Criminal-Terrorist Convergence: Intelligence Co-production for Transnational Threats*

John P. Sullivan

Contemporary nonstate threats including criminal cartels, gangs, mafias, insurgents, and terrorists operate on a global scope with distinct local characteristics. Local actors link with global actors to conduct operations through alliances and within a range of network configurations. The expanding reach of criminal, terrorist, and hybrid actors challenge local, national, and global security as crime and war converge. This paper will look into the types of connections among local–global actors and at the need for networked, global criminal, and security intelligence operations, including co-operative intelligence fusion (intelligence co-production) to address transnational crime and terrorism.

he convergence of nonstate threats poses a challenge to state response capacity. A range of nonstate threats states face. These include gangs, transnational organized crime (mafias and criminal cartels), and terrorists. Of course, each of these poses unique challenges in terms of their focus of operation, geographic reach, and level of sophistication. They also present a labyrinth of interconnected challenges as the individual groups form temporary and opportunistic connections. These connections may be short lived spanning a single transaction through longer-term alliances and at times joint ventures.

Threat Convergence

he complex, protean nature of criminal enterprises of all varieties makes assessing their capabilities a full-time, endeavor. The same holds true for terrorist groups.¹ Changes in strategic situation, competition for power and influence within the organization and among peer competitors makes the world of gangs and terrorists a volatile environment. The gangs, terrorist and insurgent groups, and cells are often in competition with themselves, competitors, and the various states they challenge. Often this competition is solved through violence. Assassinations, drive-by shootings, and brutal acts encompassing barbaric tactics such as beheadings and dismemberment are among the solutions chosen. Attacks against rivals, elements of the state, and civilians are also employed to shape the various groups market share and survival.

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Convergence of criminal, terrorist, and insurgent threat streams (and actors) is a study in illicit (and grey-area) networks and globalization. In fact, some view this as 'deviant globalization'² where illicit flows are taped to extract resources, wealth, and power.³

Defining the nature of convergence is as complex as the variety of groups involved. As a starting point, it is important to remember that all of the groups involved in this treat convergence are criminal organizations. It is their motivations (which shift with time, and are often mixed) that differentiate their specific niche. Gangs themselves include street and prison gangs (often interconnected) that can span several generations (or *loci*) of activity. Terrorists and insurgents are actively seeking political change but rely upon a range of criminal activities to sustain their activities. Mafias and cartels seek profit, but often use violence and attacks on the state to secure space and freedom to operate. And of course, some groups morph and change focus over time. Remember, Martin van Creveld (as I have often noted) said, "Future war will not be waged by armies but by groups whom today we call terrorists, guerillas, bandits, and robbers, but who will undoubtedly hit upon more formal titles to describe themselves."

This essentially describes non-Trinitarian (van Creveld) or Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW)⁵ where hybrid bands attack society and societal bonds to destroy political will. As Joseph Nye pointed out: "While particular generational delineations are somewhat arbitrary, they reflect an important trend: the blurring of the military front and the civilian rear. Accelerating this shift is the replacement of interstate war by armed conflict involving nonstate actors such as insurgent groups, terrorist networks, militias, and criminal organizations."⁶

Street gangs can be described as fitting into one of three generations: turf (1st gen); market (2nd gen); and mercenary/political (3rd gen).⁷ To complicate this, gangs can be connected to other gangs and/or organized crime groups through franchise arrangements, alliances, and familial linkages among individual members. This makes power within the constellation of gangs subject to a set of complex networks of influence. Cartels can also evolve or fall into three phases: 1st phase cartel (aggressive competitor); 2nd phase cartel (subtle co-opter): and 3rd phase cartel (criminal state successor).⁸ The third-phase cartel envisioned a state competitor of the type seen in Mexico's criminal insurgencies.⁹ Both criminal insurgencies and the emergence of narco-enclaves¹⁰ and criminalized (mafia) states involving hybrid criminal–terrorist–state franchises pose a significant national and global security threat.¹¹ Essentially this involves strategic crime.

Terrorists and insurgents, including *jihadi* networks, often rely upon crime to support their operations. Drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, and smuggling became potent revenue sources for terrorists and insurgents. This reliance on illicit revenue streams also brings the terrorist networks and its individual actors into contact with criminal gangs. New opportunities for revenue on both sides now exist to be exploited and they are. Understanding these linkages is a challenge for police, intelligence, and security scholars. (More on that later.)

Threat Actors

The hybrid actors involved in convergence include gangs, transnational organized crime (cartels, mafias), terrorists, and co-opted elements of various states. Transnational gangs are one notable component in this mix. The most notable transnational gangs are the maras: Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) and Eighteenth Street (M-18) both originating in Los Angeles, but now operating throughout the United States and in Mexico and Central America (notably El Salvador and Honduras).¹² These transnational linkages are variable, subtle, but real, often the result of migration and/or deportation of gang's members rather than a deliberate business strategy. The connections include individuals, individual cliques (or sub-sets of the gang), and networks combining both. Much of the activity is self-initiated at all levels, but influence and varying degrees of control are concentrated at key hubs (e.g., Los Angeles, San Salvador). Rather than view the links between gang's hubs as a command and control relationship, it is useful to view it as "networks of influence." 13 Both MS-13 and M-18 owe fealty to La Eme (the Mexican Mafia) in Los Angeles and pay a street tax ("quota" to that prison gangs for activities in Eme's sphere of influence. 14 The maras have dominated local gangs or pandillas and have executed alliances with other entities such as drug cartels, notably an MS-13-Zetas alliance.¹⁵

Cross-border gangs are a variation of transnational gangs. A notable example is found in *Barrio Azteca* (BA) (known as *Los Aztecas* in Mexico) in the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez area. BA is a combination of street–prison gangs with bi-national reach. BA was an integral component of *La Línea* an enforcement network for the Vicente Carillo Fuentes Organization (VCF/Juárez Cartel). *La Línea* is a specialized entity found in the Juárez *plaza*. It served to protect the VCF and is comprised of drug dealers, *sicarios* (hit men), and corrupt police officials. It is an adaptive, hybrid entity within the networked nonstate actors in Mexico's narco-conflict. As described by Sullivan and Logan: 17

Essentially, La Línea is a networked gang, a specialized node in a transnational criminal enterprise. It appears to be operating as more than a turf-oriented street gang (a first-generation gang) or even a narco-trafficking gang (a second-generation gang). It appears to act as a specialized variant of a third-generation gang essentially serving as mercenaries. It has transnational reach through its allies and internetworked cross-border gangs and cartel partners. It demonstrates a higher degree of sophistication than many gangs, and it even fulfills para-political functions for its cartel employer. Its network configuration enables morphing form to exploit custom network links to carry out specific, specialized missions.

The La Línea node is a hybrid entity, essentially a thirdgeneration gang composed partially of corrupted law enforcement officers and serving as a bridge between street gangs and organized crime. Its structure consists of interlocking membership within allied organizations of nodes (much like elites who serve on multiple corporate boards).

Here we see something similar to a feudal knight serving both his local liege (i.e., home gang) and a higher authority (i.e., the cartel). This neo-feudal organization of the parallel governance space, combined with its unbridled brutality/lethality and organizational flexibility, makes it a significant threat to public safety and an important case study in transitional criminal forms. In this case, it appears that La Línea is a violent nonstate actor operating as a private army.

Links between gangs and cartels are common. Recent estimates link 61 U.S. gangs with Mexican cartel activity (with 10 operating in the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez plaza alone.) in that plaza, the gangs include: *BA*, Latin Kings, and *La Hermandad de Pistoleros Latinos* (linked with the Juárez Cartel) and *Los Sureños*, Tango Blast, and Latin Kings (linked with the Sinaloa Federation). (The Latin Kings work for or with multiple cartels.)¹⁸

Transnational crime involves organized criminal enterprises that operate on a global scale. ¹⁹ These groups include the Sicilian Mafia, Neapolitan *Camorra*, Calabrian 'Ndrangheta²⁰ as well as Mexican criminal cartels, and Asian triads. Dawood Ibrahim's D-Company is a notorious South Asia crime syndicate that has been linked to *jihadis* including the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and *Boko Haram*. ²¹

Terrorist and insurgents also engage in crime to support their primary goal, and some even transition into essentially criminal bands. The FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) started as a revolutionary group. It utilized drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping to support its operations to the degree that criminal enterprise largely supplanted political activism. The FARC maintained links with drug cartels, terrorists (including Hezbollah), and states (Venezuela). The Taliban in Afghanistan also relied upon narcotrafficking to sustain funding.²² Drug trafficking is a key element of convergence.²³

The Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) also relies upon criminal enterprises to fuel its terrorist campaign and insurgency. Oil smuggling, kidnapping, human trafficking, and extortion round out their repertoire. Above Haram, another insurgent entity liked to al-Qaeda, also relies upon criminal enterprises for funding. In addition to raiding villages, kidnapping, and human trafficking, it engages in arms trafficking and smuggling as well as fiscal and cybercrime, and drug trafficking. Elephant poaching for the illicit ivory trade also funds insurgents such as *al Shabaab* and the Lord's Liberation Army. These groups control and tax the smuggling operations within their areas of control and link with transnational criminal enterprises that operate the global illicit market flows. In the same of the same of

Interpenetration and co-option among gangs, cartels, and state officials (elected officials, including mayors, police, judges, military personnel, and intelligence officers) is the final variation of convergence. Here corrupted officials either orchestrate or support hybrid networks that enable criminals to capture or co-opt the state (or parts

of the state). Examples of this convergence have been seen in Mexico, Brazil, Central America, and South Asia. Here the toxic mix is fueled by corruption and allows the maximum extraction of resources and wealth under the protection of corrupted officials resulting in impunity. The operational expertise of the gangsters, combined with the violent skills of terrorists, protected by corrupt state officials enable both criminal and political ends—whichever is desired at the specific time.²⁷

The disappearance and likely murder of 43 *normalistas* (students) in Iguala led to the arrest of the city's mayor and his wife for ordering the atrocity in connection with the *Guerreros Unidos* cartel. Corrupt local police are also implicated and there have been allegations that both federal police and the military may be involved (although the state denies that link).²⁸ The interaction between violence, corruption, and organized crime has the potential to erode state solvency (capacity plus legitimacy) and reconfigure states.²⁹

Intelligence and Law Enforcement Challenges

Inderstanding and addressing the convergence of transnational crime and terrorism (which must also include the role of corruption)³⁰ pose many difficulties for states. The first challenge is actually a basic intelligence challenge. Because there are a diverse range of occult groups linked in novel and rapidly changing, adaptive ways developing a collection strategy, plan, and capacity is complicated and subject to bureaucratic and budgetary inertia. Specialty analysts familiar with the groups may not be readily available and it might take time to develop capacity. Once the capacity is developed the group-network configuration is likely to have morphed. The remaining challenges are structural, and conceptual as well as bureaucratic.

The major challenge set involves competition. There is competition for intelligence, power, and bureaucratic standing within intelligence services and intelligence components of police. At national levels, the intelligence services compete with rival intelligence services as well as allied intelligence services in addition to the intelligence capacity of their rivals (and make no mistake, terrorists organize crime and gangs conduct intelligence operations). This intergovernmental rivalry also exists within states (national) as federal and state (provincial) and local agencies (intelligence agencies, police agencies, and fusion centers) vie for budget and recognition.

This fragmentation is a consequence of both politics and bureaucratic fiefdoms. It can be overcome, but the steady state is competition. Similar fragmentation and competition exists within agencies. For example within a single police agency different units all address separate components of threat convergence. A major city police department will have a patrol force that deals with crimes as they occur; a gangs unit to investigate gang crimes; a homicide unit that investigates murders; an organized crime unit that deals with the mafia; and narcotic units that deal with drug trafficking. A separate intelligence and crime analysis units, as well as staff seconded to a fusion center or terrorism early warning group are also likely to co-exist and compete for

resources and personnel. These are within one agency. Often a precinct next door to another precinct experiencing similar gang crimes will have a delayed situational awareness of current and emerging trends.

This is exacerbated when additional police agencies are added to the mix. When supranational agencies (such as Europol or Interpol) enter the equation things get more complicated, but the additional scope of knowledge is valuable and mitigates some of the fragmentation.

Beyond interagency and intergovernmental complications, there are conceptual issues that make developing intelligence to address hybrid threats difficult. Most police agencies emphasize arrests so case support for individual cases takes precedence over operational (multi-case, multi-area) and strategic analysis, and indications and warning. The pressure is to make arrests and solve crimes, and resources are allocated to support this bias. A similar pressure is faced with addressing current intelligence over future potentials (early warning and strategic foresight).

Fusion centers (including terrorism early warning groups) were developed to address these challenges. These developments have enabled better co-ordination among agencies, but since each center has a unique signature and focus much of the fusion emphasizes dissemination of finished intelligence products developed at national levels. Some fusion centers address all crimes and hazards; others focus largely on criminal intelligence and case support. Fusion can and should exist at all stages of the intelligence cycle and much benefit could accrue as individual fusion and terrorism early warning centers are linked into networks that facilitate meta-analysis and the "co-production of intelligence" with each node contributing to insight, expertise, and area, and/or disciplinary knowledge.³¹ This type of distributed police-intelligence (security service) collaboration—known as "global metropolitan policing"—could be a valuable tool for address threat convergence among terrorists and transnational criminal actors.³²

Analytical Approaches for Hybrid Threats

s stated distributed intelligence networks emphasizing meta-analysis and "co-production of intelligence" rather than simple information sharing may help overcome the bureaucratic and conceptual obstacles (bias on current operations, arrests, and case support) to developing actionable intelligence and context on hybrid threats. These approaches require interdisciplinary analytical teams that focus on "geo-social" analysis. Mapping criminal networks is an evolving intelligence tool. Key elements of this tool³³ set are social network analysis including:

- mapping illicit networks (network configuration);
- mapping key hubs and actors by relationship;
- mapping enablers, fixers, facilitators;
- mapping illicit trade flows (smuggling, trafficking);
- mapping illicit financial transactions (investments, expenditures, money laundering) and identifying illicit financial hubs.

Mapping and discerning the function and relationship of various actors in illicit networks requires all-source intelligence—including human intelligence (HUMINT), communications intelligence (COMINT), measures and signals intelligence (MASINT), geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), criminal intelligence (CRIMINT), etc.

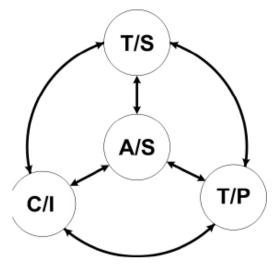
Identity Intelligence (i2)

specific tool that has the potential to bridge the intelligence gaps faced with threat convergence and hybrid criminal–terrorist threats is "Identity Intelligence (i2)." i2 exploits digital space to gain an understanding of an opposing force (OPFOR), in this case, gangs/criminals, insurgents, and terrorists. Digital media include cell phones and social media (internet communications technology—ICT).

i2 is a subset of geospatial intelligence that supports investigation and intelligence by providing context and meaning which helps link actors and suggests both trends and potentials, and capabilities and intentions. It can help answer *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and sometimes *how*. It synthesizes the traditional INTs and adds content analysis, social network analysis, link analysis and other emerging cyber exploitation tools. Understanding social networking sites (SNS) that are used by criminals, gangs, and anarchists for internal communications, recruitment, and information operations (intimidation, shaping turf, and environment) is a key component of i2.³⁴ Each individual post at a SNS is a unique transaction with a potential signature that can provide indicators and context (This is part of the Transaction Analysis Cycle—Figure 1—developed by Sullivan.).³⁵

Figure 1: Transaction analysis cycle

Transaction Analysis Cycle



Source: John P. Sullivan, "Terrorism early warning and co-production of counterterrorism intelligence," paper presented to Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS), 20th Anniversary International Conference, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, October 21, 2005; available at https://www.academia.edu/927364/Terrorism_early_warning_and_co-production_of_counterterrorism_intelligence

T/S = Transactions & Signatures

T/P = Trends & Potentials

C/I = Capabilities & Intentions

A/S = Analysis/Synthesis

Unconventional media can also form part of i2 for hybrid threats. This includes graffiti (i.e., *narcomensajes* and *narcopintas*) and tattoos. These new media are essentially messaging about who the actors are and what they intend to do (or have done). Tattoos show affiliations, allegiance, fealty, position/role in hierarchy, and past actions. Deception is also a component of i2, as deception (including "burner phones," antiforensic software, GPS jammers, etc.) is frequently employed by criminal and terrorist actors to mask their activities.

The goal of i2 can be summarized as **AC**²**E**: *Attribution* (who is it/who did it); *Connections* (nodes, position); *Context* (what does it mean in relationship to everything else?); *Exploitation* (what can we do with it?).

Conclusion

ontemporary security threats involve the convergence of criminal and terrorist actors. Gangs, cartels, mafias, insurgents, and corrupt government officials collude and interact within an illicit space of flows.³⁶ These convergent threats pose security challenges at a variety of levels from gang-infested neighborhoods (failed communities or no-go zones) spanning a few blocks through entire contested zones (such as *favelas* in Brazil parts of Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Guerrero, and Michoacán and San Pedro Sula in Honduras). These groups provide unique challenges (violence and insecurity) individually and complex challenges when they come together in alliances or in transactional operations. Corruption and violence form part of this landscape and need to be mapped.

Developing an intelligence capacity to understand these hybrid networks requires interaction among police, intelligence (and security services), and the military and civil government. It also requires interaction with a range of nongovernmental actors that provide medical, social, and humanitarian services. Intelligence approaches like distributed meta-analysis "co-production of intelligence" and the transaction analysis cycle along with expanded use of i2 are potential tools for improving intelligence to address the convergence of criminal and terrorist threats.

Notes

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⁴ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

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