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'Cleansing Polluted Seas'

Non-State Threats and the Urban Environment

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REPRINTS

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Thutmose III’s exhausted Egyptian soldiers found that the fighting was far from over after their day of slaughter on the Jezreel Plain. Canaanite leaders opposing their pharaoh had escaped the battlefield and fled into the nearby city of Megiddo, a key location along the trade route between Egypt and the fertile valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates. It would take another seven months of operations before the battle reached its ultimate end when that objective fell in 1279 BC.

Nearly a millennium later, Alexander the Great’s soldiers and sailors also labored seven months before capturing the port of Tyre. Bypassing the city would have unacceptably exposed Alexander’s line of communications. Further, Tyre was the finest of the Phoenician ports and the parent city of Carthage. Its conquest swelled Alexander’s reputation and that of his army, granting him a decided advantage as he thereafter continued his exploits in Asia and Africa.¹

The Iberian Peninsula presented multiple challenges for the Roman Publius Cornelius Scipio when he arrived in 210 BC. The interior held separate Carthaginian armies, each alone capable of defeating Scipio’s legions. The young but wise general instead chose to capture that point most important to the enemy’s lifeline: the port of New Carthage. His surprise attack brought him possession of the critical supply base, the initiative in the struggle for the peninsula, and an initial victory in the successful military career of ‘Scipio Africanus’.

Rome had long stood as the political, economic, social, and religious center of an empire that had reigned supreme for centuries before the Vandals captured it in AD 455, looting the city of much of its wealth before departing two weeks later. The fall of the capital and symbolic heart of that empire signaled the final collapse of Roman power in the west.²

The causes underlying such attacks on ancient urban areas have proved durable, applying in similar measure to more recent eras. Paris was the target of German intentions in both twentieth-century world wars because of its status as France’s head of government, a major transportation hub,

centerpiece of the nation's economy, and reputation as one of the world's great metropolises. Twentieth-century attackers were attracted to Manila, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Berlin, London, Seoul, Hue, Saigon, Panama City, and Mogadishu for these and many of the reasons that precipitated assaults on Megiddo, Tyre, New Carthage, and Rome.

There will be no diminishing of this interest in the years to come. Major concentrations of population will continue to wield local, regional, national, and often international influence. Approximately half of the world's residents now live in urban areas. The movement from rural to more densely populated regions is nearly universal, but rates in developing nations exceed those of their more economically fortunate counterparts. Cities and towns are sources of wealth. Migration from the countryside carries promises of higher wages, freedom from dependence on the weather, and relief from a social isolation especially unattractive to the young. The resultant growth often outpaces urban economies' capabilities to provide housing, utility infrastructure, and human services support for the recently arrived.

The factors that draw armies into urban areas do much to explain why villages, towns, and cities are similarly the foci of non-state actor attentions. Concentrations of dissatisfied newcomers make it easy to understand why many are successful in their pursuits. Disgruntlement born of unmet expectations grows in a soil enriched by observations of the wealthy living in close proximity, by oppression of those whose arrival economically threatens longer-term residents, and by the collocation of groups harboring long-standing antipathies. Little wonder that dominant personalities and promises of betterment win hearts and minds, especially among youths suddenly free of traditional rural social mores. It is no surprise that those desiring to raise a challenge to the established order are drawn to these concentrations of economic power, bureaucratic failure, and social inequity.

Fish in the Sea: Non-State Actors' Urban Environments

Most attempts to categorize non-state actor threats do so by focusing on the nature of the groups themselves: member motivations, ends sought, demographic characteristics, or methods employed. It is perhaps more revealing to consider an alternative perspective, one that looks at the nature of the urban population in which these organizations operate.

Non-state organizations often require support from their environments to a greater extent than do regular military forces. Mao addressed the need in his depiction of the relationship between members of a population and guerrillas: 'The former may be likened to water and the latter to the fish who inhabit it.'³

Non-state actor characteristics can, without too greatly misshaping the pegs, be put into five 'holes' or categories. The nature of few groups is such that they fall within but a single category; virtually all demonstrate the properties of two if not more. The categories draw their defining elements from the nature of the support provided by the urban population. No less than with Mao's revolutionaries, non-state actor successes are functions of the seas in which they operate.

Controlling the Sea

Organized criminal elements driven by economic gain are the longest standing non-state organizations in many densely populated areas. Survival is in considerable part due to the establishment of an environment conducive to their desired ends. These groups have in some cases established such 'legitimacy' that their authority has been recognized by local and even national governments. The New York City Mafia essentially controlled that city's docks in the World War II era. The American government asked for and obtained Mafia support in securing the New York port area against threats posed by Axis forces during the war years.⁴

Yet it is acceptance of their legitimacy by those residing in their operating areas that is fundamental to such non-state actors' welfare. This is obtained in myriad ways, to include winning support by 'policing' neighborhoods to rid them of undesirables such as drug dealers and prostitutes or coercively via the enforcement of 'laws' that require payment of protection money (taxes). Control may include co-opting government officials such as police, judges, politicians, and other public authorities to further create an environment amenable to the criminal organization's freedom of action. Such creation and maintenance of stability compares favorably with that achieved by many national governments. The result is a community in many ways reliant on and often supportive of the controlling entity.

This success is neither gained nor maintained without at least occasional resistance. Organizations so challenged have to adapt to survive. They relocate to and influence other seas when community resistance makes movement prudent. They attempt to maintain a low profile so as not to become a target for law enforcement authorities or the locally politically ambitious. They further legitimize their economic activities by integrating those illegal with others accepted by or even beneficial for the community. In short, they thrive by controlling the sea that is fundamental to organizational survival and success when such influence is feasible and by adapting when the waters sour.

Urban gangs are related to yet can in general be distinguished from more traditional organized criminal organizations. Whereas the traditional

criminal actor employs a rapier, gangs more often employ blunt instruments of coercion. Their inter-group relations are more frequently characterized by violent confrontation than are those of traditional entities. Gang success is nonetheless akin to that of the earlier-mentioned urban criminal groups in that they seek social and economical integration with their communities.

Safe Pools in Dangerous Waters

Organizations in this second category seek to capitalize on the predisposition and influence a portion of the population residing in their operational area. That they focus on only a part of the sea is due to its makeup: while some members of the larger population share goals and beliefs in common with the non-state actor, a considerable number do not. Both the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) operate in areas in which subsets of the population are sympathetic to their goals while the greater part is apathetic, uncooperative, or antipathetic.

The seas in which these organizations swim have fairly extensive pools of friendly waters. This size provides sufficient robustness to ensure that the non-state actor virtually always has a support base, even when it alienates or for other reasons loses a portion of its indigenous foundation.

Alienation can have several consequences. It can underlie the formation of permanent splinter groups or have the transient effect of causing temporary dissatisfaction within the supporting community because of individual poorly conceived actions. Both the IRA and PLO have suffered losses to spin-off organizations whose members disagree with the parent organization's political agendas or related military policies. The IRA has suffered a contraction of its support base due to a growing intolerance of violence in the Catholic community stemming in part from acts of violence that even long-time supporters find unjustifiable. Despite these losses (and diminishing support in the Irish Republic), the size and consequent heterogeneity of the Northern Ireland Catholic community is such that the IRA retains sufficient backing to sustain its agendas.

Local Ponds and Remote Seas

Non-state actors in this third category have no large indigenous support base in their target urban areas, nor do they tend to maintain other than very limited numbers of organization members there. They are therefore forced to rely on local urban nodes for assistance rather than general largesse. The IRA and PLO share some characteristics with other groups in this category in addition to their benefiting from a large and supportive indigenous

infrastructure in the region where they conduct most of their activities: both on occasion also choose to strike where local aid is limited. Irish Republican Army attacks on London targets and PLO terrorist activities in Israeli Jewish communities are not uncommon.

Unlike the IRA and PLO, however, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) have no high-profile urban targets in northern Sri Lanka where Tamils dominate the population. The region has no equivalent of a Belfast or Jerusalem in which targets are numerous and indigenous support plentiful. The Tigers instead export violence to the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo. The Tamil Tiger support base in the city is limited, and those favoring LTTE actions may be members of a Tamil diaspora rather than native residents. Assistance comes from a smaller segment of the population than is the case in Northern Ireland or Palestinian-controlled areas of Israel, easing monitoring and detection by adversary security forces. Tiger bombing and assassination cells therefore tend not to be based in Colombo for extended periods. The local sea in which they swim is like separate ponds surrounded by uncooperative if not outright threatening ground.

The cases of the IRA, PLO, and LTTE are revealing for another reason: all rely on considerable economic support from sources outside their homelands. This reliance means that the non-state actors have to work carefully at cultivating a popular external image, one that precipitates a sustaining of these sources of income. Their reliance on sources of support outside of their area of operations demands maintenance of more than a purely coercive capability. Establishing legitimacy beyond the bounds of their immediate community requires a fairly sophisticated diplomatic, political, and public relations infrastructure. The non-state actor must be able in manipulating international as well as local public opinion, a capability that implies existence of a central authority sufficiently dominant to ensure that violent activities act to support other initiatives as part of a coordinated and consistent campaign.

These three groups all obtain direct contributions from diaspora overseas, but funding from foreign commercial and charitable enterprises complements the donations. Fundraising by the Irish Northern Aid Committee (Noraid), allegedly a charity collecting for IRA prisoners, was notably less successful only after continued Department of Justice attention and extensive media coverage of a 1982 US federal trial in which Noraid's director and other defendants admitted to shipping arms to the IRA.⁵

To overcome a reliance on the vagaries of voluntary donations alone, the LTTE developed a system in which its representatives lend seed money to Tamil diaspora businesses. Subsequent profits are shared with the lenders who use them to fund rebel force activities. A recent article in *The*

Economist estimates such annual income as \$24 million from the United States and the equivalent of \$7.8 million and \$1 million from Switzerland and the United Kingdom respectively. The estimate of Canada's contributions is C \$24 million.⁶

This geographical separation of non-state actor organizations from their support bases means that these financial sources are largely out of reach of government authorities who would seek to terminate them. Political and diplomatic firewalls generally allow Tamil Tiger, IRA, and PLO leaders to operate with little concern that their enemies will be able to interfere with overseas fundraising. Such independence facilitates the development of sophisticated and long-standing financial sources. It also has direct operational impact. Extensive external financing lessens group member reliance on local support in a target area, thereby reducing the chance of compromise that such association could precipitate.

Swimming Amongst the Enemy and the Unwitting

The fourth category encompasses groups that perform unexpected one-time or only occasional actions such as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City or the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. These organizations are not based in the targeted communities. They lack virtually any measure of overt, witting local assistance. Their attacks are therefore all but devoid of dependence on direct support from sympathetic elements in the target region.

The sea may be hostile to the group's intentions, but it is nevertheless dense and heterogeneous, a condition making it fairly easy for attackers to conceal themselves. Unlike in rural environments, those speaking a foreign language and unfamiliar with local customs are commonplace in many urban areas. Daily contacts are characteristically superficial. Unusual behaviors may go undetected due to the high density of activities; the 'hum' of urban daily life veils what would immediately attract attention in less frenetic domains.

Non-state actor financial support is likely extraterritorial, as are its sources of training and equipment. Actions directed at interdicting this external support can be complicated by the lack of an identifiable diaspora or other demographic base. Intelligence collectors will therefore be severely tried during efforts to determine sources of backing and how they might be terminated. The non-state actor representative's lack of reliance on a support foundation in the target area also reduces the likelihood of compromise. Uncovering a planned attack may be virtually impossible barring infiltration of the organization itself or a mistake on the part of the perpetrators.

Yet even members of these groups swim in a sea. It is the population of the urban area in which they prepare for and execute their tasks. At a minimum, this indigenous population provides concealment via its considerable numbers. It likely provides sustenance through routine commercial exchange. The residents of most cities are little concerned and receive at best limited guidance regarding how to detect threats from unfriendly non-state actors. They are therefore unlikely to take action when seeing unattended articles, marginally unusual behaviors, or other signs that would signal potential danger to the better educated. The sea may be inherently unsupportive in character, but it is benign, even supportive, in effect.

Puddles on the Pavement

Members of the final group, like those just described, have but an ephemeral presence in a target area, but in this fifth case the non-state actor often capitalizes on the predisposition of the local populace. Anarchists and others that employ public demonstrations as a means of pursuing illegal ends are representative. The transient nature of their operations abets success: the non-state actor tends to conduct activities only for the duration of the high-profile event that is the *raison d'être* for its presence in the city. It thereafter departs with no intention of returning.

The majority of local residents may be ambivalent regarding the overt goals of such groups (for example, resistance to international trade agreements or support for marginal environmental causes), but harbor an innate belief that the right to demonstrate is worthy of preservation. The sea is therefore predisposed toward tolerance as long as its members believe the non-state actor is but exercising legitimate rights.

That the covert objectives of these organizations are outside the bounds of legal behavior necessitates further actions on the part of the non-state actors to conceal their actual intentions. They may seek to employ unwitting accomplices to screen illegal activities, actively recruiting the participation of other (law-abiding) organizations in demonstrations or simply capitalizing on the presence of naive onlookers. The greater the success in massing the unwary in the vicinity of planned gatherings, the larger the immediate sea that allows those with ill intentions to escape arrest. Many of the legitimate protestors are from outside the immediate geographical area; they are therefore as unknown to local law enforcement officials as are the problem elements.

It is thus difficult to identify troublemakers prior to outbreaks of violence or other undesirable behaviors. Determination is further complicated in that the actions of those who eventually perpetrate illegal

acts generally remain within the bounds of the law until the sea that conceals their activities is in place. They then defeat immediate efforts at identification and arrest via such simple expedients as donning masks and striking selected targets quickly, thereafter removing the concealment and reentering the greater mass of humanity.

Law enforcement personnel find themselves in a conundrum: bold and immediate action is essential to make arrests, but the dense gathering of legitimate demonstrators and onlookers precludes the rapid movement of large numbers of security personnel without risking injury to the innocent. Any inadvertent injuries are likely to be captured by the omnipresent media whose apparatus and personnel may inadvertently help to further shield criminal activities and block security force movements. The anarchist and similar organizations are also careful to limit the extent of the threat they pose. While their actions are undoubtedly embarrassing for local and even national government officials, they rarely threaten loss of life or other than minor damage to property. They as such remain below the level of major security organizations' serious concern, tending to escape focused national and international intelligence attentions that could deny them success.

Water Treatment: Addressing the Urban Non-State Actor Threat

All non-state actors operate in a sea of some kind as they pursue their urban objectives. Organizations that rely on maintaining a presence in their target area have to ensure that they can withstand the occasional draught precipitated by law enforcement crackdowns or alienation of some segments of a previously supportive population. Those that have no intention of maintaining large on-station representation may take advantage of local diaspora, their members temporarily immersing themselves in the friendly population and moving within it as would a single fish in a school, visible yet virtually impossible to individually identify and isolate. Others create transient ponds that evaporate after a target event has passed.

Treatment of the waters on which these threats depend offers a means of limiting their influence. Removal of oxygen from a river causes its fish to die. Public officials can stunt or kill undesirable elements in their troublesome seas, pools, ponds, or puddles, but the remedy has to be tailored. A general poisoning will destroy legitimate and illegitimate enterprises alike. What comprises effective treatment will vary depending on the nature of the threat and the sea on which it depends. It will inevitably include the following three elements in some form.

Focusing Treatment: Identifying Critical Points

The initial step in a treatment process involves the identification of those key elements, or critical points, that offer a way of most effectively influencing the target in the manner desired. Members of non-state actor threat groups are themselves both targets and a means to controlling or eradicating undesirable entities. Eliminating, compromising, or turning sufficient numbers of a group may eventually cause an organization to fail.

Key components of the supporting sea are likely more lucrative targets in that they offer greater chances of success. If an organized criminal entity is the threat, turning a highly placed member is a desirable but rare coup. An anti-corruption campaign seeking to remove police, politicians, inspectors, and others that have aligned themselves with the threat offers better promise and the added benefit of winning support from the local populace, especially if that public is recruited and thus shares responsibility for the victory. Expelling the pollutants provides an environment in which desirable life forms can once again thrive. Convincing citizens to rely on honest public officials for basic needs further undermines the criminal organization's foundation.

If it is a disenfranchised or disenchanting portion of a larger sea that is providing the support base, as is the case with the IRA and PLO, critical points include these dissatisfied members of the community. Such cases may be immune to rapid treatment; long-standing antipathies have spawned in-bred hatreds that permeate the disgruntled waters. Other parts of the sea may also resist the treatment methods, perceiving that state resources are being unwisely spent on those who have long supported an adversary.

Yet well considered, multi-faceted initiatives hold promise. The British have demonstrated considerable patience in improving the economic and political status of Northern Ireland's Catholic population despite resistance from Unionist elements. Slowly, ever so slowly, living standards, education levels, and other measures of basic well being are improving through mutually supporting economic, social, political, and military efforts. There is evidence that the IRA is being deprived of its oxygen; the once friendly pool shows signs of desiring to purge itself of that group's violence. The Palestinian situation is not completely dissimilar, but attempts at treatment have thus far proven unsuccessful, perhaps because it too greatly ignores the sea from which the treatment is to remove the pollutants.

Critical points may be distant from the immediate waters in which the threat operates. Loss of the external support on which it depends would dramatically handicap a group such as the IRA, PLO, or LTTE. As has been noted, in these cases critical points may be beyond the political jurisdiction of the nations most threatened by the non-state actors. Addressing them can

be problematic. Efforts by the Sri Lankan government to convince other countries that they should more rigorously police those supportive of Tamil Tiger operations have had limited results. Success comes more easily for nations with greater diplomatic, economical, or coercive influence. In either case, an information campaign directed at the citizens and leaders of selected nations will deny the non-state adversary unchallenged access to those waters.

The critical point may in some instances be the sea at large. The city of San Diego was notably successful in containing the influence of disruptive demonstrators during the 2001 Biotechnology Industry Organization's annual trade show because its officials recognized that the key target group was the sea in which the threat had chosen to demonstrate. A preemptive educational campaign directed toward the city's residents undermined the non-state actor position prior to the conference.⁹ An informed and law-abiding citizenry and city police force together refused to tolerate incursions on the property and other rights of fellow residents, choosing instead to support law enforcement efforts to restrict the activities of demonstrators with other than legitimate agendas.

Forcing the Threat into Shallow Waters

A fish in the shallows finds it more difficult to remain unseen by potential predators. Actions taken to limit tolerance of illegal acts can have the dual effects of selectively poisoning a threat's sea and draining it of supporting waters. Non-state actor success relies on adequate resources, vulnerable targets, and freedom of action during preparation periods. The IRA, PLO, and LTTE operate surreptitiously until striking a blow for much the same reasons organized criminal elements seek to maintain a low profile. Terrorists' innocuous behavior before their 11 September attacks denied intelligence authorities knowledge of their intentions. Those intending to use demonstrations as forums for violence tend to overtly remain within the confines of the law until the event itself. All of these groups attempt to make early detection problematic by seeming to be but an innocent part of the sea.

Yet illegal actions, either those recurring or others necessary to prepare for single major illegal acts, fall outside the norm of accepted and routine behavior. Those activities too often go undetected or unreported due to complicity, complacency, concealment, or ignorance. It is within the power of security authorities to address all of these shortfalls. The threat's ability to operate unimpeded can first be restricted by actions taken to identify critical points. Examples include the already mentioned elimination of a previously supportive population's sources of discontent, the conduct of education programs directed at inciting intolerance for illegal acts, and

public awareness campaigns directed at increasing public understanding of criminal methods.

These initiatives act to make the seas unwelcome for threat elements. Those elements must then seek support from the increasingly small segments of the population that remain willing to assist them. Sources of provisions shrink accordingly; they can be further reduced by the monitoring of products thought to be of value to the non-state actor (such as explosives ingredients or components of sophisticated trigger devices). Actions taken to limit threat freedom of movement, such as curfews or restricting routes open to vehicle traffic, act with these other measures to force those with ill intentions into increasingly shallow waters where they are more readily detected and removed.

Forming the Net

Removal of non-state actor urban threats will depend in considerable part on cooperation between disparate governmental and at times governmental and non-governmental agencies. Denying diaspora or other external support will involve multiple international jurisdictions. Lessons learned at considerable economic cost and embarrassment in Seattle and Genoa should be passed on to those overseeing the sites of impending events that are likely to attract demonstrator involvement.

Few local urban governments have the financial or other capabilities essential to expelling a non-state actor threat alone. Cooperation weaves a net of shared expertise, intelligence, and supportive action far more likely to clear the waters of unwanted elements. Federal governments should act to coordinate national programs with the objective of countering threat initiatives; they should also be the conduits for the dissemination of lessons learned by local, national, and international authorities. Non-governmental elements, most notably the public itself, should be invited to play a role. The greater the number of those supporting actions to limit the activities of non-state urban threats, the tighter the weave on the net woven to sweep them from supporting seas.

Conclusion

Understanding the nature of the various urban seas in which the non-state actor swims, and identifying those elements most critical to its support, are vital first steps toward gaining advantage and eventually expelling pollutants from the waters. Employing education and otherwise acting to remove nutrients on which the threat depends simultaneously starves the fish and reduces the depth of the waters on which they depend for protection

from detection and attack. Such actions may themselves precipitate the targets' demise. If not, ultimate removal will rely on a net woven of cooperation between local, regional, national, and international agencies and the people who comprise the seas essential to threat survival. Focusing on the non-state actor alone risks ineffectiveness, outright failure, and long-term alienation of the citizenry. Actively cultivating the cooperation of the people during treatment efforts acts to both advance the adversary's defeat and calm the waters for the years to come.

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NOTES

1. J.F.C. Fuller. *The Generalship of Alexander the Great* [1956] (New York, NY: Da Capo 1989) p.203.
2. Though puppet emperors would rule for nearly another quarter century, Rome the empire had all but disappeared. See, for example, Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars* (New York, NY: M. Evans 1974) p.285.
3. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Garden City, New York, NY: Anchor 1978) p.83.
4. Carlo D'Este. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (Glasgow, Scotland: Collins 1989) pp.624-5.
5. Robert D. McFadden. '5 are acquitted in Brooklyn of Plot to Run Guns to IRA', *New York Times*, Section 1, 6 Nov. 1982, p.31; and Jimmy Burns, 'Noraid defiance fails to move US Justice Department', *The Financial Times* (London), 6, 30 May 1994.
6. 'Migrant Communities: There is Another Country ...', *The Economist* 356 (19 Aug. 2000) p.26. See also Antony Davis, 'Asia, Tamil Tiger International', *Jane's Intelligence Review* 8/10 (1 Oct. 1996) p.4.
7. Non-state actors employing demonstrations to further their aims may openly advertise their pending presence at future events. Advertising their intentions to protest compromises the locations and times at which demonstrations will take place. However, as recruiting other groups (essential for concealment) and ensuring media coverage are crucial to the non-state actors' agendas, this loss of secrecy is viewed as necessary despite the negative security implications. It is therefore possible for security authorities to fix the timing of threat actions with near certainty. This in turn should facilitate study of demonstrator methods and consequent adaptation by governmental authorities.
8. The author thanks Tom Sward for his advice to expand the concept of educating members of the population to encompass a larger information operations campaign.
9. Seth Hettena. 'Hundreds Protest Biotech Conference.' *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. (25 June 2001) accessed 26 Oct. 2001 at <enquirer.com/editions/2001/06/25/fin_hundreds_protest.html>.