast-track approval of NAFTA by the U.S. Congress.

This new round of NGO activism did not prevent fast-track approval of NAFTA in 1993. Yet, the NGOs' trinational, pan-issue networks got better organized than ever before. This laid a foundation for the NGO mobilization that followed the EZLN insurrection in January 1994—just a few months after the NAFTA-related activism had subsided, and once again the infrastructure was sitting there, with more potential than ever, waiting to be reactivated.

Another current of activity involving thousands of NGOs during the early 1990s—a series of UN-sponsored conferences and parallel NGO forums on a range of global issues—also strengthened the activists' infrastructure, albeit indirectly regarding Chiapas. In particular, the UN Conference on the Environment and Development—the "Earth Summit"—held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 put NGOs on the map as

global activists and provided them with experience at formulating their own policy positions and pressuring government officials to heed them.

Meanwhile during the 1980s and early 1990s, the number and diversity of local NGOs and related movements and organizations grew rapidly inside Mexico, including with regard to issues involving Chiapas.[10] Thus, by the time of the EZLN's insurrection, the transnationally networked NGOs had many local counterparts with which to link up in Mexico City, San Cristobal de Las Casas, and other locales. And as NGO representatives rushed into Chiapas in early 1994, new organizations were established—like the Coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ), which is associated with the Archdiocese of San Cristobal de las Casas—to assist with communication and coordination.

Once the netwar got under way, two types of NGOs were active in issues regarding Chiapas, and both were significant: (a) the issue-oriented NGOs and (b) the infrastructure-building and network-facilitating NGOs. The former consist of NGOs whose identities and missions revolve around a specific issue area, such as human rights, indigenous rights, peace, the environment, or trade and development. Numerous NGOs were active in each such area. To give an example, during 1994 Chiapas engaged the attention of the following NGOs concerned with the rights of indigenous peoples: transnational NGOs with no national identity—the Continental Indian Commission (CONIC), the Independent Indian Front (FIPI), and the International Indigenous Treaty Council (IITC); U.S.-based NGOs—the South and Mesoamerican Indian Information Center (SAIIC); Canadian NGOs—Okanaga Nation; and Mexican NGOs (or quasi-NGOs), such as the State Coalition of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations (CEOIC), the Coordinadora de Organizaciones en Lucha del Pueblo Maya para su Liberacion (COLPUMALI)) and the Organizacion Indigena de los Altos de Chiapas (ORIACH). Many of these have links to each other—for example, COLPUMALI and ORIACH are sister organizations within FIPI-Mexico, and FIPI is a member of CONIC. This is only a partial listing, and for only one issue area—a full listing for all issue areas would run for pages.

Acting in synergy with them are the second type of organization: the infrastructure-building NGOs. These are not defined by specific is-

sues; rather, they assist other NGOs and activists, no matter what the issue is. They specialize in facilitating networking, notably with regard to communications services; the organization of demonstrations, caravans, and other militant events; and through education and exchange activities.

Of these organizations, one of the most important is the expanding, transnational Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a network of networks that has many affiliates, such as the U.S.-based Peacenet and Conflictnet, and the nascent LaNeta in Mexico. All are attached or have access to the Internet. The APC and its affiliates amount to a worldwide computer-conferencing and e-mail system for activist NGOs. This system enables them to consult; coordinate; disseminate news and other information; and put pressure on governments, including by mounting fax-writing campaigns.[11] The APC itself did not have activists in Mexico because of Chiapas, but other important infrastructure-building NGOs did, including: from the United States, Global Exchange; the Canadian networking NGO, Action Canada; and Mexico's CONPAZ. Again, cooperative connections exist among all these organizations.

Were Subcomandante Marcos or other EZLN leaders and sympathizers aware of this potential? Did they anticipate that activist NGOs could—and would—swarm to support them? We have no evidence of this. Nonetheless, conditions in Chiapas were already well known to many activists, despite official Mexican denials that problems were growing there. Amnesty International and Americas Watch had each published a similar report of human-rights violations in the area, the former in 1986, the latter in 1991. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, and the World Policy Institute, jointly published a report in August 1993 about soldiers beating and torturing a group of Mayan Indians in May 1993. The Jesuit Refugee Service, long active in the area to deal with Guatemalan refugee issues, had become increasingly alarmed about the treatment of Chiapas' Indians and issued an "Urgent Call to the International Community" in August 1993. Curiously, it made demands almost identical to those fielded a few months later by many Mexican and transnational NGOs in January 1994.

Whatever the full story, as the NGOs turned their attention to Mexico, the EZLN proved entirely receptive, and the artful Subcoman-

dante Marcos clarified that a new model of conflict and transformation was emerging and being tested. He and his cohorts claimed to eschew Leninist, Maoist, and Fidelista models that meant an army or party must seize power as the vanguard of socialist revolution. Instead, the EZLN's agenda (e.g., political democracy, local autonomy) sounded more reformist than revolutionary (see Castañeda, 1995). Marcos denied that the EZLN wanted to occupy the seats of power (though it aimed to change the state) and proclaimed a key role for civil-society actors, like the NGOs, in the EZLN's vision of the conflict:

> We do not want state power. It is civil society that must transform Mexico—we are only a small part of that civil society, the armed part—our role is to be the guarantors of the political space that civil society needs.

In this doctrine, the mobilization of civil society—not the expansion of the insurgents' army—is the key strategic element. Indeed, once the fighting ended in January and negotiations got under way, Marcos would emphasize in March 1994 the expectation that

> war will be exorcised by the pressure put on by civil society throughout the country to fulfill the agreements. . . . The problem will arise if civil society becomes exhausted, tired, collapses; in that case every thing will be left loose and then they will jump on us through the military route.

Ever since, Marcos and other EZLN leaders have worked ceaselessly to keep foreign journalists, intellectuals, and activists focused on, and present in, the conflict zone. They have used "information operations" to deter and counteract the government's military operations. They have endeavored to dominate the "information space" (e.g., in the media, via faxes, and on the Internet) in ways that compensate for their inability to hold much physical territory.[12] International conferences that the EZLN convened in April and August 1996 to criticize the detrimental effects of neoliberalism—they were attended, or supported from a distance, by various U.S. and French luminaries of the left—are recent examples of this. Meanwhile, the activists have had many opportunities to claim that their efforts have helped prevent violence by all sides to the conflict. A symbolic high-

light was their participation in one of the "Three Rings of Peace" that surrounded the initial government-EZLN negotiations in early 1994.

NGO activists sense that they are molding a new strategy of conflict based on networking (see Cleaver 1994a, 1994b). For many of them, nonviolent but compelling action is crucial; and to this end, they need rapid, far-reaching communications, as well as freedom of information and travel. Much of their netwar has been waged through the media—both traditional media like newspapers, magazines, and television, and new media like faxes, e-mail and computer billboard and conferencing systems. (Old-fashioned face-to-face and telephone communications remain important too.) Since word of the Zapatista insurrection first spread via the new media, activists have made heavy use of the Internet (and adjuncts like Peacenet and Mexico's nascent LaNeta, which came on-line in 1993) to spread information (and disinformation), mobilize their forces, and coordinate actions. Indeed, there are quite a few World Wide Web (WWW) "pages" on the Internet that convey the EZLN's views and make Marcos' statements available. Thus, in April 1995, Mexico's Foreign Minister Jose Angel Gurria was observant to comment that

> Chiapas . . . is a place where there has not been a shot fired in the last fifteen months. . . . The shots lasted ten days, and ever since the war has been a war of ink, of written word, a war on the Internet.

All sides have waged public-relations battles to affect perceptions of each other. Many NGO activists worked to ensure that the insurrection became an international media event, and that the EZLN and its ideals were portrayed favorably. NGO representatives struggled ceaselessly through fax-writing campaigns, public meetings, and other measures to make Mexican officials aware of their presence, and to put them on notice to attend to selected issues. The fax numbers of Mexican and U.S. government officials were often posted in Internet newsgroups and mailing lists—if a number became inoperable, a new one was soon discovered and posted.

This transnational social netwar has been partially effective. It helped impel two Mexican presidents to halt military operations and turn to political dialogue and negotiations: first, President Salinas in January 1994, a week after the insurrection erupted and the Mexican army took to the field in Chiapas; and next, President Zedillo in

February 1995, four days after he ordered the army to expand its presence in the conflict zone and to arrest the EZLN's leaders. Both turns of events surprised government officials, army officers, and the public at large. There are other explanations for both presidents' decisions —e.g., that worries about a backlash among foreign creditors and investors, or about damage to Mexico's image in the media, or about infighting among Mexico's leaders, led Salinas and Zedillo to halt military operations and agree to dialogue and negotiations. Our explanation, however, is that the transnational netwar was a major contributing factor, including in riling up media attention and alarming foreign investors. And this activism was made possible by networking capabilities that have emerged only recently as a result of the information revolution.

Beyond such effects on army operations, the netwar reignited public debates about Mexico's national identity and policy directions. It added to the pressures on Mexico's leaders to enact political and electoral reforms, to make the political system more transparent, accountable, and democratic, to take human rights more seriously, to accept the growth of civil society, and to heed the needs of indigenous peoples. Some analysts claim that political and electoral reforms have proceeded faster since the Zapatista movement than in years, if not decades, past. A case can also be made that the netwar contributed to the perceptions of crisis in late 1994, and then the huge peso devaluation that alarmed many foreign creditors and investors. Yet, inside Mexico, where many activists shifted their focus in mid 1994 from the conflict in Chiapas to aspire to bring about the downfall of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the national elections, the perceptions of crisis led Mexican citizens to vote overwhelmingly for the PRI. (The netwar may also be obliging the army to adopt institutional changes, but that remains undocumented except for the army's somewhat increased attention to public affairs, relations with NGOs, and human-rights issues).

In short, the NGOs' activism altered the dynamics of the confrontation in Chiapas and helped convert a military confrontation into a political one. It assured that what might once have remained a provincial event became a national and international event. It affected the context for decisionmaking in Mexico City; it helped impel the government to dialogue and negotiate with the EZLN; it helped keep the military at bay; and it put unusual pressures on the political

system to become more democratic. In such respects, this netwar has not been bad for Mexico (nor has it jeopardized U.S. interests). However, in the short run, it has heightened uncertainty in Mexico and abroad about Mexico's stability and future prospects. At least, these are our preliminary impressions; in truth, much work remains to be done before scholars can be certain how social netwar has affected Mexico.

THE FUTURE OF NETWAR—AND COUNTERNETWAR—IN MEXICO

Mexico's transition to a new type of system that has greater evolutionary capacity is, and will continue, causing many minor and some major disturbances. At times, this may mean labor strikes; electoral protests; student demonstrations; protests by environmental, human-rights, and other activists and dissidents; and shoot-outs involving drug traffickers. At times, the scene may be a major city, but often it may be a provincial location where *caciquismo* remains entrenched. The list of possibilities is long and diverse. Presumably, most disturbances will prove manageable; they will challenge but not jeopardize the stability or the transformability of the Mexican system.

The serious risk for Mexico is not an old-fashioned civil war or another great revolution—these seem unlikely. The greater risk is a plethora of social and *criminal* netwars. Indeed, Mexico's security in the information age may turn out to be a function of netwars of all varieties. The challenge for Mexico will be to cope with these netwars in ways that ensure both the stability and transformability of the Mexican system. Both dynamics—stability and transformability—are at stake.

Here we have focused on the Zapatista social netwar. But Mexico is also the scene of criminal netwar actors, with the Internetted drug cartels being the major culprits.[13] Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) are a growing threat around the world, largely because they are so adept at taking advantage of global and regional interconnections. As specialist Phil Williams points out:

> TCOs are diverse in structure, outlook and membership. What they have in common is that they are highly mobile and adaptable and

> are able to operate across national borders with great ease. . . . They are able to do this partly because of the conditions identified above and partly because of their emphasis on networks rather than formal organizations (Williams 1994; also see Sterling 1994).

Mexico's drug-trafficking organizations have evolved aggressively in this direction since the late 1980s, in league with Colombian cartels.

Neither social nor criminal netwar actors seem likely to make Mexico ungovernable. That might occur, perhaps, if they all reinforced each other, directly or indirectly, under conditions where the country's economic recession deepened, the federal government lost credibility and legitimacy, and elite infighting threw the "revolutionary family" and its *camarillas* (political clans) into chaos. But, in many respects, Mexico seems to be in somewhat better shape now than it was in the 1980s, when some analysts (e.g., Castañeda 1986; Latell 1986) proposed that collapse seemed imminent.

To ensure that netwars do not adversely affect Mexico's stability or transformability, the government will have to improve its ability to wage *counternetwar*—not to mention its ability to maintain a credible pace of reforms. The prospects for netwar—and for counternetwar—revolve around a small string of propositions about networks versus hierarchies (Arquilla & Ronfeldt 1993, 1996b): Accordingly, the information revolution favors and strengthens actors who use network forms of organization and makes life difficult for large traditional hierarchies. In general, it can be said that hierarchies have difficulty fighting networks. It take networks to fight networks—a hierarchy may have to form its own networks to prevail against networked adversaries. Whoever masters the network form, organizationally, doctrinally, and technologically, will gain major advantages in the information age.

By implication, a government may need great agility and adaptability to cope with netwar-related threats and challenges. Waging counternetwar may require the development of highly effective interagency mechanisms and operations, since the interagency arena is where networking may best occur in the government world. Improvements at civil-military, inter-service, and intra-military networking are also implied.

How well do these propositions apply in Mexico's case? It confirms that hierarchies—such as the Mexican government, the army, and the PRI—do have difficulties fighting a networked actor (or set of actors). The case may also show that the government has had to organize its own interagency and other intergovernmental networks to prevail against the pro-Zapatista networks. While the government and the army initially responded in a traditional, heavy-handed manner to the EZLN's insurrection, they have apparently not responded idly or unthinkingly since then to this seminal case of social netwar. However, research is lacking at this time to substantiate how they have adapted, and what they have learned.

The Zapatista netwar and the government's efforts at counternetwar are far from ended. By now (May 1996), it seems clear that the EZLN's putative power and influence depend on its political support from the activist world, that the EZLN poses a symbolic more than a real threat of violence, and that its military capabilities are very limited. Meanwhile, beginning in late 1994 and extending into 1996, the army has slowly but surely reasserted a dominant presence in the conflict zone. It has gained the upper hand from a military standpoint, showing that the EZLN is a weak "paper tiger" (even though it has proven to be a successful "Internet tiger" from an information-warfare perspective).

Meanwhile, the military's image has not fared well during most of this netwar (see Wager & Schulz 1995). The army evidently resented having its field operations halted in January 1994, and again in February 1995. It also resented being blamed retrospectively for intelligence failures after the insurrection broke out, and then for human-rights abuses when it tried to restore order in a war zone. At times, the army found itself confounded, on the one hand, by NGO activists (and willing journalists) who mounted media campaigns to impugn its image, and on the other hand, by occasional indecisiveness and confusion on the part of civilian leaders. Meanwhile, the army learned in 1994 that it was not accustomed to dealing with civil-society actors clamoring for access and information in a conflict zone. Indeed, since a social netwar is not a traditional insurgency, part of the challenge is to recognize (as has probably occurred) that military roles rarely figure large in counternetwar against social actors.

Dealing with civil-society NGOs—whether as allies, as in humanitarian and disaster relief operations, or as antagonists, as in some cases of pro-democracy, human-rights, and environmental movements—is a new frontier for government officials around the world. In the period ahead in Mexico, the government may at times be tempted to repress local NGOs and restrict freedom of information, in the name of security. But that would ignore the positive roles that NGOs are generally likely to play in the information age. Will there instead be temptations to constrain just the transnational NGOs and their representatives from abroad? To some extent, Mexican agents have episodically attempted that in Chiapas.[14] However, without a transnational presence, presumably of responsible NGOs (as well as corporations), Mexico would probably not make a strong effort to evolve into a democratic, market-oriented society.

In addition, the advent of netwar may induce a rethinking of aspects of Mexico's security concept. For at least a decade, it has been defined in "integral" terms—it has emphasized a combination of political, social, economic, and military dimensions, with the military accepting, if not insisting, that the military dimensions be subordinate to the civilian ones. In 1980, Secretary of National Defense General Felix Galvan Lopez gave the concept a valuable tone when he remarked, "I understand by national security the maintenance of social, economic, and political *equilibrium*, guaranteed by the armed forces."[15] The Zapatista netwar has called critical attention to the fact that Mexico is adapting, with difficulty, to political and electoral reforms, the growth of a market system and the rise of civil society. If Mexico can continue to adapt successfully, it will establish a new "equilibrium," and this will surely prompt some reevaluation of what is meant by "national security."

There is another conceptual implication, this time for the civil-society activists. Important roles will be played—the balance between stability and instability, between advance and regression, may even be tipped—by the new generation of civil-society activists who are organized in national networks and, in some cases, have connections to transnational networks that include activists from the United States, Canada, and other countries. These activist NGO networks can have—and some are indeed having—a positive influence on Mexico's prospects for stable, democratic development. Such groups as the Civic Alliance have pressured the electoral and party

systems to adopt reforms and become more open and competitive. But there is a conundrum. If the progressive left is to continue to be the cutting edge of "cybernet" activism—not only in Mexico but all across North America—it must help find a way to make peace with the market system, and to acknowledge its benefits for the evolution of complex social systems. Indeed, the success of that system is a key reason why the activist networks emerged first in North America and Western Europe, and not in another part of the world.

Meanwhile, the interests and needs continue to grow for all manner of civil-society NGOs and other nongovernmental actors to develop new ways to work with government actors all across North America. As Thorup (1995) observes, the positive result of the empowerment of civil society may be that "nations" rather than just "states" can be better represented in policymaking processes for building secure, progressive communities.

Ultimately, then, netwar and counternetwar in Mexico become a game not solely of power, but also of vision and responsibility.

IMPLICATIONS BEYOND MEXICO

This case indicates that social netwar can be waged effectively where a society is open, or slowly beginning to open up; where divisive social issues are on people's minds; and where outside activist NGOs and their networks have local counterparts with which to link. Such a society should be in a region where the activists have a well-developed communications infrastructure at their disposal for purposes of rapid consultation and mobilization. Because of such conditions, Mexico provides a much more susceptible environment for social netwar than do more closed societies (e.g., Burma, Cuba, and Iran) that are not yet fully connected to the Internet.

The Mexican case instructs that both issue-oriented and infrastructure-building NGOs are important to the development of a social netwar. It also instructs that activist swarming best occurs where the NGOs are internetted and collaborate in ways that exhibit "collective diversity" and "coordinated anarchy." The paradoxical tenor of these phrases is intentional. The NGOs often have diverse, specialized interests; thus, any issue can be rapidly singled out and attacked by at least elements of the swarm. At the same time, many NGOs can act,

and see themselves acting, as part of a collectivity, because they share convergent ideological and political ideals, and similar concepts about nonviolent strategy and tactics. Although some NGOs may be more active and influential than others, the collectivity has no central leadership or command structure; it is multi-headed, impossible to decapitate. Their behavior may look uncontrolled, even anarchic at times. But in fact it is shaped by extensive consultation and coordination, made feasible by rapid communications among the parties to the swarm.[16]

Furthermore, the Mexican case hints at the kind of doctrine and strategy that can make social netwar effective for transnational NGOs. The following appear to be two important elements: (1) Make civil society the vanguard—work to build a "global civil society" and link it to local NGOs; (2) make "information" and "information operations" the decisive weapon—demand freedom of access and information, capture media attention, and use all kinds of information and communications technologies. Where this is feasible, *netwarriors* may be able to put strong pressure on state and market actors, without aspiring to seize power through violence and force of arms.

Netwar forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, tactics, and communications infrastructures are still emerging—they are far from being fully defined and developed. Yet, it is already clear that a social netwar can disrupt a slowly liberalizing authoritarian regime, put it (and its military) on the defensive, and, to some extent, help spur new steps toward democratization. Social netwar is an agent of change that may have both positive and negative effects. Mexico is one of the first countries to experience this, but it is far from the last.

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NOTES

[1]Kelly (1994) provides an introduction to the concept of swarm networks and to the dynamics that may govern their behavior. We are using the term in this analytical sense.

[2]Ideas and observations about the advent of netwar stem from work done jointly by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt. See Arquilla & Ronfeldt (1993, 1996b).

[3]In making such statements, we refer mainly to the "all-channel" multiorganizational type of network; the "chain" and "hub" (or "star") types are less pertinent to our discussion. But whatever the type of organization, the strongest will be based on distinctive doctrines, and be layered atop advanced telecommunications networks and traditional networks of personal and social ties. See Arquilla & Ronfeldt (1996b).

[4]In all fairness, it should be pointed out that Gerlach and Hine might be loath to see their concept related to netwar, since they were more concerned about global governance than conflict.

[5]For a discussion of the term *information*, see Arquilla & Ronfeldt (1996a).

[6]Sources consulted include: Collier (1994), Gossen (1994), Harvey (1994), Hernandez (1994), Nash (1995), Ross (1994), and Tello (1995).

[7]As used here, the term NGO includes many non-profit organizations (NPOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), and grass-roots organizations (GROs). The term does not include government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), or international governmental organizations (IGOs).

[8] Evidently in an effort to emulate this experience, a Committee in Solidarity with the People of Mexico has been recently formed.

[9]The leading example of Mexican participation was the Mexican Network Against Free Trade (Red Mexicana de Accion Frente al Libre Comercio—RMALC), a coordinating center for a number of individual Mexican NGOs.

[10]This is an important part of the story that we neglect here in order to keep the focus on the transnational actors.

[11]For background, see Frederick (1993).

[12]Colleague John Arquilla has helped generate these kinds of ideas and observations. Readers interested in them should also consult Szafranski (1994, 1995).

[13]For some discussion of how criminal elites may fit into Mexico's *camarilla* (political clan) system, see Ronfeldt & Reuter (1992).

[14]A case can be made that the Mexican government has actually been quite tolerant of this transnational activist presence. What other government would be so tolerant of such an unusual, heavy influx in response to an internal security problem?

[15]From an article in the magazine *Proceso*, September 22, 1980, p. 6 (translation; italics added).

[16]See Kelly (1994).