

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND CONFLICTS HISTORY

NARCO-CARTELS: NEW ACTORS OF IRREGULAR WARFARE

CRISTOBAL FUNDORA

ABSTRACT

Narco-Cartels are becoming new actors of Irregular Warfare. The purpose of this document is to guide force development, capacity building and create a comprehensive scenario. This research will provide necessary knowledge to analyze the Narco-Cartels' strategies and to examine the operational roles of the military, security forces and civil action in countering these threats.

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KEY WORDS

Narco-Cartels, government, strategies, irregular warfare, population, global threat, conventional warfare, targets, violence, drugs, corruption, force development.

CRISTOBAL FUNDORA

Adviser to the Deputy 4-3,
National Assembly,
Republic of Panama

Overview

Nowadays not only criminal gangs and terrorist organizations threaten the national security. The rapid growth and expanding of the Narco-Cartel around the world is undisputed. Narco-Cartels are irregular enemies that simultaneously and adaptively employ conventional weapons in a fused mix of insurgencies, terrorism, disinformation, propaganda and organized crime activities in order to accomplish their objectives.

The globalization brought development in areas such as communication, transport, computer technologies, global networks, information sharing, defense and security. These factors made the connection between the states more transparent and interconnected. The consequences of these important changes, complex vulnerabilities, threats and crisis situations has also increased and we are facing the growth of new sophisticated threats in developed and/or developing countries. The presence

of Narco-Cartels are leading to regional instability, extreme violence and unrest.

According to RAND Corporation, since World War II, there have been more than 80 irregular conflicts. These irregular conflicts include countries such as Rwanda and Somalia (Civil Wars), Colombia and Sudan (Guerrilla warfare), Chechnya (rebellions) several countries in the Middle East (Political and religious extremism); they involve irregular elements fighting against other irregular elements, regular forces of a central government, or an external intervention force.

In relation to the rapidly developing environment, the nature of conflicts is changing, and we are increasingly confronted with ways that are difficult to distinguish clearly between traditional or irregular warfare. A US military theorist in the field of armed conflict and military political strategy, formerly an officer of the US Marine Corps. And now an investigator in the US

Department of Defense, Frank G. Hoffman introduced the definition of hybrid warfare, where several types of combat operations are used, and the conflict takes many forms to achieve the objectives.

The birth of the cartels

Chinese Influence: There is tendency that when people hear the word Cartels it is only related to Mexico, when in fact its origin is very complex. The origin of drugs in Mexico, as well as the appearance of the first Narco-Cartels in this region can be attributed to the end of the nineteenth century. The wave of immigration from China to the United States increased greatly due to the arise of Taiping rebellion in 1848¹. The Act of 1882 banned Chinese immigration. As a result the Chinese immigrants had to established themselves in the Mexican territory, mainly at the border between the US and Mexico. At the same time opium was first introduced to Mexico by Chinese migrants.

Since the beginning of the 20th century both opium and marijuana were grown in Mexico by the Chinese community. Marijuana was brought to Mexico for the first time in 1525 by the Spaniards². Since then, Mexico has developed its specialized skills in the production of drugs. Thanks to the easy smuggling between borders at that time and an excellent profitable market in the North, it has developed into the powerful drug business that we have nowadays in Mexico.

Russian Influence: Narco-Cartels use members of Russian organized criminal groups, as well as former KGB agents, to smuggle drugs into the United States, and

to strengthen their influence in the region³. In his publication Professor Bruce Michael Bagley of the University of Miami says that international expansion of Russian organized crime is reflected in a three-pronged pattern⁴.

The first focus of Russian organized crime in the early 90's was the former Soviet Union States, which obtained independence and then further to Western Europe and the European Union through Eastern and Central Europe, the Balkans and in the south to the Caspian Sea, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second target of the Russian mafia expansion was China and Korea. The third prong in early 90's was focused on the USA and Canada. But in the middle of the 90's, the Russian mafia became significantly interested also in Latin America and the Caribbean markets for their criminal activities. Colombian and Mexican drug cartels also discovered new opportunities in this new avenue. The Russian mafia was involved in drug trafficking, money laundering and arms trafficking. Many of the Russian mafia were former KGB agents and had control over many banks in Moscow and established others in Panama and the Caribbean to launder hundreds of millions of dollars in illicit drug profits⁵.

Colombians and Mexicans were provided with access to sophisticated weapons, intelligence-gathering equipment and

³ Douglas Farah, "Russian Mob, Drug Cartels Joining Forces", The Washington Post, published September 29, 1997 – https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/09/29/russian-mob-drug-cartels-joining-forces/b838dca0-5717-4c91-9d07-b798a435544d/?utm_term=.4eda7cbaed38

⁴ Bruce Michael Bagley, *Globalization and Transnational Organized Crime: The Russian Mafia in Latin America and The Caribbean*. School of International Studies, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida. November 15, 2001, p. 8-9.

⁵ Douglas Farah, "Russian Mob, Drug Cartels Joining Forces", The Washington Post, published September 29, 1997 – https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/09/29/russian-mob-drug-cartels-joining-forces/b838dca0-5717-4c91-9d07-b798a435544d/?utm_term=.4eda7cbaed38

¹ F. de Jonge, "Mexico and the Drug Cartels: A History of Fascination," Peace Palace library (blog), 4 May 2017.

² Isaac Campos, *Home Grown: Marijuana and the origins of Mexico's War on Drugs*. (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1.

other military hardware for drugtrafficking, along with a split of the profits. Most of the money laundering operations are conducted by Russians in various offshore zones in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Russians export large quantities of drugs that are being shipped to the United States.

On May 03, 2001, the US Coast Guard detained a ship with a mixed Russian-Ukrainian team, carrying 12 tons of cocaine. A Belize-flagged fishing trawler named the "SvesdaMaru", with a crew of 10 Russians and Ukrainians and loaded with some 12 tons of cocaine, provided new evidence of Russian mafia involvement in drug trafficking in Latin America⁶.

At the moment the Russian mafia indirectly affects economic growth, effective democratic governance and stability of the regime in the countries of the region. But in the future, Russian transnational criminal networks can become a more direct threat to state security throughout the Latin American region. The networks which were created initially for the transport of drugs and light weapons may possibly be reconfigured to move heavy weapons, chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction and contract killers⁷.

In earlier years, the Narco-Cartel's operations appeared more like the Italian Mafia⁸, but their activities nowadays have increasingly developed and changed into a new hybrid activities more similar to those of international terrorist organizations and in-

surgeants as defined by the laws of war. The Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety and former FBI agent Steven C. McCraw, stated that the Mexican Situation is both a public safety and national security issue⁹.

Mexico's violence is notable not merely for the scale of killing but for its deliberately savage quality. Kidnappings, mass killings and mass graves are common. Victims are brutally tortured and often beheaded. Messages are sent pinned to corpses. The purpose is terror, but the violence exceeds what is required to eliminate rivals and intimidate authorities¹⁰.

RAND Corporation

The political scientist Benjamin Lessing of the University of California, Berkeley, claimed that the strategy of Narco-Cartels is due to the intensity of the repressive force that the government uses to enforce drug control laws¹¹.

NARCO-CARTELS AND IRREGULAR WARFARE

The U.S. policy classified the cartels as sophisticated criminal organizations¹². Traditional warfare typically involves force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional military

⁹ See On the Border and In the Line of Fire: U.S. Law Enforcement, Homeland Security, and Drug Cartel Violence: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight, Investigations, and Mgmt. of the H. Comm. on Homeland Sec., 112th Cong. 40 (2011).

¹⁰ New Challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts: An Assessment of the Current Terrorist Threat: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs, 112th Cong. 5 (2012) [hereinafter Jenkins Statement July 2012] (statement of Brian Michael Jenkins, RAND Corporation).

¹¹ Lessing, B. (2012). The Logic of Violence in Criminal War: Cartel-State Conflict in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. Chapter 3 Logics of Violence in Cartel-State Conflict., pp. 28-29.

¹² See Southern Border Violence: Homeland Security Threats, Vulnerabilities, and Responsibilities: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Governmental Affairs, 111th Cong. 2, 8 (2009).

⁶ CNN "Ship and Suspects in Major Cocaine Bust Arrive at San Diego," CNN. com., May 14, 2001. <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/05/14/cocaine.seizure.txt/index.html>

⁷ Bruce Michael Bagley, Globalization And Transnational Organized Crime: The Russian Mafia in Latin America And The Caribbean. School of International Studies. University of Miami. Coral Gables, Florida. November 15, 2001, p. 28.

⁸ Carrie F. Cordero, Breaking the Mexican Cartels: A Key Homeland Security Challenge for the Next Four Years, Georgetown University Law Center, Pag. 292, 2013.

capabilities against each other in the air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains¹³. The traditional form of warfare is when direct military confrontation is used to defeat the enemy's armed forces, destroy its military power and either capture or preserve territory in order to change the enemy's government or force it to change politics.

The basis for Irregular Warfare is the central role of the relevant population groups in the nature of the conflict. It changes the concept of war since its focus is on the control and/or on the impact created on the population, rather than on the management of enemy forces or territory. Irregular Warfare is a political struggle against violent and non-violent components and the control and/or influence, as well as for the support of the respective population. Parties of the conflict, whether they are states or armed groups, seek to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of their opponents and isolate them from the relevant groups of the population physically and psychologically. At the same time, they strengthen their own legitimacy in order to exercise power over the same population.

To understand what irregular warfare is, let's use a few definitions.

A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will¹⁴.

United States, Department of Defense.

Adaptive adversaries such as terrorists, insurgents, and criminal networks

as well as states increasingly resorting to irregular forms of warfare as effective ways to challenge conventional military powers. Advances in technology and other trends in the environment will render such irregular threats ever more lethal, capable of producing widespread chaos, and otherwise difficult to counter. These threats are enmeshed in the population and increasingly empowered by astute use of communications, cyberspace, and technology, such that their impact extends regionally and globally. Many of these conflicts are essentially contests for influence and legitimacy over relevant populations¹⁵.

The Countering Irregular Threats Joint Operating Concept (JOC)

Hoffman argues that future conflicts will be multi-modular (they will be conducted in different ways) not fitting into the framework of a simple characteristic by the principle of division into black and white. There are mixed forms of war, the frequency of which increases. In irregular warfare, the enemy is most often a unique combination of threats, instead of individual adversaries with fundamentally different approaches (traditional, non-traditional, terrorism and criminal activities) all of which are now expected to be used and possibly simultaneously.

According to Joint Publication 3-24, Counterinsurgency, defines insurgency as: *the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region¹⁶*. Narco-Cartels employ similar strategies in order to weaken the structures of governance and rule of law to secure maneuver room for their own operations and influence. This can give

¹³ Curtis E. Lemay Center, Volume 3 Command, Operations and War, 22 Nov. 2016.

¹⁴ Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 12 April 2001 (as amended through 30 September 2010).

¹⁵ Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats Joint Operating Concept (JOC) version 2.0, 17 May 2010.

¹⁶ Joint Publication 3-24. "Counterinsurgency." 22 November 2013.

a more secure operational area for them to operate.

Narco-Cartels follow a criminal insurgency strategy (their actions can be described as criminal activities, terrorist actions, functional tactics, and information warfare) divided in a three-pronged attack:

1. Attrite or co-opt law enforcement officers through a campaign of terror.
2. Conduct information warfare (IN-FOWAR) to degrade public and state resolve, intimidate rivals.
3. Martial support; and conduct high profile assassinations of state officials¹⁷.

Narco-Cartels are becoming increasingly militarized in the way in which they execute tactical operations, potentially a result of the integration of ex-military and police members into the organization. Their military capabilities improve as they continue to acquire high military power such as high-powered automatic weapons, sniper rifles; light, medium, and heavy machine guns; grenades and grenade launchers; light anti-tank weapons; rocket-propelled grenades; armor-piercing munitions; 60-mm mortars with high explosive rounds; improvised explosive devices, heavy vehicles and IT capabilities¹⁸. They are winning more territory by using these capabilities since police forces are far less capable and do not possess the same equipment and trainings.

[The cartels] use military and terrorist tactics and weaponry ... They employ horrific tactics to intimidate their adversaries and the public such as decapitations, acid baths, skinning people alive, torture and Improvised Explosive Devices and they have expanded their criminal operations to profit from kidnappings, robberies, human trafficking,

¹⁷ John P. Sullivan and Adum Elkus. "State of Siege: Mexico's Criminal Insurgency". *The Small Wars Journal*. 19 August 2008.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Ramsey. "Poverty a Recruitment Tool for Mexico's Criminal Gangs." *InSight Crime*. 20 July 2011.

*extortions, and theft*¹⁹.

Experts in the field feel that drug cartels should be treated as international terrorist organizations, and this perception is rapidly growing²⁰. The main issue in evaluating the necessity to shift the United States policy and whether it should strategically go beyond or complement the law enforcement model, is whether it is possible and necessary to consider cartels as international terrorist organizations under the laws and policies pursued after 9/11.

Narco-Cartels have an impact on the state through violence. A terrorist psychological campaign is launched by displaying brutally publicly murdered bodies, designed to frighten their target audience – the population, the government and rivals as well in order to generate a sense of fear, crisis and attendant political costs for leaders²¹. When drug cartels face more repression from official powers, they are resorting to higher violent strategies.

Due to unrest and dissension between each link in the legal chain there is much fragmentation of the overall system. Police complain of hours lost on laborious forms; prosecutors blame judges for setting criminals free; judges accuse poorly trained police of botching crime scenes. Powerful drug cartels, meanwhile, are taking advantage of this weaknesses in the new system and strong-arming targets with death threats and bribes²².

¹⁹ *Id.* at 42-43 (stating that equipment used by the cartels is military and nation-grade including: "communication intercepts, interrogations, trend analysis, secure communications, coordinated military-style tactical operations, GPS, thermal imagery, and military armaments including fully automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, and hand grenades").

²⁰ Border and in the Line of Fire: U.S. Law Enforcement, Homeland Security, and Drug Cartel Violence: Hearing Before H. Subcomm. On Oversight, Investigations, and Mgmt., 112th Cong. (2011).

²¹ Lessing, B. (2012). *The Logic of Violence in Criminal War: Cartel-State Conflict in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil*. Chapter 3. *Logics Of Violence In Cartel-State Conflict*, p. 32.

²² Joshua Partlow, Mexico's crisis of justice, *The Wash-*

Targets

Authorities: Authorities who refuse to cooperate with drug cartels are also in danger, i.e. Marco Antonio Leal Garcia, the mayor of Hidalgo, in the violent border state of Tamaulipas, Mexico was killed. He refused to cooperate with Los Zetas cartel and was killed in August 2010²³. He was brutally murdered, and his daughter was injured as a result of the attack.

Military and Law Enforcement: The components of security and defense become targets when they enter cartel territory, interfere with the flow of drugs from South America to markets in the United States or perform counter operations and repressive action against the Cartels. In April 2007, seven attacks against police and security forces were made resulting in the deaths of at least eight police officers, including the commander of the Durango state anti-organized crime unit and Guerrero state Police Chief Ernesto Gutierrez Moreno²⁴.

Civilians: Civilians who were not at all involved in drug war became the victims of the violence executed by Narco-Cartels. This is to generate fear against the adversaries and gain more terrain (operational area), i.e. The massacre of 72 migrants in Mexico. The migrants were trying to reach US soil, but while crossing Los Zetas cartel territory they were forced by cartel members to hand over all their things and when they refused to do so, they were brutally murdered²⁵.

Business: Often the owners of legal businesses are forced to pay a part of their income, in the case of refusal to pay a tribute to drug cartels, they become targets

ington Post, 29 December 2017.

²³ Tracy Wilkinson, "Mexican drug traffickers blamed in killing of second mayor", Los Angeles Times, August 30, 2010.

²⁴ Stratfor, Mexican Drug Cartels: Targeting the Military, May 11, 2007.

²⁵ FoxNews, "Survivor Details Massacre of 72 Migrants by Drug Cartel in Mexico", published August 25, 2010.

of acts of violence to force their payments and at the same time teach a lesson to others. This creates an effect of intimidation and maintains a state of fear of possible violence, i.e. an arson attack on a casino in Monterrey in August 2011, that killed 52 people. The target was the owner of the casino who refused to pay a protection fee to the cartel²⁶.

Social Media: Other targets of their terror campaigns are representatives of social media. In 2017 Latin America and the Caribbean was the deadliest region for journalists. And Mexico is the most dangerous country. Though the government tries hard to implement more mechanisms to defend threatened journalists, yet they remain ineffective²⁷. Journalists are threatened to report any act of violence. Also, the bloggers, often become victims of Narco-Cartel violence, i.e. the blogger 'Rascatripas' (or or Belly Scratcher) in the city of Nuevo Laredo, was found killed on November 09, 2011 with a message left with the body: "This happened to me because I didn't understand that I shouldn't report on the internet"²⁸. He was the moderator of the web-site which reported about Narco-Cartels.

Mexico and Afghanistan can serve as examples of such Irregular Warfare (IW). i.e., the drug war in Mexico, which has killed more than 50,000 people since 2006²⁹, is directly related to the internal struggle for spheres of influence between drug cartels, corruption in law enforcement agencies and US intervention. In Afghanistan, it is a combination of local tribes, veterans of the Afghan-Soviet war (Mujaheddin), Taliban

²⁶ BBC News, "Mexico arrests 'mastermind' of Monterrey casino fire", 6 January 2012.

²⁷ IFEX network, "Mexico most deadly country for journalists in 2017", International Press Institute (IPI), 24 December 2017

²⁸ Pen International, "MEXICO: Another Blogger Murdered and Decapitated by the Carteles", published Tuesday 15 November, 2011

²⁹ Alan Taylor, The Atlantic, Mexico's Drug War: 50,000 Dead in 6 Years, May 17, 2012.

and Al-Qaeda movements and the funding for their activities through opium production, raising funds from Salafite Islamists and the methods of attacks on NATO bases and transport convoys, terrorist acts and killings of individuals.

As addition, the nexus between criminal and terrorist organizations is no longer something that requires proof. The growth of terrorist and transnational organizations that use smuggling, drugs, human trafficking and racketeering to fund their operations and undermine the legitimacy of local or national government is undisputed. Terrorists can deliver special training and organized crime can facilitate funds and a safe haven. It can be assumed that the growing problem of Narco-Gangs (Hybrid Terror-Crime Organizations) as a form of destructive force within The Americas and in Mexico portends great problems in the future for the world at large.

Conclusions

The modern Irregular Warfare (IW) performed by the Narco-Cartels is unpredictable and is a global threat that hits its targets, physically and psychologically. Narco-Cartels exist and develop in specific operational environments. The weaknesses within the judicial system and the inequality of experience, training, tactics capacity, integration of forces and technological advances between individual nations contributes to the abilities of the Narco-Cartel to exist and cripples the ability of response to these global threats. These environments need to be understood by the governments of these nations, intelligence agencies, military and security forces in order to apply proper response.

The acknowledgment of The Narco-Cartels as an Irregular Warfare (IW) actor, will significantly improve the level of capacity building, cooperation and training between

Sates. This will also enable the States to use the country's national defense system in conjunction with the actions of the national police to combat and counter these threats, which will provide the additional power in the war. The combination of highly effective counter insurgency (COIN), force protection, operational designs for Irregular Warfare (IW) with proper training and real actions will help to reduce the level of violence that we are witnessing today as a result of the increased capacity of the Narco-Cartels. We can also expect new developments in strategies, operations and tactics from these Irregular Groups. To be able to employ a balance between effective policies, we must perform a comprehensive approach and carefully combine the full spectrum of military, Law Enforcement and Civil action to achieve success. This is what Eric T. Olson call "*The Balance of Warfare*".

RECOMMENDATIONS	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with Partners • Joint intelligence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce or eliminate unnecessary redundancies. • Increase processing and analytic capability. • Provide intelligence that enhance situational understanding by describing and assessing the operational environment
INFO-OPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate People • Big Impact at Political Level
Regular Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Approach • Flexible in Operational Planning • Accuracy in Tactical Level
Develop strategies which address risk-based vulnerabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessments. • Encourage Public-Private partnerships in-sector and across sectors.
Empower Military and law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnational law enforcement and military cooperation and info-sharing • Additional resources for capacity-building

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