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The
Era
of
Armed
Groups

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I. INTRODUCTION

Armed groups—terrorists, insurgents, militias, and criminal organizations—present three major challenges to the United States today. First, some groups have developed capabilities to strike high-value strategic targets across the globe through asymmetric means. Al Qaeda leveled direct strategic blows against the United States, causing a radical change in U.S. policy. Second, armed groups employ standard terrorist and insurgent tactics to attack the United States regionally to undermine U.S. policies and commitments, as the war in Iraq illustrates. Third, armed groups are major regional players who employ indirect and protracted violence to undermine the stability of states and regions where the United States has important interests at stake, such as Colombia and the Andean Ridge, Lebanon, and the Philippines.

    In addition to challenges, armed groups can also provide oppor-

tunities. In certain instances, armed groups may, if taken advantage of, contribute to the attainment of U.S. foreign policy objectives.

These challenges and opportunities need to be understood in the new context created by the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization, which have permitted armed groups of many kinds to thrive. Unfortunately, the intelligence community, particularly the CIA—both during the Cold War and in its aftermath—has thought about and dealt with armed groups in an *episodic*, *transitory*, and *ad hoc* manner. Yet there is little to suggest that armed groups are a fleeting phenomenon. Rather, several trends illustrate just the opposite. Thus, the United States and its intelligence community will have to implement a variety of reforms to respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities presented by armed groups in the twenty-first century.

II. THE POST-COLD WAR SECURITY CONTEXT AND THE EVOLUTION OF ARMED GROUPS

Even before the Cold War ended, it was evident that new forces and actors were part of an evolving international security environment. Several reports and studies in the late 1990s highlighted these changes and estimated their impact on stability and conflict in the twenty-first century.[1]

1. Some examples include National Intelligence Council (NIC), *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Nongovernment Experts* (December 2000); Zalmay Khalilzad and Ian O. Lesser, eds., *Sources of Conflict in the 21st Century: Regional Futures and U.S. Strategy* (Washington, DC: RAND, April 1998); Ted Robert Gurr, *Peoples Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Los Angeles: University of California at Berkeley, 2000); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, July 1999); Sudhir Kakar, *Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, February 1996); Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trends and Transformations*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press, 2004); John Bailey and Roy Godson, eds., *Organized Crime and Democratic Gov-*

A common theme running through many of these works is the need to develop a new framework or paradigm that takes into account a global environment in which the dynamics of change and the emergence of new actors have a powerful impact on the once-dominant role of states. Within this context, there is general agreement that nonstate armed groups are proliferating in number and importance. However, there is disagreement over the nature and extent of the challenge posed by these new actors.

James Rosenau's *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* provides an incisive description and analytic breakdown of this new international environment.[2] It consists of the following six developments, each of which accelerated in the 1990s due to the rapid advance of information-age technology:

- Shifting and increasingly porous borders

- New patterns of economic growth and interaction

- A changing distribution of power, capabilities, and authority

- Increasing numbers of weak and disintegrating states

- Proliferation of various kinds of nonstate actors

- Emergence of new issues and alteration of traditional ones

While Rosenau does not believe these developments will result in an end to the state, he marshals weighty evidence showing that world affairs will no longer be dominated by state power. The broad scope of global politics, the arena within which political activities occur, and the relationships among actors are all changing drastically, says Rosenau, and will continue to do so.

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ernability (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Roy Godson, ed., *Menace to Society: Political Criminal Collaboration Around the World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003).

2. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Integration and Fragmentation

At the center of this new global milieu lie the interactive and seemingly contradictory processes of fragmentation and integration, which give rise to new spheres of power and authority. Fostering these interrelated phenomena are technological innovations in transportation and communications.

Integration, wrote Rosenau, is reflected in the internationalization of capital and growth of markets, the expansion of regional and transnational corporations and organizations, the spread of shared norms (democratic practices, human rights, environmental protection, free enterprise), and the interdependence of issues.[3]

Integration's antithesis, fragmentation, is the result of a continuing allegiance to traditional or particularistic values and practices (i.e., ethnicity, ethnonationalism, and religious fundamentalism), a weakening of state authority, and the growing influence of armed groups at both the substate and the transstate levels.

Because fragmentation and integration alter the structure of a global politics anchored in the nation-state, other diverse sources of power and authority—subsumed under the rubric of nonstate actors—now challenge the preeminence of the state. Bifurcation of world politics is the result. Moreover, a major outcome of bifurcation is growing violent discord between one category of increasingly powerful nonstate actors—armed groups—and increasingly weakened states.

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3. It is possible for a state to be part of this integration, at least at the economic level, without adopting the shared norms identified by Rosenau. China is a case in point. In addition to Rosenau, see James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations,* 5th ed. (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001); Michael Doyle and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *New Thinking in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997); and Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Fragmentation and Failing States

Since 1945, the number of states has expanded from 51 to nearly 200. In almost every instance, these new governments, upon achieving independence, were granted sovereignty and the imprimatur of legitimacy from the United Nations. For many of them, however, achieving domestic legitimacy proved much more difficult. According to Robert Rotberg: "The decade plus since the end of the Cold War has witnessed a cascading plethora of [these] state failures, mostly in Africa but also in Asia. In addition, more and more states are at risk, exhibiting acute signs of weakness and/or the likelihood of outright failure."[4] Fragmentation escalated as armed groups increasingly challenged the authority and ability of states to rule, using a variety of means, including terrorism, guerrilla insurgency, and other irregular and unconventional forms of organized violence. Several internal wars resulted.

The primary cause of these internal wars today can be found in the state's "domestic politics." The critical factor determining whether a state is viable or failing, according to K. J. Holsti, is legitimacy.[5] Strong and healthy states exhibit several common characteristics or measures of legitimacy. First, there is an implicit social

4. Robert I. Rotberg, "Nation-State Failure: A Recurring Phenomenon?" This paper was prepared for the NIC's project on the shape of the world in 2015, available at www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_home.html. See also Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

5. K. J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15; Donald M. Snow, *Distant Thunder: Patterns of Conflict in the Developing World,* 2nd ed. (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997); Snow, *Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts* (Boulder, CO: Lynne-Rienner, 1996); William E. Odom, *On Internal War: American and Soviet Approaches to Third World Clients and Insurgents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); *Small Wars and Insurgencies Journal Special Issue: Non-State Threats and Future Wars* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 2002); and Gurr, "Communal Conflicts and Global Security," *Current History* (May 1995).

contract between state and society, the latter comprising all ethnic, religious, political, and economic groupings. In other words, there is agreement on the political "rules of the game." Citizens feel loyalty to the state, the political principles upon which it is based, and its institutions. Second, while legitimacy allows the state to extract resources, it also requires that the state provide services and a reasonable amount of order, law, and security. Third, a clear boundary must exist between public service and personal gain. In other words, state power is not a platform for personal enrichment. Finally, no group is excluded from seeking political influence or receiving a fair share of resources and services because of its affiliation.

In the late twentieth century, government legitimacy was eroding in many Third World states and was failing to take root in a number of post-communist states, according to the Minorities at Risk Project.[6] Based on data from this study, Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr found that when compared with the high-water mark of the mid-1990s, internal or societal armed conflict was somewhat reduced in 2002. That is the good news. They also explain, however, that these trends are fragile: "[P]ositive trends coexist with counter-trends that present major challenges to the emerging global community."[7] Among the countertrends are the enduring causes of failing and failed states—weakened capacity, deeply divided societies, devastated economies, squandered resources, traumatized populations, civil societies crippled by war, international organized crime, and black market networks.[8]

Chester Crocker summarized this situation succinctly: "Self-

6. The Minorities at Risk Project website, www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/data.htm, allows easy access to this data set and also provides up-to-date qualitative assessments for each communal group.

7. Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2003* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2003), 1, 15.

8. Ibid.

interested rulers . . . progressively corrupt the central organs of government," and they "ally themselves with criminal networks to divide the spoils." The authority of the state is "undermined, . . . paving the way for illegal operations." In conjunction with these developments, "state security services lose their monopoly on the instruments of violence, leading to a downward spiral of lawlessness." Crocker concluded, "When state failure sets in, the balance of power shifts . . . in favor of armed entities [groups] outside the law" who "find space in the vacuums left by declining or transitional states."[9]

Lawless/Ungoverned Territory

In turn, the "vacuum left by declining or transitional states" results in the expansion of lawless and ungoverned areas. This creates safe havens in which armed groups can establish secure bases for self-protection, training, planning, and launching operations against local, regional, and global targets. Terrorist groups, as well as insurgent and criminal organizations, are located in the remote parts of more than twenty countries. These areas are distinguished by rugged terrain, poor accessibility, low population density, and little government presence.

For example, the confluence of such territory in several Central Asian states has made that region home to several armed groups: a nascent Afghani insurgency based in the tribal areas along the Pakistan border, Kashmiri insurgents located in Pakistan, the reduced insurgent movement in Uzbekistan, as well as elements of the Taliban and al Qaeda spread across this lawless area. Bin Laden himself is apparently hiding in the mountains of the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan. In South America, about half of Colombia's national territory, abandoned for decades by the central

9. Crocker, "Engaging Failing States," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2003): 34–35.

government, is now controlled by a range of armed groups, including Marxist guerrillas, drug traffickers, and right-wing paramilitary groups, each pursuing its own political and social agenda and the defeat of the state.

Lawlessness and ungovernability are not confined to remote rural territories. They can also be found in cities located in failing states. As with more remote areas, urban areas can provide safe havens for armed groups. Mogadishu, in Somalia, is a case in point, as are the Pakistani cities of Karachi and Lahore. In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Taliban, many al Qaeda members redeployed to the safety of these cities, from which they can coordinate attacks, recruit members, and solicit funds to continue their holy war against America.

III. FRAMEWORK FOR CATEGORIZING AND DIFFERENTIATING ARMED GROUPS

Armed groups pose different analytical and operational challenges from those of states. However, like their state counterparts, armed groups are now able to acquire the capacity to execute violent strikes that can have a strategic impact on even the most powerful nation-state. This appears to be the case in terms of one type of armed group in particular—international terrorist organizations— as al Qaeda demonstrated on September 11. In addition to direct strategic threats, armed groups, such as international criminal organizations, can also challenge states in various indirect ways.

Indeed, during the past two decades, many states have been increasingly confronted by nonstate armed groups—militias, insurgents, terrorists, and criminal cartels—that operate both within and across state boundaries. With few exceptions, however, U.S. policy makers, and the security and intelligence organizations that serve them, failed to appreciate the growing salience of some nonstate armed groups and were loath to consider these groups tier-one

security threats that could undermine major interests or carry out attacks that could have a strategic impact. Only states, it was thought, had such power.

An examination of the *National Security Strategy of the United States*, produced annually through the 1990s by the White House, bears this out.[10] While terrorist and criminal organizations were included, they were seen as secondary or tier-two or tier-three security problems, not requiring a military response. This point was driven home by the intelligence assessments of terrorist attacks against the United States, beginning with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993. Indeed, throughout the 1990s, these terrorist strikes were classified as criminal acts, and few intelligence community officials and analysts were willing to consider these actions a clear and present danger to the United States—much less a form of war. Any attempt to describe terrorism in those terms ran into a stone wall of skepticism.[11]

A Taxonomy of Armed Groups[12]

What constitutes an armed group? How many are there? How should they be differentiated from one another and categorized? What motivates them? To what extent do they cooperate with one another, as well as with states and other nonstate actors? Can they be identified and countered in their emergent or incipient stage of development? Do armed groups provide policy opportunities, as well as threats, to policy? No taxonomy exists that rigorously

10. For the most current publication, see *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html.

11. This rejection of the belief that terrorism is a form of warfare was forcefully made by Paul Pillar, deputy chief of CIA's Counterterrorism Center, in his *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001).

12. This is drawn from Richard Shultz, Douglas Farah, Itamara V. Lochard, *Armed Groups: A Tier-One Security Priority* (Colorado Springs: U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies, 2004), 14–30.

addresses these questions, even though armed groups are the subject of increasing attention worldwide.

Armed groups can be divided into four categories—insurgents, terrorists, militias, and organized crime. Consider first what they have in common.

First, all armed groups, to varying degrees, challenge the state's authority, power, and legitimacy. Some do so by seeking to overthrow the government and replace it, while others attempt to weaken, manipulate, or co-opt the state. Second, armed groups, at least in part, use violence and force, but in unconventional and asymmetric ways. It is true that some armed groups maintain political and paramilitary wings and that the former may, for tactical reasons, eschew violence. Still, the use of force is a critical instrument for these organizations, regardless of how they may seek to mask that fact. Violence is used instrumentally to achieve political and/or other objectives. Third, armed groups operate both locally and globally due to the developments of the information age, a point elaborated below. Thus, they are able to expand the battlefield to attack state adversaries both at home and abroad. Fourth, armed groups operate on a clandestine and conspiratorial basis. They are, in large part, secret organizations that seek to mask their infrastructure and operations. Fifth, all armed groups have factional and political rivalries. Finally, as noted above, armed groups are not democratically based organizations. They do not adhere to the rule of law to resolve disputes. Just the opposite is the case.

Insurgents, terrorists, militias, and criminal organizations also differ in critical ways. There is no generic or ideal type for any of these four variants. This is certainly true in terms of the basic characteristics of an armed group, which can be divided into the following six elements: (1) leadership, (2) rank-and-file membership, (3) organizational structure and functions, (4) ideology or political code of beliefs and objectives, (5) strategy and tactics, and (6) links with other nonstate and state actors. How armed groups approach these

issues varies across and within the four categories, as the following taxonomy illustrates.

Insurgents

Insurgents can threaten the state with complex political and security challenges because of their organization and operation. One specialist defines insurgents as armed groups that "consciously use political resources and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics."[13] While this description is a useful starting point, a more comprehensive delineation is necessary:

- *Insurgency* is a protracted political and military set of activities with the goal of partially or completely gaining control over the territory of a country. It involves the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. The insurgents engage in actions ranging from guerrilla operations, terrorism, and sabotage to political mobilization, political action, intelligence and counterintelligence activities, and propaganda or psychological warfare. All of these instruments are designed to weaken or destroy the power and legitimacy of a ruling government, while at the same time increasing the power and legitimacy of the armed insurgent group.

Within the parameters of this definition, insurgent groups can and have taken a number of different organizational forms, ranging from complexly constructed political, intelligence, and military associations to narrowly structured conspiratorial groups.[14] The

13. Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990), 13.

14. Thomas H. Green, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990); Jack A. Goldstone, Tedd Robert Gurr, and Farrokh Moshiri, eds., *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991); Anthony James Joes, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical, Biographical, and*

former is designed to mobilize supporters and establish an alternative political authority to the existing government, while employing intelligence and military means to attack and weaken the state through escalating violence—the classic insurgent model. The latter focuses on using violence to undermine the will of a government to sustain losses and stay in the fight—not on controlling a particular territory and building a parallel political apparatus in it.

Also affecting the approach taken by insurgents is the area or terrain in which they carry out their activities. Whether they act in cities, in a rural environment, or transnationally will have an impact on how they approach each of the characteristics or elements of an armed group—organization, ideology, motivation, leadership, and membership background.

Where armed insurgent groups operate, the objectives they pursue and the organizational approach they adopt will shape the strategy employed. In the classic insurgent model, the strategy goes through four stages—preinsurgency, organizational/infrastructure development, guerrilla warfare, and mobile conventional warfare. This process can extend over a very long time. However, not all insurgencies seek to go through all four stages, and this will affect how they employ unconventional paramilitary tactics, including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and sabotage. Often, insurgents receive assistance from states and, increasingly today, from other nonstate actors,[15] which also affects each group's organizational and operational profile.

Finally, armed insurgent groups have pursued very different

Bibliographical Sourcebook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Mustafa Rejai, *The Comparative Study of Revolutionary Strategy* (New York: McKay, 1977); Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Cultural Study* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976); James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991); and Paul Berman, *Revolutionary Organizations* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974).

15. Daniel Byman, et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).

objectives. During the Cold War, left-wing revolutionary and national liberation movements employed insurgency strategies. These movements took considerable time to establish complex political structures as a prelude to carrying out military operations. Their overall objective was to overthrow the state and carry out radical political and social change.

In the 1980s, this objective began to change. New types of insurgent movements appeared, based on existing ethnic and religious identities, which had a profound impact on the objectives pursued. Examples of ethnically driven insurgents include the Democratic Party (DPK) and Patriotic Union (PUK) of Kurdistan, the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the armed clans fighting the Russians in Chechnya, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eel (LTTE). Religious cases include the People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) of Sudan, various Sikh and Kashmiri factions in India, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Are there incipient or nascent indicators that a state can identify before an insurgency rises to the level of a serious threat to the state's stability and security? Yes, and this is true not just for insurgents but also for each of the armed groups included in the taxonomy. However, most states faced with such challenges fail to see the early telltale signs and, consequently, do not take the necessary steps to prevent the situation from escalating. According to interviews with senior-level Pentagon and CIA officials, this is certainly true of the U.S. government. These officials doubted that such early and preventive steps are possible, given the existing organizational cultures in each agency.[16] Nevertheless, these indicators do exist, and they can be observed if the intelligence and security agencies are structured to do so.

For example, a new group seeking to mount an insurgency must

16. Confidential interviews with Department of Defense and CIA officials conducted in 2004.

take certain steps. First, it must build an organization. If the state is vigilant, it can see early signs, such as the departure of a number of individuals from their homes for training and indoctrination or the defection of a noticeable number of members from moderate political parties. Increasingly radical political proselytizing by members of previously unknown political groups would be another early indicator, as would the discovery of small but growing amounts of arms and other materials needed for an insurgency. Fund-raising efforts to purchase these necessities would constitute additional supporting evidence of the beginnings of an insurgency.

These and other early warning signs of the emergence of an insurgency do not take place in the dark. All are discernible. Intelligence and security services can discover them at the beginning or preinsurgency stage of development. But to do so, a new way of thinking has to be bred into the organizational culture of the intelligence and security services.

Terrorists

Terrorism, and the armed groups that employ it, has been defined in myriad ways.[17] Moreover, since the latter 1970s, "terrorism" has

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17. See Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer, eds., *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* (Guilford, CT: McGraw Hill, 2004); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Pillar, *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001); Eqbal Ahmad and David Barsamian, *Terrorism: Theirs and Ours* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001); Cindy Combs, *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997); Thomas Badey, "Defining International Terrorism: A Pragmatic Approach," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Spring 1998); C. J. M. Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Summer 1998); and Hoffman, "The Confluence of International and Domestic Trends in Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Summer 1997). In addition, there are academic journals devoted to the topic, including *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*.

frequently been used as a rhetorical tool to discredit and delegiti-
mize. With that in mind, a more operational definition is useful:

- *Terrorism* is the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear by
  an armed group through the threat and/or use of the most pro-
  scribed kind of violence for political purposes, whether in favor
  of or in opposition to an established government. The act is
  designed to have a far-reaching psychological effect beyond the
  immediate target of the attack and to instill fear in and intimi-
  date a wider audience. The targets of terrorist groups increas-
  ingly are noncombatants, and under international norms, large
  numbers of them have the status of protected individuals and
  groups.

Terrorists differ from insurgents in several ways, beginning
with tactics and targeting. Insurgents use a number of political and
paramilitary tactics, of which terrorism frequently has been only
one. Terrorist groups, on the other hand, have a narrower opera-
tional approach that increasingly focuses on targeting noncombat-
ants. Through the 1990s, terrorist groups were progressively more
indiscriminate in their targeting, seeking to kill as many noncom-
batants as possible.

As with insurgents, terrorist groups in the 1990s were
motivated less by left-wing ideologies and more by ethnicity and
religion. According to the RAND–St. Andrews University index,
approximately half of all known terrorist groups were religiously
driven.[18] Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of these groups
are located in the Islamic world. This is in contrast to the 1970s
and 1980s, when terrorists tended to be organized into smaller
groups and were inspired by left-wing ideologies.

Another important difference between terrorist and insurgent

18. The database can be found at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and
Political Violence, St. Andrew's University (UK), www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/
research/cstpv/.

armed groups is the extent to which the former establish links and cooperative arrangements. During the 1990s, al Qaeda created an elaborate set of connections with a significant number of like-minded terrorist groups in as many as sixty countries. In effect, al Qaeda established a multinational alliance of armed groups that can operate in their originating states as well as transnationally. It also developed a sophisticated financial network for collecting and transferring money for the organization and its operations.[19]

As with an insurgent movement, there are incipient indicators that a state can identify before a terrorist group rises to the level of a serious threat. Given that some terrorist groups can be quite small, however, detecting these indicators is difficult. Nevertheless, such groups still have to establish a clandestine organization, recruit and train personnel, acquire resources, meet and communicate, and so on. Although they do so in secret, it is possible to monitor these activities.

As more is learned about al Qaeda's origins, early stages, and maturation, it becomes apparent that early warning indicators were available for the U.S. intelligence community (IC) to collect and analyze. However, such an approach is usually not part of the IC culture.

Militias

With the growing number of weak and failing states in the 1990s, a third category of armed groups—militias—became more numerous and prominent.[20] Militias appear to thrive, in particular, in

19. Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: A Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), and Douglas Farah, *Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004).

20. Ralph Peters, *Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph?* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999); and Alice Hills, "Warlords, Militia, and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: A Re-examination of Terms," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (Spring 1997).

states with ineffectual central governments and to benefit from a global black market. While individual militias received considerable international attention, particularly those in Africa and Central Asia, there have been few attempts to define this type of armed group in a systematic way or to identify different subtypes. Indeed, of the four variants in our taxonomy, the literature on militias is, from an analytic perspective, by far the weakest.

Based on post–Cold War examples, armed militia groups appear to share the following characteristics:

- A *militia*, in today's context, is a recognizable irregular armed force operating within the territory of a weak or failing state. The members of militias often come from the under classes and tend to be composed of young males who are drawn into this milieu because it gives them access to money, resources, power, and security. Not infrequently, members are forced to join; in other instances, membership is seen as an opportunity or a duty. Militias can represent specific ethnic, religious, tribal, clan, or other communal groups. They may operate under the auspices of a factional leader, clan, or ethnic group or on their own after the breakup of the state's forces. They may also be in the service of the state, either directly or indirectly. In general, members of militias receive no formal military training. Nevertheless, in some cases, they are skilled unconventional fighters. In other instances, they are nothing more than a gang of extremely violent thugs who prey on the civilian population.

Militias so defined can vary widely in terms of how they organize, recruit, operate, and conduct themselves. Of the four armed group variants in the taxonomy, militias are the most amorphous.

Several militias that emerged since the latter 1980s have been brutal in their use of violence, directing it more at civilians than at soldiers or other militias. In fact, in conflicts involving militias, civilians are frequently the target, as has been the case in Africa.

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Untrained militia groups, often made up of youth who are forced to join and compelled to take part in initiation rituals involving frightful human rights abuses, have been guilty of unspeakable crimes and atrocities, even against the tribe or clan they claim to represent.

Consider the situation in Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s. Both anti- and pro- government militias were charged with widespread maltreatment of civilians. According to Human Rights Watch, these militias carried out "systematic and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, [including] summary executions, arbitrary arrest and detention, disappearances, torture, rape, pillage, corporal punishment, and other violent acts."[21]

In other parts of the world, militias have been more disciplined, less abusive of the population in general and of their own ethnic tribe or clan in particular, and led by men interested in local or regional political power. Afghanistan is a case in point. Still, there is no generic Afghan militia. Rather, militias there include various formations comprising former mujahideen commanders, tribal contingents, seasonal conscripts, and foreign volunteers. The combat potential of these units varies considerably, ranging in strength from a few dozen to several hundred fighters, depending on the ability of their leaders and the resources available. To be sure, Afghan militias and their leaders threaten both the country's stability and the current attempt by the United States and the international community to build a post-Taliban government of unity.

Militias have been central players in the politics of other multiple-identity countries as well. This has been true in Lebanon, where many seem to be more loyal to their confessional group or clan than to their country. For example, in the latter 1970s, when Lebanon plunged into civil war, and through the early 1990s, confessional factions and their militias were locked in an intractable

21. Human Rights Watch, "Côte d'Ivoire: Militias Commit Abuses with Impunity," *Human Rights News* (November 27, 2003), www.hrw.org/press/2003/11/cote112703.htm.

political fight in which Sunnis fought Shiites, Maronites fought Druze, Christians fought Muslims, and so on. When the civil war ended in the early 1990s, demobilizing these militias was not easy. But eventually, it was accomplished, and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) began to slowly rebuild itself as Lebanon's only major nonsectarian institution. The LAF has extended central government authority over about two-thirds of the country. However, Hezbollah retains its weapons and militia forces.

Another way militias differ among themselves has to do with leadership. There are those operating under the control of a recognized and powerful leader, like the late General Aideed in Somalia. Clan militias, however, function under decentralized collective leaderships that seek to protect or advance the interests of the clan; there is no one identifiable leader. Many of the armed groups in Chechnya fit this description.

Where strong militia leaders exist, "warlord" is often used in the media to describe them. As with other terminology employed to describe militias, this term also lacks analytic clarity. What is a warlord and how does he operate as a militia leader? One specialist describes modern-day warlords as "local strongmen able to control an area and exploit its resources and people while . . . keeping a weak authority at bay. Warlords' motives range from the advancement of clan, tribe, or ethnic goals to political ambition, localized power, and personal wealth."[22] Such individuals as General Rashid Dostum (Afghanistan), General Aideed (Somalia), Walid Jumblat (Lebanon), Charles Taylor (Liberia), and Colonel Khudoiberidyev (Tajikistan) are all prominent examples from the 1990s.[23] Even so, among these individuals, there are important differences that the generic label "warlord" obscures.

These examples illustrate how widely militias can differ. Any

22. Hills, "Warlords, Militias, and Conflict," 40.
23. Ibid., and John MacKinlay, "War Lords," *RUSI Journal* (April 1998).

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attempt to categorize them by how they organize, recruit, operate, and behave requires close attention to the cultural and political context in which they exist.

Militias have had an impact beyond the borders of the states in which they operate, and in the aftermath of the Cold War, they have engaged U.S. interests and policy. As a result, Washington has had to come to appreciate the complex nature of these disparate armed groups. Doing so has proved thorny, and, not infrequently, the United States has found itself in situations where it has been bereft of such knowledge and suffered the consequences.

Consider the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following September 11. To understand what goes on inside Afghan borders, the key unit of analysis remains the tribe, even in the twenty-first century. This was the reality Washington faced in fall 2001, when it went to war with the Taliban, a radical Islamist regime that for several years had given sanctuary and succor to al Qaeda.

Washington aligned with the Northern Alliance, a loose grouping of different tribal factions—Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks—that had been fighting the Taliban for years. The Alliance reflected the traditional nature of politics and society in Afghanistan, where tribal groups and their leaders are central actors. The Department of Defense and the CIA were unable to incorporate the majority Pashtun tribe into their operations. Although at the time it proved unnecessary, this decision had long-term implications that a sophisticated understanding of Afghanistan's tribal system would have signaled. In the aftermath of the war, Washington found this expedient decision to ride the Northern Alliance to a quick victory to be costly. To stabilize and unify Afghanistan, Washington had to bring all of the tribes together, demobilize their militias, and establish a national government of unity. This turned out to be tricky given both the course of action Washington pursued in fall 2001 and its belated understanding of Afghanistan's complicated tribal system.

As with insurgent and terrorist groups, there are incipient indi-

cators that can be identified before a militia group rises to the level of serious threats to both regional stability and U.S. interests. Information on the indicators I have highlighted can be collected and analyzed. However, to do so requires an intelligence service that not only is geared to spot such developments early on but also has a mature understanding of the culture and the traditional setting in which militia groups flourish.

Criminal Organizations

The final category of armed groups is that of criminal organizations. While certainly not new, this group has grown as a dangerous threat to individual states and the international system. The wealth and power of these organizations has burgeoned over the past twenty-five years, and several have established international links and networks.

Armed criminal groups today exhibit several characteristics. First, they possess an identifiable structure and leadership that have as their purpose operation outside the law in a particular criminal activity. They maintain hierarchical arrangements with clearly demarcated leadership-subordinate roles, through which the group's goals are advanced. As such armed groups mature, they no longer rely on the leadership of one or a few individuals for their survival.

Second, these armed groups can take different forms and "operate over time [and space] not just for ephemeral [or temporary] purposes."[24] That is to say, they engage in more than one type of

24. Godson and William J. Olson, *International Organized Crime: Emerging Threat to U.S. Security* (Washington, DC: National Strategy Information Center, 1993), 4. Also see Bailey and Godson, eds., *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability*; Godson, ed., *Menace to Society: Political Criminal Collaboration Around the World* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers); Phil Williams, "Transnational Criminal Organizations: Strategic Alliances," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1995): 57–72; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, www

criminal enterprise and operate over large parts of a region or
around the globe.

Third, armed criminal groups maintain internal cohesion and
loyalty through ethnicity and the family ties of its members. They
are anchored in a "community, family, or ethnic base." This pro-
vides the armed group with a code of behavior that entails "alle-
giance, rituals, [and] ethnic bonds . . . [to] help to engage the
compliance and loyalty of individuals within the organization."[25]
These "ties that bind" allow group members to trust one another
in ways that are very personal, reducing the likelihood of law
enforcement infiltrating the group.

Fourth, criminal organizations employ violence "to promote
and protect their interests." The violence can be directed externally
against rivals to intimidate them or eliminate them as competitors.
Internally, the violence maintains discipline and loyalty. Although
criminal organizations vary in the extent to which they employ vio-
lence, all do so "for business purposes."[26] If violence is the stick,
then bribery is the carrot used by criminal organizations. The avail-
ability of cash, in large quantities, is used to corrupt police and
other government officials.

Finally, each of these characteristics contributes to the penul-
timate feature that distinguishes criminal organizations from other
armed groups—they seek to make as much money as possible from
their illegal activities, much like a legitimate business. The quest for
money, and the power that goes with it, drives and sustains armed
criminal groups.

The following definition emerges:

.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized_crime.html; Nathanson Centre for the Study of
Organized Crime and Corruption, www.yorku.ca/nathanson/Links/links.htm;
Center for Strategic and International Studies Organized Crime Project,
www.csis.org/tnt/; Jane's Intelligence Review, jir.janes.com/; The Narco News
Bulletin, www.narconews.com.

25. Godson and Olson, *International Organized Crime*, 4, 6.

26. Ibid., 6.

• An *armed criminal group* possesses a clandestine hierarchical structure and leadership whose primary purpose is to operate outside the law in a particular criminal enterprise. Such groups frequently engage in more than one type of criminal activity and can operate over large areas of a region and globally. Often, these groups have a family or ethnic base that enhances the cohesion and security of its members. These armed groups typically maintain their position through the threat or use of violence, corruption of public officials, graft, or extortion. The widespread political, economic, social, and technological changes occurring within the world allow organized crime groups to pursue their penultimate objective—to make as much money as possible from illegal activities—in ways that their earlier counterparts could not.

Major international criminal organizations (ICOs) have established links with other armed groups, and not just criminal ones. One of the more significant developments since the end of the Cold War is the burgeoning involvement of insurgents, terrorists, and militia groups in criminal activities. Unable to rely on outside aid from state sponsors, which can be fleeting, many insurgent and terrorist groups diversify their resource base by becoming involved with international criminal organizations. For ICOs, these partnerships are equally valuable, widening the scope and profitability of their operations.

A case in point is Hezbollah. Although Iran has been its patron, providing significant assistance, Hezbollah has been involved in drug trafficking as another way of financing its activities. It provides opium production and transshipment protection to criminal organizations in exchange for financial and other kinds of support.[27] In

27. Magnus Ranstorp, *Hiz'ballah in Lebanon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Afghanistan, various armed ethnic groups are involved in similar activities, as was al Qaeda.[28]

Another example can be found in Colombia. Since the late 1980s, insurgents there have not been able to rely on financial support from states that once backed them. Therefore, some insurgent fronts of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) generate substantial revenue by taxing and protecting criminal enterprises involved in coca cultivation, cocaine processing, and drug shipments in the areas they control. It is estimated that this provides FARC with as much as half of its revenues. For the criminal groups, this collaboration provides safe haven in which production can flourish. At the same time, official government support for paramilitary self-defense groups, which control up to one-third of the national territory, has waned. In recent years, groups such as United Self Defense of Colombia (AUC) have turned to drug trafficking for economic support, allying with leaders of Colombia's heroin trade as well as with the cocaine cartels.[29]

Another link that enhances the power of ICOs is the active partnership between political actors—officeholders and the staff of the legal-governmental establishment of a state—and criminal actors. These arrangements, termed the political criminal nexus (PCN), consist of varying degrees of cooperation among political and criminal participants at the local, national, and transnational levels.[30]

28. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda.*

29. Alberto Garrido, *Guerrilla y el Plan Colombia: Hablan las FARC y el ELN* (Caracas, Venezuela: Producciones Karol, 2001); Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002); Bailey and Godson, eds., *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability*; and Godson, ed., *Menace to Society.*

30. Godson, ed., *Menace to Society.*

Enhancing the Power of Armed Groups

The potential power of armed groups was enhanced in the 1990s by three factors: globalization, information-age technology, and network-based approaches to organization.[31] Each factor provided armed groups with the opportunity to operate in ways that their earlier counterparts could never have imagined. As illustrated below, this is especially true for international criminal and terrorist organizations. While these three factors have been touched on previously, they need to be highlighted here to show how each affords armed groups the potential capacity to attack even the most powerful states, either directly or indirectly.

Globalization erodes the traditional boundaries that separated and secured the nation-state.[32] It allows people, goods, information, ideas, values, and organizations to move across international space without heeding state borders. Anyone with the necessary resources can do so. Modern transportation and communications systems, the movement of capital, industrial and commercial trends, and the post–Cold War breakdown of political and economic barriers, not only in Europe but also around the world, accelerate the globalization process.

Information-age technologies are central to globalization. These are the networks through which communications take place—instantaneously—on a worldwide basis. Cellular and satellite phones allow contact between the most remote and the most accessible locations of the globe. Computers and the Internet are the other pillars of the information revolution. According to Kegley and

31. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).

32. Rosenau wrote, "[W]hat distinguishes globalizing processes is that they are not hindered or prevented by territorial or jurisdictional barriers. They can spread readily across national boundaries and are capable of reaching into any community anywhere in the world." Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier*, 80.

Wittkopf, "No area of the world and no area of politics, economics, society, or culture is immune from the pervasive influence of computer technology."[33]

To take advantage of globalization and information-age technologies, nonstate armed groups adopt new organizational strategies that are less hierarchical and more networked. They follow the lead of the business community, which is in the forefront of such change. Small and large corporations have developed virtual or networked organizations that are able to adapt to the information age and globalization.[34]

The organizational design is more flat than pyramidal, with less emphasis on control from a central headquarters. Decision making and operations are decentralized, permitting local autonomy, flexibility, and initiative. To operate globally, network-based organizations require a capacity for constant communications among dispersed units, a capability afforded to them by the World Wide Web and cellular networks.[35] Globalization, information-age technology, and network-based organization empower not only international business but also armed groups to expand their activities across the world.

Consider how terrorist organizations have adapted to and taken advantage of globalization, information-age technology, and network-based organization. Most notable in this respect is al Qaeda. In a 1997 interview, bin Laden described his organization as "a product of globalization and a response to it."[36] To be sure, al

33. Kegley and Wittkopf, 272; Kakar, *Colors of Violence*; and Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

34. Charles Heckscher and Anne Donnelon, eds., *The Post-Bureaucratic Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

35. Peter F. Drucker, "The Coming of the New Organization," *Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 1998), 3.

36. Foreign Policy Association, "In Focus—Al Qaeda," www.fpa.org/ newsletter_info2478/newsletter_info.htm. See also Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War,*

Qaeda could not have operated in the 1980s as it did in the 1990s. As it did with international businesses, globalization had a huge impact on how and where al Qaeda organized and operated.[37]

Unlike hierarchically structured terrorist groups of the 1980s, the networked organization of dispersed units that bin Laden established prior to 9/11 were able to deploy nimbly, almost anywhere in the world. Al Qaeda's doctrine, configuration, strategy, and technology are all in harmonization with the information age. During the 1990s, it created an elaborate set of connections with fronts, several like-minded terrorist groups, other types of armed groups, and terrorist-sponsoring states. Information-age technologies and cyber networks allowed al Qaeda to recruit, communicate, establish cells, and attack targets globally. The pattern that emerged was a web of cells and affiliates around the world that could provide the intelligence and personnel needed to execute terrorist attacks against the United States and other targets. The 1998 East Africa Embassy bombings and the 9/11 attacks illustrate the phenomenon.[38]

Direct and Indirect Impact of Armed Groups

The developments outlined above make it possible for certain armed groups to attack asymmetrically and to strike at high-value or strategic targets of even the most powerful states. These attacks can have strategic consequences for the states' policies. This is a new phenomenon that requires states to change their behavior. Of course, not all armed groups that exist today can reach the level of power to constitute a tier-one threat to the United States.

Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 222.

37. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda.*

38. Richard H. Shultz Jr. and Andreas Vogt, "The Real Intelligence Failure of 9/11 and the Case for a Doctrine of Striking First," in Howard and Sawyer, eds., *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment.*

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An asymmetrical attack is one that seeks to circumvent or undermine an adversary's strengths and exploit his weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the adversary's mode of operation. While asymmetric options are a normal part of all wars, armed groups must pay closer attention to this approach because of the power differences between themselves and the states they are confronting. Given this imbalance, the asymmetrical techniques that armed groups employ fall into the irregular, unconventional, and paramilitary categories of armed violence and warfare.

States confronted by armed groups often do not understand the significance of those challenges and frequently downplay the dangers they produce. According to Colin Gray, asymmetric threats work, in part, by defeating a state's imagination. Gray argued that in the 1990s, the United States was "trapped in a time warp of obsolescent political, ethical, and strategic assumptions and practices."[39] Evidence of this proposition can be seen in how the U.S. intelligence community downplayed asymmetrical terrorist threats and even successful operations.[40] This lack of imagination coincided with the attainment by at least one armed group—al Qaeda—of the capacity to initiate operations against high-value U.S. targets—political, economic, and military—across the globe.

An armed group could achieve the same direct strategic impact on U.S. interests and policies using more standard forms of terrorist and insurgent violence. The insurgents, militias, and terrorists

39. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Gray, *A Second Nuclear Age* (Boulder, CO: Lynne-Reinner, 1999); Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002); and Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When Do Special Operations Succeed?" *Parameters* XXIX, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

40. *Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001* (December 2002), www.gpoaccess .gov/serialset/creports/911.html; Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*; and Shultz and Vogt, "The Real Intelligence Failure."

attacking coalition forces in Iraq are a case in point—their assaults have seriously and rapidly spiraled since the end of the conventional war in April 2003. This could have dire strategic consequences for U.S. foreign policy if it weakens Washington's commitment to its long-term reconstruction and democratization program for Iraq.

In addition to asymmetrical attacks against high-value targets, there are other indirect ways armed groups can affect the interests and policies of the United States. For example, they can destabilize states or regions that are of critical importance to the United States. These indirect threats, while not of the same magnitude as those described above, can nevertheless affect important U.S. interests in various ways. Take the example of regions where the stability and development of states is undermined by collaboration between the political establishment and armed criminal groups. In most instances, if a criminal group has endured and prospered, it has reached some type of accommodation with political authorities.[41]

Such active partnerships can undermine the rule of law, human rights, and economic development. They can also create ungoverned areas where armed groups can flourish. In some areas, such as Mexico, Nigeria, and Turkey, the problem of the PCN is chronic. In other countries and regions—Colombia, Afghanistan, the Balkans, and the Caucuses—the problem is more acute and violent and often can dominate political, economic, and social life.

These situations constitute security problems because they can interfere dramatically with the functioning of state and society, undermining political, economic, and social infrastructure. The instability generated can affect not only the state and region in which it takes place, but also U.S. policy interests. In each of the countries and regions with acute PCN problems discussed above, the U.S. interests range from important to vital.

41. Godson, ed., *Menace to Society.*

IV. U.S. INTELLIGENCE CULTURE: NOT PREPARED FOR ARMED GROUP THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

During the Cold War and now in its aftermath, the U.S. intelligence community, and most importantly the CIA, has dealt with armed groups in an *episodic*, *transitory*, and *ad hoc* manner. This approach took root in the 1950s. However, even in those early days of the Cold War, insurgent and resistance groups began to appear and affected regional and international security. While they received some CIA attention, it was on a makeshift basis. This impromptu approach characterized the 1950s through the end of the 1970s, with one major exception.

The exception to this pattern occurred in the early 1960s. It came about at the strong behest of policy makers—in this case, the president. The Kennedy administration ushered in a period of heightened interest in both the threats and opportunities presented by armed groups. This entailed two missions—assisting and countering armed insurgent groups—that, at the time, were subsumed under the rubric of special warfare.

As a result, the intelligence community—the CIA in particular—expanded capabilities to respond to armed group challenges. According to one former senior officer who specialized in paramilitary operations (PM) at that time, the CIA established within its operational training program insurgency and counterinsurgency courses.[42] This had been mandated by the White House under National Security Action Memorandum 124, which directed that all agencies of the U.S. government with a role in special warfare must develop an infrastructure to support this new mission area. All those involved were to receive training, from the junior to the senior levels.[43]

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42. Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 66–74.

43. Ibid., 70.

While the extent to which this took place and the degree to which it was institutionalized within the CIA is not clear, in the field, particularly in Southeast Asia, the CIA established major operational programs both to counter communist insurgents and to assist anti-communist resistance. The common theme running through those efforts was training and mobilization of local forces, be they tribal, religious, or political.

Again, according to one former senior officer, "[V]ery little theorizing accompanied this process." In other words, no systematic doctrine was developed. Rather, operational programs grew out of "the intelligence agency's professional familiarity with the Communist styles and particularly its conclusion that the decisive answer to peoples' war was a similar strategy on the government's side. Support was therefore provided to host government efforts toward this goal." In addition, "the CIA sought and found opportunities to mobilize, train, and arm minorities with a natural antipathy toward communists."[44]

On the analytic side, at that time, analysts and their managers paid a great deal of attention to insurgency. They were encouraged to take in-house courses on the subject, as well as classes offered by other U.S. government agencies. A former analyst from that period said that writing on insurgency and counterinsurgency issues would get the analyst instant attention. Therefore, many focused on armed groups and movements.

However, it does not appear that a separate branch was set up for this purpose. Rather, the topic was covered within the geographical units of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI). The Southeast Asia branch is illustrative: The CIA developed an expertise in understanding how the insurgents operated within South Vietnam. This can be seen in the debate that took place within the U.S. intelligence community over how to understand and estimate the size

44. Ibid., 83.

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and capabilities of the Viet Cong. By approaching the topic of armed insurgent groups through its geographical units, the DI avoided institutionalizing the analysis of such nonstate armed groups.

When the Vietnam War ended, so did the intelligence community's interest in insurgency and counterinsurgency. No doctrine or lessons learned were deduced. Policy changed and attention to armed groups at the CIA quickly evaporated. The Directorate of Operations (DO) returned to its state-centric focus on the Soviet Union and its clients. The considerable paramilitary capabilities built up during the 1960s were drastically downsized, as the numbers bear out.[45] By the end of the 1970s, there were few PM specialists left in the CIA. The withdrawal from Vietnam likewise brought an end to the attention given to insurgency in the DI. As a result of this drawdown, when the Reagan administration elevated the threats posed by armed groups to a tier-one national security priority, it found the intelligence community did not have the capabilities to respond to these challenges. The systems for dealing with insurgents, resistance movements, and terrorism had to be reconstituted almost from scratch.

Over the next several years after the drawdown, the experiences of the Kennedy administration were repeated. Again, at the strong behest of policy makers, the CIA expanded capabilities to meet armed-group challenges. For example, when in 1982, the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence established a new branch to address the issue of insurgency, it came about not because the leadership of the DI recognized the importance of insurgency as a security issue in need of analytic attention. Rather, the director of Central Intelligence, William Casey, tasked them to do so.

45. In the fist year of his stewardship, DCI Turner ordered the elimination of 820 positions in the Directorate of Operations. This substantial reduction was only the harbinger of a major exodus of analysts. According to one of the most distinguished among them, Ted Shackley, during the latter 1970s, "approximately 2,800 American career intelligence officers like myself retired, many prematurely." Theodore Shackley, *The Third Option* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1981), ix.

Also during the 1980s, units were established at the CIA to focus on other types of armed groups. In 1986, again at the initiative of DCI Casey, a Counterterrorist Center (CTC) was created and directed to preempt and disrupt terrorists. Made up of officers from the DI and DO, as well as from other parts of the intelligence community, CTC was to produce assessments of international terrorist groups and to implement counterterrorist operations to collect intelligence on and minimize the effectiveness of those groups.

While the CTC was potentially a significant development in recognizing the importance of the terrorist threat, the 9/11 Commission revealed that CTC has had a checkered history in the CIA and was generally considered an anachronism within its organizational culture. DCI Casey envisioned an offensively oriented outfit that would track down and attack terrorists globally.[46] This stirred up sharp opposition in the DO, where it was worried that CTC would divert resources and talent and get the CIA involved in risky operations that could have serious political consequences. There were also questions raised about characterizing terrorism as such a serious threat.

With the conclusion of the Casey era and the Iran-Contra scandal, CTC's initial mandate came to an abrupt end. It remained in existence but was bureaucratically marginalized. According to one recent account, "[T]he original 'war room' vision [of Casey's] for action teams and an offensive posture yielded to a more cautious, analytical, report-writing culture."[47] Within the U.S. government, terrorism came to be seen as a secondary security issue that should be treated as a judicial/criminal/law enforcement matter. The CIA had a role to play, but it was ancillary.

The Reagan administration tasked the paramilitary division of the DO to become involved in two major operations—Afghanistan

46. Duane Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

47. Steve Call, *Ghost Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 141.

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and Nicaragua. The DO was ready for neither. As noted earlier, not only were paramilitary capabilities drastically reduced in the wake of Vietnam, but also there were no organizational lessons to draw upon. Moreover, the DO leadership saw these kinds of operations as having the potential to get the CIA in big trouble. Consequently, they resisted the Reagan administration's decision to resuscitate the paramilitary capability. Nevertheless, the CIA's paramilitary capabilities were built up for these missions.

With the end of the Reagan administration and then the end of the Cold War, the operational and analytic capabilities to deal with armed group challenges were drastically downsized. As in the Kennedy period, when policy changed, so did attention to armed groups.

During the post–Cold War 1990s, even as armed groups became a major security challenge for the United States, the intelligence community did not see them as such. Analytically, the only armed groups that received meaningful attention during the 1990s were terrorist organizations, mainly al Qaeda. The primary place for this analysis was within CTC. The various 9/11 reports reveal that some members of that unit understood the growing power and danger al Qaeda posed. But within the CIA, these CTC members were seen as going too far and were labeled the Manson Family.[48]

These reports paint an even more disturbing picture concerning the developing operational capabilities in the DO to fight terrorism. The trouble can be seen in the late 1990s, when the Clinton administration began to recognize the seriousness of the al Qaeda challenge and ordered the DO to conduct covert operations against it, including killing bin Laden and his chief lieutenants. But the DO did not have the capabilities to do so, as these studies spelled out. Furthermore, members of the Clandestine Service questioned whether the service should even be involved in such operations. According

48. Ibid., 454, 511, 518, 535.

to Staff Statement No. 7 of *The 9/11 Commission Report*, "[S]enior CIA officers told us they were morally and practically opposed to getting CIA into what might look like an assassination." In addition, "a former CTC chief said he would have refused an order to directly kill bin Laden."

How can we explain this pattern, which, as this brief review discloses, stretches over several decades and spans both the Cold War and the post–Cold War periods? *The 9/11 Commission Report* and other similar reports concluded that the answer lies in the structure of the intelligence community. The recommendations of the reports to fix the situation take the form of a plethora of management reforms that both the White House and Congress have embraced. Althoug important, these remedies are not sufficient. They overlook an important root cause of U.S. intelligence weakness. Missing in the reform movement is recognition that it is the intelligence community's culture—the way professionals think about and approach their jobs—not just its structure that accounts for the pattern highlighted above.

The intelligence community's conception of its mission, as well as its methods of collection, analysis, covert action, and counterintelligence, reflect deep Cold War roots that have been resistant to change. This is not surprising, given what we know about organizational culture and how it shapes the mind-set and intellectual constructs of senior officials and managers. Once a culture becomes established, it is passed on and engrained into each new generation of professionals early in their induction into the organization. The culture will influence how the organization defines challenges and opportunities. It determines how to organize, prioritize, and operate.

This enduring U.S. intelligence culture reflects these organizational dynamics. Thus, the intelligence community has been unable to provide the capabilities needed to deal with the phenomenon of armed groups and the major challenges they pose. In the aftermath

of the Cold War, the dominant culture's standard operating principles remained intact. While traditional approaches may be effective against state threats like Iran, armed groups are not vulnerable to analytical and operational practices of an intelligence culture anchored in the previous century.

Thus, reformation of the intelligence community means, first, recognizing that armed groups pose major, even strategic, challenges. Then it means that policy makers must take the necessary steps to change the dominant intelligence culture to address those challenges. It is to this that we now turn.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTELLIGENCE

Armed groups have changed the nature of conflict and war in today's international security environment. Developments in the 1990s enhanced the power and capabilities of armed groups to attack the United States and other states in ways that constitute direct and major security challenges. When these attacks rise to the level attained by al Qaeda or by the insurgents, terrorists, and militias fighting U.S. forces in Iraq, they should be considered as warfare and should be treated as such.

Armed groups will continue to pose serious and increasingly dangerous security challenges to states, including the United States, into the foreseeable future. There is little to suggest they are a temporary post–Cold War phenomenon. The following trends illustrate just the opposite:

1. The number of weak and failed states remains a significant and chronic problem. Where they exist, armed groups find a hospitable environment with relative freedom from government authority and control.

2. Topographical mapping of these lawless and ungoverned areas reveals that they cover a massive amount of territory, providing

armed groups with access to secure bases for training, plan-
ning, and launching operations locally, regionally, and globally.

3. Nonstate armed groups and internal/transnational conflicts
   represent the most recurrent cause of instability around the
   globe. And these groups are growing more lethal due to the
   acquisition and indiscriminate use of highly destructive weap-
   ons. Moreover, many of these conflicts, particularly those due
   to ethnic, religious, tribal, and communal differences, will
   remain vicious, long lasting, and difficult to terminate.

4. The gravity of this situation is further compounded by the pub-
   licly stated objective of several armed groups to acquire and use
   weapons of mass destruction.

These trends have important implications for American intelli-
gence. There are several steps the United States should consider for
dealing with a twenty-first century international security landscape
in which armed groups—insurgents, terrorists, militias, and crim-
inal organizations—will present a plethora of direct and indirect
challenges.

Senior policy makers and intelligence community managers
need to recognize that in the years ahead, armed groups will seek
to attack the United States asymmetrically to strike at high-value
targets. These attacks can have strategic consequences similar to
and even greater than 9/11. While not all armed groups can reach
a level similar to that of al Qaeda, it is probable that some will see
al Qaeda's conduct of warfare as a model to emulate.

Policy makers and intelligence community managers also have
to comprehend the complex nature of the armed group threat and
its tier-one security status. In the 1990s, as armed groups prolif-
erated in both number and power, Washington was inattentive and
subsequently paid a steep price. Given the keen interest of some
armed groups in acquiring and using WMD, policy makers and

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intelligence community managers can afford no such indifference in the years ahead.

The escalating role of armed groups in the international security environment of the twenty-first century should not be seen as only constituting threats to U.S. interests and security. In certain cases, armed groups may also provide opportunities that, if taken advantage of, could contribute to the attainment of U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives.

This evolving security setting will necessitate major changes in the U.S. intelligence community. Through the 1980s and 1990s, this community assessed armed groups as secondary and peripheral security issues and was unwilling to recognize their growing salience, linkages, and power. Even today, doubts may still remain in these agencies about whether any armed group can undermine major U.S. interests or carry out attacks that could have a strategic impact. That such attacks constitute a form of warfare likewise remains, in the intelligence community, a suspect proposition.

Consequently, the organizational culture of the intelligence agencies tasked with the analytical and operational responsibilities of dealing with armed groups requires major revision. That organizational culture is not geared to deal with the emerging strategic challenges of armed groups. Thus, a new organizational culture must be established that approaches armed groups as a tier-one priority.

Armed groups present complex analytic puzzles. Understanding them requires sophisticated tools for differentiating among them, as well as for constructing systematic profiles of how they organize and function. These analytical tools should serve as the basis for all source collection that will provide the information needed to build such profiles.

These profiles, in turn, should serve as the basis for developing intelligence and special operations options—political, informational, psychological, economic, and paramilitary—for responding

to and degrading or destroying those armed groups that threaten the United States. They could also be employed to identify options for assisting those armed groups that provide the United States with potential opportunities.

These profiles should also be adapted not only for use against armed groups already directly or indirectly attacking the United States, but also for identifying armed groups in their nascent stages. This will allow the United States to take preventive measures, defusing a threat before an armed group reaches the stage of serious violence.

The profiles can likewise be employed to identify ways in which the United States may want to assist certain armed groups whose success will be advantageous to U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Finally, beyond major revisions in the culture of the intelligence agencies, the developments outlined here have other important implications for those agencies, including the need for each to establish new practical requirements to create the requisite intelligence doctrine, organization, training, and personnel to meet the armed groups challenge in the twenty-first century.