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**FINDING A STRATEGY FOR THE HEZBOLLAH &
THE TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME NEXUS**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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ABSTRACT

Since 9/11 the United States has been acutely aware of the threat presented by terrorist organizations. However, this focus has almost exclusively been centered upon Al Qaeda and its affiliates. Hezbollah, meanwhile, has developed into a highly capable and multi-faceted organization that has demonstrated a robust military capability, a strong ability to use and manipulate information, while gaining an air of legitimacy, specifically as a notable voice in the Lebanese legislature.

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) organizations have also gained U.S. attention, largely due to the impact of drug and human trafficking into the United States from Mexico. Additionally, Mexico's current struggle against TOCs has showcased a brutal affair, which has impacted American politics.

In recognition of the threat presented from terror groups and TOCs, the United States has published two specific strategies, the National Counterterrorism Strategy and the Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime.

What has not been formally recognized and is only slowly becoming understood is that terror groups, specifically Hezbollah, and TOCs are working together. Of particular concern to the United States is the relationship between TOCs and Hezbollah in what has become known as the "Northern Triangle" in Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala). This illicit alliance of opportunity and benefit, in states that are teetering on the edge of failure, presents a grave danger to the United States and the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since 9/11, U.S. media headlines have continually covered “The War on Terror”, specifically the U.S. campaign against Al Qaeda. Indeed, Al Qaeda has captured the attention of the U.S. public, and the U.S. Government has aggressively pursued its agents across the globe. Accordingly, the current U.S. National Security Strategy for Counterterrorism dedicates the vast majority of its prose to discussion of the threat provided by AQ and its notable affiliates¹.

Although the U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy focuses upon Al Qaeda, the Iranian backed Shi’ite terror group Hezbollah has quietly diversified and improved its capability into a wide spectrum of legal and illicit activities that give it a unique position in the world. Hezbollah is both well-funded and highly capable, largely due to its strong affiliation with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s Quds Force. Hezbollah, generally considered a terror organization, has demonstrated significant battlefield capability. Additionally, it is well-established political entity² within Lebanon, which provides an uncommon veil of legitimacy. Hezbollah, once a high-profile terror concern of the U.S., has been somewhat less visible since 9/11 as U.S. (and world) focus has turned to AQ. As testament to this reduced visibility, the word “Hizballah” is mentioned only twice in the National Counterterrorism Strategy³, while “al-Qa’ida” is mentioned dozens of times.

During the past decade, the U.S. media and public have also focused attention upon the problems relating to illicit trafficking between the U.S. and Mexico. The

¹ Al Qaeda Arabian Peninsula, Al-Shabaab, Al Qaeda Iraq, Al Qaeda Islamic Maghreb, among others.

² Hezbollah occupies 12 seats in the 128 seat Lebanese parliament.

³ (National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011) Of note, “Hizballah” is mentioned virtually in passing alongside Hamas and the FARC.

discussion's loudest voice centers upon illegal immigration, but other elements, such as drugs and the wider impact of human trafficking, are also prevalent. This increased attention can also be attributed to Mexico's aggressive, which has spawned astonishing levels of cartel violence, law enforcement (and at times federal military) campaign to eliminate the cartels.⁴ Additionally, these concerns now extend to cartel and gang evolution and growth and the corresponding threat that they pose to regional security.

Much like Hezbollah, Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) groups in Latin America have developed into formidable entities, capable of challenging local, and at times, national governments. Mexican Cartels, such as the Cali, Guadalajara, Gulf, and Zetas, have become vastly wealthy and powerful in the transit of drugs and people (primarily) through Mexican transit routes into the United States. Similarly, notorious gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) and *Calle 18* (18th Street) have grown in power and wealth through illicit trafficking, largely from El Salvador.

Although cartels and gangs and terrorist groups rightly garner much attention by themselves, there is a greater threat posed when they decide to work together. The anti-American intent and killing capacity of terror groups coupled with the advantageous location, transportation capability, and malign purpose of gangs and cartels presents a real and viable security threat to the United States. This threat is even greater when considering the advanced organizational and operational capabilities of these illicit groups. All of these elements taken together identify this new threat as one that requires

⁴ "Mexican Public Favors Military Use, U.S. Aid to Fight Drug Cartels" [Pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org)

new thought and discussion, "...the new combination of TOC, criminalized states, and terrorist organizations presents a new reality that breaks the traditional paradigms."⁵

There is a well-documented relationship between gangs and cartels and terror groups indicating that terror groups and TOCs have already found common ground in which to operate and collaborate. "In 2010, 29 of the 63 top drug trafficking organizations identified by the Department of Justice had links to terrorist organizations."⁶ This nexus of terror groups and TOCs is not a new phenomenon, "The failure of the international community to recognize the centrality of this unholy trinity allowed this nexus to flourish in the 1990s and the beginning of this century."⁷ Terror groups and TOCs have shown themselves to be willing and able to build relationships with outside agents, as long as there is benefit. "Rather than operating in isolation, these groups have complex but significant action with each other, based primarily on the ability of each actor or set of actors to provide a critical service while profiting mutually from transactions."⁸ Drug cartels and gangs, with their well-developed networks and infrastructures in Mexico and Latin America, provide an opportunity for access to those that would commit acts of terror within the U.S. Homeland.

This trend in illicit partnership is growing, fueled by destabilized and ungoverned spaces where both TOCs and terror organizations prosper. "...militias in Lebanon, and criminal armies in Mexico are part of a global pattern and not anomalies."⁹ Further, this pattern is in many ways self-perpetuating as TOCs and terror groups often provide the

⁵ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 20)

⁶ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013)

⁷ (Shelley 2005)

⁸ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 10)

⁹ (Shultz 2010, 1)

fuel for destabilization, as it is in their interests to create operational spaces for themselves. This destabilizing influence goes beyond the immediate locale and has global implications, “The milieu into which transnational crime, terrorism, and corruption merge is extremely threatening to the international order.”¹⁰

With the prospect of a nexus between Hezbollah and the TOCs of Central America, the U.S. National Security Council must develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-agency strategy to defeat this high priority security threat. Additionally, this strategy should incorporate members of the international community. As the U.S. focuses upon Al Qaeda and related groups, a highly evolved and dynamic Hezbollah operates with great latitude and operational freedom. When Hezbollah interacts with cartels and gangs, a grave synergy is achieved; “This emerging combination of threats comprises a hybrid of criminal-terrorist, and state and non-state franchises, combining multiple nations acting in concert, and traditional TOCs and terrorist groups acting as proxies for the nation states that sponsor them.”¹¹ Thus, a complex threat will require a detailed and comprehensive solution that spans capabilities resident across the U.S. Government, “Understanding and mitigating the threat requires a whole-of-government approach, including collection, analysis, law enforcement, policy and programming.”¹² This comprehensive approach to dealing with the criminal-terror nexus will require adaptive thought and action as a Westphalian approach will not encompass the totality of dynamics necessary. “No longer is the state/nonstate

¹⁰ (Shelley 2005)

¹¹ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 1-2)

¹² (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 2)

dichotomy useful in illustrating these problems, just as the TOC/terrorism divide is increasingly disappearing.”¹³

This paper will address the issue in three primary parts; the threat, which discusses Hezbollah, cartels & gangs and the nexus between them; current U.S. Government activities targeted against these illicit groups and; a proposed strategy that targets these groups through a tiered approach using the varied strengths of the U.S. at all levels.

¹³ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 2)

CHAPTER 2: THE THREAT

The threat presented by the nexus of terror organizations and criminal cartels and gangs presents in a variety of ways. Most of these manifestations are readily recognizable, yet their implications and attendant challenges are highly concerning and complex. There are two basic elements of this threat; terror groups themselves and the TOCs that they would align with. While Al Qaeda gets the majority of media attention, Hezbollah has quietly developed into a well-organized, multi-faceted, and global organization that has developed links to South and Central American TOCs.

Hezbollah

The 23 October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon introduced most of the world to a new terror organization, Hezbollah.¹ While generally considered Hezbollah's most spectacular attack, it is not representative of what this terror organization has become. Indeed, Hezbollah has evolved into a much more formidable and dangerous multi-faceted organization. Beyond highly evolved combat and terror capabilities, Hezbollah, under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah, has also become a highly effective political, media, and criminal organization that enjoys solid popular support in Lebanon, with strong ties to Iran and transnational organized crime organizations (TOC).

Once defined simply as a terror organization, Hezbollah now defies definition. What is clear, however, is that Hezbollah's intentions remain the same, although its

¹ The organization initially referred to itself as "Islamic Jihad" although it would become known as Hezbollah. Note that there are alternate spellings of "Hezbollah," which will be seen throughout this paper in source quotations, which will be kept intact.

methods have become dynamic and multi-faceted. As concerning as Hezbollah's capability is the likelihood that it may serve as a model for future terrorist and insurgent groups to emulate.

Throughout its history, Hezbollah has conducted persistent, aggressive actions against Israel, and targeted the U.S. and its interests through a variety of suicide attacks, airline hijackings and hostage taking and murder. In its early actions, suicide bombing was a primary technique for achieving its objectives—even if the actions were contrary to the teachings of the Koran, “Hezbollah brought the same ethos of martyrdom to its operations, even though the Koran expressly forbids the killing of innocents.”² Hezbollah eventually discarded these tactics, not out of religious compunction, but because of a greater understanding of immediate, and second and third order, effects. Nasrallah and his deputies recognized that Hezbollah could have greater impact through more evolved military capability and, significantly, through the manipulation of political, social and media mechanisms.

Hezbollah's sworn purpose was identified in its, “...release in 1985 of a manifesto denouncing the ‘aggression and humiliation’ inflicted by ‘America and its allies and the Zionist entity’.”³ In pursuit of this mission, Hezbollah has evolved into a global organization with a wide array of capabilities that have made Hezbollah significantly more powerful while offering an operational reach and flexibility that is

² Boot, Max. *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*. New York & London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013. (pp. 505)

³ Norton, Richard. *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987. (pp. 170-171) as quoted in, (Boot 2013, 504)

both impressive and troubling at the same time. It does this through an advanced organizational model designed to operate remotely while supporting the center:

A local Hezbollah network usually includes the following components: *Dawa* and recruitment entity, based on religious clerics, Islamic centers, Internet sites, and the broadcasts of Almanar Television; a financing department whose capabilities based on the ability to raise money legally and illegally by using organized crime; and an operational team, dealing with smuggling activists and means of warfare and the assembling of intelligence concerning potential targets.⁴

Clearly, Hezbollah has moved far beyond the “simple” construct of a terrorist organization. While there is no question that Hezbollah maintains its extremist roots, it has evolved beyond what most people consider a terrorist organization to be. In his book, *Invisible Armies*, author Max Hastings refers to Hezbollah as the “A Team” of terror organizations due to its highly evolved organization and capabilities. Indeed, as Hezbollah has developed over the past 20-30 years it has become much more competent, effective and dangerous. Nowhere was this more evident than in southern Lebanon in 2006.

In 2006, Hezbollah triggered an Israeli invasion of Lebanon by ambushing an Israeli military patrol in northern Israel and capturing two Israeli soldiers. By all accounts, Hezbollah did not expect the magnitude of the Israeli response, but they were prepared for what was to come. As the Israelis advanced into southern Lebanon, they encountered a highly dedicated and well-trained Hezbollah militia that was prepared for just such an event. The capability and ability of the Hezbollah defense shocked all but the Hezbollah fighters themselves, “Hizballah’s tactical success surprised most in Israel

⁴ Azani, Eitan. *Hezbollah: The Story of the party of God*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009. (pp. 204)

and many elsewhere. It did not surprise members of the group itself who had spent years preparing southern Lebanon for defense and training to fight on the rugged terrain.”⁵

Since the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah had undergone a virtual transformation. It organized its military capability into two groups, a “...full-time military force of experienced, well trained, highly disciplined and motivated guerilla fighters,...”⁶ and a locally recruited, trained and organized force that was familiar with the area terrain and dedicated to fight for it. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this tactical evolution was the command and control, planning and execution of the Hezbollah forces. Hezbollah had made a significant leap in organizational capability, “Hizballah’s command structure provides centralized guidance, plans, and policies to subordinate units. Yet its tactical commanders are trained to operate in the absence of continuous oversight,...”⁷ This western-doctrinal approach of “centralized planning and decentralized execution” belies an ability to learn and adapt that far exceeded Israeli (among others) expectations. Furthermore, the application of these methods was highly effective; well-sited Hezbollah strongpoints were stocked with large stores of food, water and ammunition while Hezbollah agents acted effectively without guidance and communications outside their immediate areas.

As the world watched the Israeli military fight this surprisingly capable foe, it was exposed to new dynamics of Hezbollah that complimented, and in many ways

⁵ Glenn, Russell W. *All Glory is Fleeting*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012. (pp. 6)

⁶ Blanford, Nicholas. "Terrorism and Insurgency: Deconstructing Hizbullah's Surprise Military Prowess." *Jane's Intelligence Review* 18, no. 11 (November 2006): 20-27.

⁷ (Glenn 2012, 7)

exceeded, their newfound combat prowess. The political and informational wings of Hezbollah effectively turned the tide of the conflict against the Israeli's—weapons that they had no ability to counter.

Beyond Hezbollah's substantial military transformation, it has assumed an identity as a political group that recognizes the importance of perception and legitimacy. As such, initial formal political endeavors in 1992, there have been corresponding efforts to use media to develop a persona of legitimacy both in Lebanon and throughout the globe.

Nasrallah moved Hezbollah away from being purely a terrorist organization. Like Mao, Ho and Castro, he recognized the importance of political action. Unlike them, he was even willing to compete in more or less free elections, although Nasrallah continued to use considerable coercion to turn out the vote and to silence critics. Over the objections of some members, Hezbollah became a political party that, starting in 1992, competed in Lebanon's elections and appointed cabinet ministers.⁸

The critical element of this political climb was garnering local popular support in Lebanon. Hezbollah's appreciation of the worldview is second to its understanding for a strong operating base—the Shia population in Lebanon. To establish this support base, Hezbollah has assumed the role of societal benefactor through the establishment of a wide variety of humanitarian and licit organizations designed to provide for large portions of the Lebanese population. "Hezbollah has created an impressive social base by setting up an array of public services, including schools, mosques, clinics, hospitals, community centers, and public assistance facilities...This kinder, gentler side of Hezbollah has been used to bolster the party's membership and to increase popular

⁸ (Boot 2013, 508)

support.”⁹ Hezbollah has gone on to make use of this tactic—social action that garners return through popular support—to great effect in furthering its political control within Lebanon. In the wake of the 2006 Israeli invasion, “Hezbollah also spent hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild war-damaged areas, thus strengthening its hold on the Shiite population. In 2011 Hezbollah and its allies toppled Lebanon’s Sunni, pro-Western prime minister, Saad Hariri, and replaced him with a politician more to their liking.”¹⁰

As stated, a key element of Hezbollah’s information is to further its newfound philanthropic identity, while also clouding its true malign intent to the people of Lebanon, as well as the world at large. “Nasrallah uses a ‘double-faced’ policy...to blur the identity of the organization as a terrorist organization and to emphasize the identity of the organization as a political party inside Lebanon and social party inside Lebanon.”¹¹ This effort has been effective, as the 2011 Lebanese parliamentary elections brought 12 Hezbollah representatives to the national parliament (out of 128). Thus, Hezbollah achieved deception of true design, achieving a degree of legitimacy, and thus influence through inclusion in a democratic government that maintains a seat at the United Nations.

With these perception-focused realizations have come shifts in technique. “Indeed, as of 2011, Hezbollah had not mounted a single suicide operation since 1999.”¹² This tactical shift identifies itself as full recognition that tactics resulting in indiscriminate killing—collateral damage—have a negative impact on others’ perception of the organization. Realist in their outlook and desired impacts, Hezbollah is acutely aware of

⁹ Jorisch, Avi. *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al-Manar Television*. Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004. (pp. 11)

¹⁰ (Boot 2013, 512)

¹¹ (Hezbollah's Global reach 2006)

¹² (Boot 2013, 505)

how local and global perceptions can influence organizational success, “As a pragmatic terrorist organization, Hezbollah is conscious that many of its actions are condemnable to the international community, if exposed.”¹³ Considering this, Hezbollah countered and then capitalized on this dynamic through highly effective use of media. Not content to rely upon external media to carry its message, Hezbollah developed a robust information distribution capability, “... it set up its own website, four newspapers, five radio stations, and a satellite television station, Al Manar (The Lighthouse), to get its message out.”¹⁴ This media savvy had allowed Hezbollah to “control the narrative,” not just about Hezbollah itself, but also in promulgation of a variety of messages that are heard by Lebanese and world consumers.

Within this information-societal-political dynamic may reside the greatest capability, and threat, presented by Hezbollah. Through its political position, Hezbollah possesses legitimacy, making direct military targeting of its members, particularly challenging. The base of support that Hezbollah now enjoys among the Lebanese population suggests a great challenge to those who would topple Hezbollah from within—even if they could develop an information campaign and capability capable of outperforming the Hezbollah media machine.

Some have suggested that Hezbollah has transformed into several organizations, with varied goals and objectives, rather than maintaining as a singular centralized organization. It is not difficult to see how this misconception could occur based off the organization’s expansion and diversity of interests. Additionally, a base component of

¹³ Miryekta, Cyrus. "Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Area of South America." *smallwarsjournal.com*. n.d. (accessed October 1, 2013).

¹⁴ (Boot 2013, 508)

their organizational message is to foster the perception of legitimacy via political and social activities, while clouding their true intentions and activities, through use of an enlightened information campaign.

Since the early 1990s, Hezbollah has been very concerned with public and international opinion. It has developed a well-oiled propaganda machine which has successfully blurred its image to the outside world. Because Hezbollah conducts propaganda and political warfare so well, using a two-pronged approach of coercion and persuasion, it has solidified much support in Lebanon, and is now vying for global opinion. These misconceptions, however, have severe implications. The world is divided on what the nature of Hezbollah is, which prevents efforts to counter it.”¹⁵

It must be remembered, however, that Hezbollah is monolithic in its design and purpose, “The organization’s senior members have clarified more than once that Hezbollah and all of its branches are a single organic unit whose policy and activity are decided by its leadership.”¹⁶

The realization of the power of information has set Hezbollah on a new path, even to the point where it recognized that killing was not the primary means to attain its objectives, “Hezbollah knew it did not have to kill that many people, because it could magnify its attacks through its powerful propaganda arm.”¹⁷ This recognition of the power of information—or disinformation—was fully exploited in the 2006 Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon. As Hezbollah fighters demonstrated surprising tactical skill, combat ability was secondary to the information operations that had strategic effect, “Where Hezbollah really excelled, however, was not in ground combat but in manipulation of the news media.”¹⁸ As Israeli jets targeted Hezbollah’s critical infrastructure, Hezbollah effectively turned its tactical losses into a strategic victory by

¹⁵ (Miryekta n.d.)

¹⁶ (Hezbollah's Global reach 2006)

¹⁷ (Boot 2013, 510)

¹⁸ (Boot 2013, 511)

using Israeli capability to its own advantage, “Hezbollah had mastered jujitsu information operations, turning its enemy’s strength into a disadvantage in the battle for global sympathy.”¹⁹

Among extremist-terrorist organizations, Hezbollah has blazed a new path in the use of terror, insurgent capabilities, social action, criminal activity, information manipulation and political endeavors. While these individual components are common across the globe, Hezbollah’s ability to bring them under common control and purpose is alarming. What may be even more concerning is that this could be the model for future groups to emulate and improve upon. The United States, and anyone else that draws their ire, will ignore them at their own peril.

Cartels, Gangs, Criminalized States & Ungoverned Spaces

The malign influence and activities of Mexican drug cartels and Latin gangs are understood as significant security threats throughout the western hemisphere. Much discussion and effort is dedicated to halting their operations throughout North and South America. Despite this attention, these groups continue to prosper at unprecedented levels and now dominate large geographic areas. Of primary concern is that these groups have increased the range of their international operations and that no governments or international bodies have proven able to subdue them. “Established crime groups have developed in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and the United States; no region of the world, nor any political system, has prevented their emergence, or succeeded in suppressing them.”²⁰

¹⁹ (Boot 2013, 512)

²⁰ (Shelley 2005)

Once considered simply as drug trafficking organizations, cartels and gangs have also prospered in the illicit transit of a variety of goods, most specifically human trafficking. “Unable to legally enter the developed countries of Western Europe and the United States, human smuggling rings run by international organized crime groups have arisen to meet the increased demand.”²¹ For the United States, this trafficking is primarily in the form of Central American and Mexican illegal immigrants, but it also contains elements of the sex trade and raises the concern of terrorist infiltration.²²

In Mexico and across large swaths of Latin America, gangs and cartels have manipulated the gap opened up by weak governance to take control of large areas, which serve to facilitate their operations. “The new transnational crime groups, often operating regionally, exploit porous borders and dysfunctional state institutions where territory is outside the control of the central state.”²³ This often develops into a self-supporting relationship. As TOCs gain more operational freedom due to their influence on local and regional governance, they are able to expand their enterprises and profits. This, in turn, provides more power and money to establish greater control and influence over the area (which in many cases is ever expanding). “Flush with increasing resources, political protection and access to law enforcement entities, the criminal organizations are ascendant.”²⁴

In Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (the “Northern Triangle”), cartels and gangs have taken this span of influence, power and control to a new level, such that they pose a serious existential threat to the national governments. “...the Northern Triangle is

²¹ (Shelley 2005)

²² See: (Gertz 2010) (Enos 2011) (Human trafficking in Mexico targets women and children 2010)

²³ (Shelley 2005)

²⁴ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013)

emerging as a region where the state is often no longer the main power center or has become so entwined with a complex and inter-related web of illicit activities and actors that the state itself at times becomes a part of the criminal enterprise.”²⁵ While the countries that comprise the Northern Triangle have long struggled to maintain adequate governing capacity, the introduction of TOCs to their territories could be the harbinger of a plummet into true failed-state status. “The result [from TOC influence] has been that the three governments have moved beyond being weak, somewhat corrupt and unresponsive to almost non-functional in much of their national territories.”²⁶ This collapse, or near collapse provides TOCs and others increased freedom and allows them to more deeply entrench themselves in the region.

Recently, it has become clear that cartels and gangs are developing into multi-faceted organizations. This includes a variety of elements, which go beyond simple area control, and includes the recognition of the value of social support, which facilitates secure operating bases as well as a degree of legitimacy—at least among the local population.

Vast swaths of national territory, the legal economy and government infrastructure now fall under the control of non-state actors whose budgets often rival or surpass those of the governments. ...major drug trafficking leaders have acquired massive land holdings²⁷ and provide employment, occasional medical care, educational services and other economic benefits to those on their land or adjacent villages. This, in turn, builds a solid social network that protects the traffickers from surprise raids or other state activities.²⁸

²⁵ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013)

²⁶ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013)

²⁷ (Council 2011)

²⁸ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013)

In addition to the evolving dynamic nature of these illicit groups, they are beginning to recognize the value in working with other like-minded organizations. Mexican cartels are moving into the Northern Triangle, largely to increase their operational flexibility and span of control. This area expansion has also led MS-13 and *Calle 18* to discuss building relationships with the encroaching cartels, with the potential of “partnership.”²⁹ The implications of these actions show an evolution in organizational structure within the gangs as well as a desire for greater reach and effect. “The gangs’ transformation from loose associations of small-time criminals devoid of strategic long-term planning into more coherent syndicates has alarmed authorities in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras — all three of which are seeing the encroachment of Mexican cartels on their territories.”³⁰ The lack of government capability and authority in the Northern Triangle, in the face of well organized, ruthless and capable illicit groups—who have found common cause—provides an existential threat to the legitimate governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador and a significant national security concern to the United States.

²⁹ (Dettmer 2011)

³⁰ (Dettmer 2011)

CHAPTER 3: THE NEXUS

As seen, the threats presented by both Hezbollah and TOCs are significant. The prospect of a nexus between these organizations increases concerns greatly. Regardless of the motivations behind such an unholy relationship, the capability that it represents a great concern for U.S. security as well as other Western nations. While many discount the likelihood of such a relationship, there are numerous indications and examples that the link between Hezbollah and TOCs already exists. Illicit activity for fund raising, either purely for profit or to fund other endeavors, is a common interest where Hezbollah's and TOC's operations have physically intersected. In both the South American TBA and Central America's Northern Triangle, there is strong evidence of this linkage. There are many reasons for this nexus, with one of the defining elements in this dynamic being the occupation of "ungoverned spaces."

Ungoverned Spaces

The use of "ungoverned" spaces by terror groups and criminal organizations is a central aspect of post 9/11 security concerns. As testament to this, one of the underlying objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) is to remove Afghanistan as an operating base for Al Qaeda. Similarly, as OEF has continued, the role played by Pakistan, both with its ungoverned spaces and its complicit (either formal or informal) role in aiding and abetting the Taliban and Al Qaeda is a defining element of the entire conflict.

As any organization seeks freedom to operate, terror groups and TOCs also seek operational freedom, “These franchises operate in, and control, specific geographic territories which allow them to function in a relatively safe environment.”¹ Since both terror groups and TOCs look for similar environments in which to operate, it is natural that their paths converge. “Hezbollah has taken advantage of the lawless region of the Tri-Border Area. The lack of rule of law makes the TBA a haven for criminal syndicates and nefarious factions from every continent come and function without restraint. Hezbollah too, exploits the lack of vigilant or concerned law enforcement which permits free trade and fairly free movement across the borders of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina.”²

Adding to this international dynamic is Hezbollah’s long standing and close relationship with Iran is well understood and documented. From its origins in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have had a profound influence in Hezbollah’s growth and development. This relationship with Iran has continued to the point where Iranian activity abroad often suggests the presence of Hezbollah as well. “Hezbollah has gained entry into Latin America through Iran, which has strengthened ties with Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua.”³ More significant than simply riding along with Iran internationally, has been Hezbollah’s establishment of presences in two areas in the western hemisphere, the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, and the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

¹ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 2)

² (Miryekta n.d.)

³ (Brice 2013)

Establishing & Debating the Nexus

With this physical intersection of terror group and TOC operations, the nexus between them was virtually inevitable. Both groups seek out and thrive in chaotic environments. Both Hezbollah and TOCs have vast resources that allow them in some cases to challenge regional and state authority, where they establish operating zones that are largely free of influence by legitimate authorities.

Analysis of certain criminal groups⁴ indicates that they seek to operate in areas that lack government control and hence civil accountability for their actions. They seek to act in the manner that they deem appropriate, and associate with those that they deem suitable for achieving their desired ends. “The newer crime groups most often linked to terrorism have no interest in a secure state. In fact, they promote grievances, because it is through the prolongation of conflict that they enhance their profits. There is no disincentive for them to cooperate with terrorists because they want neither stability nor a state that can control them.”⁵ This perspective, coupled with the environments that they inhabit, create and haunt, provides an ideal opportunity for association with terror groups. “The terrorists, who for political reasons seek to destroy the existing system, thus share a common objective with criminals. Both thrive on the violence and the disorder of the state.”⁶

There is a somewhat common refrain that criminal organizations are unlikely to partner with terror groups due to the threat terror groups pose to the operating environment of the TOCs. The logic is generally that the objectives of terror groups are

⁴ This discussion centers upon a partition of criminal organization types. The first model follows a more “traditional” mafia style where activities are done in the shadow of legitimate governance, using bribery and corruption to enable operations. The second is a relatively modern adaptation where illicit groups seek unstructured, chaotic environments to operate unfettered.

⁵ (Malone 2000)

⁶ (Shelley 2005)

ultimately detrimental to criminal organizations; the actions of terror groups, and the resulting state responses could result in damage to the criminal organizations. This may have been the case in the past, where international crime was dominated by mafia style groups that operated by corrupting officials *within* a functioning state. That model has given way, in large part, to a new model for international crime. “The newer crime groups in ungovernable regions are now forging alliances with terrorist organizations; because the crime groups and terrorist organizations do not possess long-term financial strategies or long-term political horizons, neither the criminals nor the terrorists need fear ineffective and corrupt law enforcement regimes in conflict regions.”⁷

As previously discussed, Hezbollah has been present in the TBA since the 1980’s. Many believe the primary focus of Hezbollah’s TBA effort to be fund-raising. Others, however, consider the presence to be more significant, and include the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish community center to be evidence of broader intent. Additionally, there is evidence that Hezbollah has reinforced and added value to its TBA operations. “Hezbollah’s presence and capabilities in the TBA are strong and getting stronger. The organization is now protecting its operations and members with counterintelligence, while infiltrating more operatives into the region.”⁸ While the 1994 bombing is nearly twenty years old, and there haven’t been any notable follow-up attacks, there are no indications that Hezbollah’s presence in the TBA has diminished. Considering the overall maturation of Hezbollah’s operations, it is likely that its TBA operations have largely transitioned into an organizational enabling capacity, such as financial, training or logistical. Further, while many discount Hezbollah’s threat to the United States, its stated

⁷ (Shelley 2005)

⁸ (Miryekta n.d.)

goals and actions indicate something different. "Over the past decade, Hezbollah's regional activities have shown a clear pattern of targeting U.S. interests and assets throughout Latin America."⁹

Despite Hezbollah's long-term activity in the TBA, its recent activity in the Northern Triangle is of acute concern. This concern comes largely from the development of relationships with regional TOC groups who have come to a dominant position in the three-state region. "Para-state actors such as Hezbollah, the premier hybrid terrorist-TOC organization in the world, have been active in carrying out criminal activities in Central America, as documented by ongoing field research and multiple cases now in U.S. courts."¹⁰ With Hezbollah in close operational proximity to TOCs, who exist largely to smuggle drugs, people and other illicit items into the United States, there is a real concern that this nexus presents a clear and present danger to the United States. This concern is comprehensively illustrated by Former Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Executive Michael Braun in 2012 testimony to the U.S. Congress :

These bad guys (cartels) are now routinely coming in very close contact with the likes of Hezbollah, Hamas, Al Qaeda, who are vying for the same money, the same turf and same dollars. It's really a nightmare scenario. And my point being is if anyone thinks for a moment that Hezbollah and Qods Force, the masters at leveraging and exploiting existing illicit infrastructures globally, are not going to focus on our southwest border and use that as perhaps a spring board in attacking our country then they just don't understand how the real underworld works.¹¹

Despite the warnings offered by experts such as former agent Braun, many question whether gangs or cartels would be motivated to affiliate and work with terror groups due

⁹ (As quoted in Brice 2013)

¹⁰ Farah, Douglas. "Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions." *Prism* (Center for Complex Operations) 4, no. 3 (2013): 88-109.

¹¹ (Congress, House, Committee on Homeland Security Hearing 2012)

to an issue of organizational interest. "...[A]bsent a significant precipitating development in the Middle East, the likelihood of a terrorist attack on the United States by Hezbollah in the near future remains low.¹² Despite this dismissal, the October 2011 attack on the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States is instructive.

In October 2011 the Iranian Qods Force attempted to hire a Zeta Cartel member to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States for \$1.5 million. While the assassination attempt was troubling in itself, there are indications that the relationship between Qods, Hezbollah, and Mexican Cartels is deeper than previously known.

In 2010, U.S. authorities accused Lebanese native Ayman Joumaa of selling Colombian cocaine to the Mexican Zetas drug cartel and laundering money for the drug-trafficking organization and channeling the profits to Hezbollah. The Zetas, one of Mexico's most ruthless cartels, also was in the news in October 2011, when U.S. officials said Iranian operatives tried to recruit cartel members to assassinate a Saudi diplomat in Washington.¹³

This marriage of Iranian and Hezbollah's interests and the relationship with Mexican Cartels was further substantiated in the investigation into Joumaa's actions.

The indictment alleges Joumaa shipped thousands of kilograms of Colombian cocaine to the United States via Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.... The indictment further substantiates the established relationship between Hezbollah, a proxy for Iran, and Mexican drug cartels, which control secured smuggling routes into the United States. This nexus potentially provides Iranian operatives with undetected access into the United States.¹⁴

With increasing familiarity and knowledge of Latin America, Hezbollah and its Iranian allies have proven able and willing to operate with and *manipulate* TOCs in order to support their agenda. "Iran and Hezbollah have been involved in the underworld of Latin

¹² (Brice 2013)

¹³ (Brice 2013)

¹⁴ (McCaul 2012, 9)

America long enough to become intimately familiar with all of its inhabitants and capitalize on their capabilities.”¹⁵ Again, the 2011 assassination attempt upon the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. supports this point. The Qods Force agents selected the cartel members because they knew that “drug traffickers are willing to undertake such activity in exchange for money.”¹⁶ Further, “...if this terror attack had been successful, the Qods Force intended to use Los Zetas for other attacks in the future.”¹⁷ With the attempted assassination of the Saudi Ambassador, it is easy to imagine a terror group manipulating a gang or cartel to conduct an action in the future, or simply paying a gang or cartel to facilitate the transportation of terror personnel or materiel into the United States.

A Greater Concern

With the intersection of Hezbollah’s and TOCs interests and operations in the Northern Triangle, there is a particularly compelling concern: Should Hezbollah desire to move agents or capabilities into the United States, the trafficking capabilities of Mexican Cartels or Salvadorian Gangs could be of great assistance. “These networks are functioning, as Hezbollah smuggles its terrorists into the United States taking the Mexican drug routes.”¹⁸ Compounding this concern is the potential movement of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) into the U.S. by Hezbollah. “Of equal concern is

¹⁵ (McCaul 2012, 13)

¹⁶ (U.S. v. Manssor Arbabsiar and Gholam Shakuri n.d.) (McCaul 2012, 14) Note: The plot failed due to U.S. intervention—largely due to the work of undercover agents infiltrating the Zetas—not due to lack of Zeta interest.

¹⁷ (U.S. v. Manssor Arbabsiar and Gholam Shakuri n.d.)

¹⁸ (Carter 2009)

the possibility to smuggle materials, including uranium, which can be safely assembled on U.S. soil into a weapon of mass destruction.”¹⁹

Considering the existential relationship between Hezbollah and Iran, and the long running animosity between the United States and Iran, Iran’s nuclear ambitions bring a specter of great concern to the discussion. “How this plays into the Iranian nuclear threat leaves troubling possibilities for the U.S. and our ally Israel. We know that Hezbollah has a significant presence in the United States that could be utilized in terror attacks intended to deter our efforts to curtail Iran’s nuclear program.”²⁰ The capability and function of Hezbollah, with weapons developed by Iran, facilitated by the illicit transit networks of TOCs present a nightmare scenario for the United States.

¹⁹ (McCaul 2012, 3)

²⁰ (Congress, House, Committee on Homeland Security Hearing 2012) as quoted in (McCaul 2012, 15)

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

Three U.S. national strategies deal (broadly) with the issue of the nexus between Hezbollah and TOCs. These are the National Security Strategy (NSS), published in 2010, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, published in 2011, and the Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, also published in 2011. While all of these strategies reference the issue of a terror-criminal nexus in rough form, none of them address the concern directly. Significantly, the terror focus is almost exclusively upon Al Qaeda and its affiliates, while the TOC discussion focuses upon international organized crime as an item generally isolated from terrorism.

With the 2011 release of The Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime the President and National Security Council (NSC) identified the high level of concern that is provoked by TOC groups. The strategy recognizes that the solution to this threat is dynamic and will require both interagency and international efforts. “This Strategy is organized around a single unifying principle: to build, balance, and integrate the tools of American power to combat transnational organized crime and related threats to national security—and to urge our foreign partners to do the same.”¹ Recognition of this threat, and the dynamic challenge it presents is overdue. As previously discussed, TOCs already dominate large portions of Central America’s “Northern Triangle” (Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) and maintain a strong position in Mexico, even after years of aggressive Mexican actions to destroy the drug cartels.

¹ (Council 2011)

To be certain, the Federal government is heavily engaged against both terrorism and transnational crime. The approach, however, appears to be largely one of independent agencies acting as they see fit, rather than in a coordinated and comprehensive strategy. Although there have been recent success in countering terrorism, events in Pakistan, Iraq, Mali, Libya, Somalia and numerous other nations indicate that terror groups, including Al Qaeda, have not been critically harmed and will continue their operations. Additionally, there is little or no evidence that Hezbollah has been targeted by U.S. agencies in any form.² Similarly, transnational organized crime groups, although under some pressure due to impacts surrounding the U.S. border with Mexico, are operating with extraordinary freedom in both Mexico and the Northern Triangle, among other areas.

The following is a brief discussion of some of the on-going efforts of both the Department of State (DOS) and Treasury Department.³

Department of State

The DOS has numerous long-term and ongoing counterterrorism programs that span the range of the department. Among the more notable are the Anti-Terrorism

² It is fully appreciated that a vast amount of counterterror and counter TOC efforts and information are not available as open source. In fact, the expectation is that virtually all intelligence and military information related to these issues is not available via open source and thus will not be addressed in detail in this paper.

³ This is not a comprehensive nor exhaustive list, but is simply intended to show the reader some of the capabilities and initiatives that these agencies are exercising. Additionally, as noted previously, DOD and Intelligence Agency efforts will not be discussed in detail largely due to their classified nature. Also, it is fairly common knowledge that these agencies have a heavy focus upon Direct Action (DA), through the use of manned and unmanned aircraft as well as special operations and similar forces. Law enforcement efforts are also commonly understood in the main and will not be covered.

Assistance Program (ATA), the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).⁴

The ATA, created in 1983, has been a long-standing program, which has provided training and equipment to law enforcement agencies of partner nations. Its focus has been on improving overall law enforcement capacity as well as promoting regional coordination and cooperation, among other things. Central to its intent, the ATA strongly emphasizes the rule of law and human rights.⁵

The CVE is considered a pillar of the current administration's approach to counterterrorism. It provides grants to foreign nations to support three main lines of effort:

- 1) To provide positive alternatives to those most at-risk of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism;
- 2) Counter violent extremist narratives and messaging; and
- 3) Increase international partner capacity (civil society and government) to address the drivers of radicalization.⁶

This effort strays somewhat from “traditional diplomacy” as it focuses upon communities and law enforcement in finding ways to prevent radicalization of “at risk” populations. This includes identification and elimination of problems within a community that could enhance vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment through a variety of means, including the use of mentors and community leaders.

The GCTF was launched in 2011 and is designed to support nations in developing rule of law (and related) capabilities, and capacity building with specific focus upon countering violent extremism. This forum has seen successes in the development of several memorandums (Rabat, Rome, and Algiers) where partner nations have agreed to

⁴ Please see www.state.gov for full details of these and other related programs (State n.d.)

⁵ (State n.d.)

⁶ (State n.d.)

efforts supporting rule of law, effective counterterrorism practice, reintegration of violent extremists, and other related topics.⁷

DOS has also, as part of the 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Crime, launched several initiatives to support rule of law efforts of local governments in combatting TOCs. Notable among these is the, “Central America Regional Security Initiative to coordinate investigations, support prosecutions, and build our collective capacity to identify, disrupt, and dismantle transnational organized crime groups.”⁸ Significantly, as part of the President’s new counter-TOC strategy establishes a new sanctions program against specified TOC groups and a cash rewards program⁹ that provides incentive to those willing to come forward with information that leads to the arrest or conviction of TOC members.

Treasury Department

As would be expected, the Treasury Department’s contribution to counterterrorism and countering TOC groups centers upon targeting their finances. Under the heading of “Terrorism and Illicit Finance,” the Treasury Department describes its role as, “...performs a critical and far-reaching role in enhancing national security by implementing economic sanctions against foreign threats to the U.S., identifying and targeting the financial support networks of national security threats, and improving the safeguards of our financial systems.”¹⁰ The Treasury Department has strongly embraced its role in national security, particularly with the establishment of the Counterterrorism Section (CTS), which, “is responsible for the design, implementation, and support of law

⁷ (State n.d.)

⁸ Statement by Under Secretary for Political Affairs William J. Burns, 25 July 2011 (Burns 2011)

⁹ (State n.d.)

¹⁰ (Department n.d.)

enforcement efforts, legislative initiatives, policies and strategies relating to combatting international and domestic terrorism.”¹¹

Perhaps the most well-known of the Treasury Department’s efforts are the financial sanctions of specially designated nationals, as well as sanctions targeting terror and narcotics agents. Similar to sanctions are the Asset Forfeiture¹² program targeting the assets of both terror and [narco] criminal agents. The design of both the sanctions and forfeiture programs recognizes that financial assets are critical to the operations and support of these illicit groups and that undermining them can have a significant impact upon their capabilities. A third program targeting illicit finances is Treasury’s Money Laundering program where Treasury targets the organizations and networks that launder money for illicit groups¹³.

Another program of note is the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP). Treasury initiated this program, “to identify, track, and pursue terrorists and their networks.”¹⁴ Interestingly, there is a similar effort at the DOS called Counterterrorism Finance (CTF), which also tracks financial leads while also seeking to deny access to financial systems and resources.¹⁵ Of particular interest in Treasury’s arsenal of counterterror and counter-TOC activities is its Hawala and Alternative Remittance System.¹⁶ This program recognizes the different and specific to Islam system of Hawala and that it is being used by terror groups to hide, launder and distribute money. Similarly, by looking at remittances, Treasury is also recognizing that illicit money

¹¹ (Department n.d.)

¹² (Department n.d.)

¹³ (Department n.d.)

¹⁴ (Department n.d.)

¹⁵ (State n.d.)

¹⁶ (Department n.d.)

gathered by TOC agents in the United States is sent to Mexico, the Northern Triangle, and other destinations, as remittances.

The national security contributions of both the DOS and Treasury are significant and complimentary to those of the DOD and DOJ. While DOD and DOJ center upon direct action and law enforcement (among other things, such as Security Force Assistance [SFA] and Building Partner Capacity [BPC]), Treasury and State focus upon both the enabling capabilities of terror and TOC groups as well as some of the root elements that enable these organizations to exist. This is particularly the case with DOS as many of its programs and initiatives are designed for the prevention of radicalization and establishment and maintenance of the rule of law.

What is missing in the counterterrorism and counter-TOC effort is a truly unified approach. This requires a binding strategy that establishes the bridge between terror and TOC groups and that requires the separate Federal agencies to coordinate their programs and initiatives at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

CHAPTER 5: DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE INTERAGENCY & INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

A most basic and critical requirement for any successful strategy is recognition of the objective while focusing resources against those issues which create the problem or threat, "...strategy focuses on root causes and purposes."¹ While this seems intuitive, actual recognition of the threat and its attendant dynamics is often illusive. Upon recognition of the threat, it is then necessary to address the components of the threat and their associated strengths and vulnerabilities.

In the cases of U.S. strategy against terrorism and transnational organized crime, there has been increasing awareness of these growing threats. Terrorism has been a front line concern for decades (admittedly, with varying levels of attention and effort applied against it). TOC groups are a more recently recognized concern, but the 2011 TOC strategy shows an important growth in understanding of the threat presented by these groups. These strategies fall short, however, in two ways.

First, references to Hezbollah are virtually in passing. As discussed previously, Hezbollah's advanced capability is striking and it is backed by a regional power with an emergent nuclear program. Second, all U.S. security strategies fail to acknowledge that Hezbollah (as well as AQ and its affiliates) and TOC groups have begun to collaborate and in many functional ways resemble each other—clouding the distinction between them. Hezbollah operates a variety of illicit (drug) fundraising networks and uses social programs to garner popular support. TOCs are known for their use of murder and intimidation (terror). They also make social outreach efforts designed to gain popular

¹ (Yarger 2006, 10)

support, while also using them to discredit area governance. Although the motivations of terror groups and TOCs are different, the techniques they employ, environments in which they desire, and the relationships they are developing between each other indicate significant commonality. As troubling as this is, there is reason to see this as opportunity. Tactics that are effective against one type of group could actually damage another due to their inter-relationship. Similarly, tactics validated against one group, and *properly applied*² against another, could have positive effect.

From a U.S. centric perspective, the primary agencies of the federal government must recognize their role in ensuring national security. This must go beyond the DOD, DHS, DOJ and the Intelligence community. The Department of State must fully embrace a primary role in providing national security. Furthermore, there are contributions from other federal agencies that are not typically recognized as contributors to national security. These contributions are such that they can address the conditions, outside and inside U.S. borders, which allow illicit groups to recruit, operate and prosper.

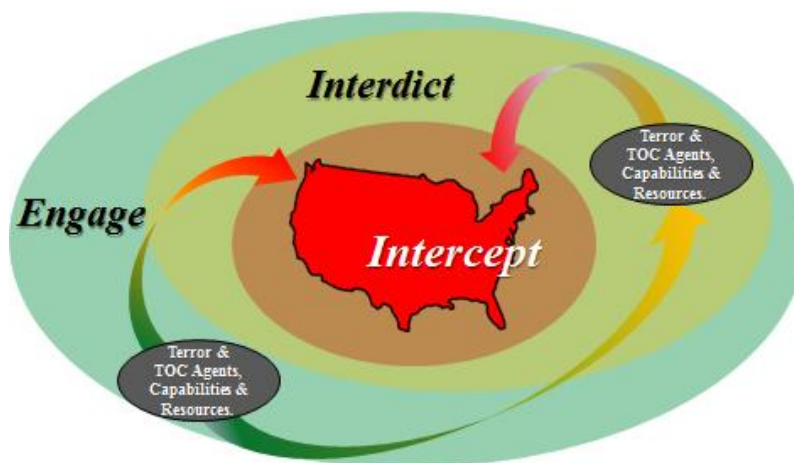
The U.S. approach must be comprehensive and integrated—with full realization that this is a complex, *wicked* problem. “Now we are faced with a new threat in Latin America that comes from the growing collaborations between Iran, Venezuela, Hezbollah and transnational criminal organizations. Similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the evidence to compel action exists; the only question is whether we possess the imagination to connect the dots before another disaster strikes.”³ U.S. assets must operate as part of an integrated strategic approach that produces complimentary effects rather than disparate

² It is important to note that tactics effective against one group can have positive effect against another. The issue is appropriate adjustment of these tactics to the target. Successful information and anti-corruptions campaigns in Central America will need to be substantially revisited in order have similar effect in Lebanon.

³ (McCaul 2012, 3)

ones. “Western policymakers should seek to address the problem systematically, at both a strategic political and a legal level, rather than continue to pursue disjointed reactive measures on a case-by-case basis. Policymakers will need to confront, rather than shirk, strategic complexities.”⁴ This will require all of the U.S. agencies involved to develop a detailed plan that addresses the threat from multiple aspects at the same time. Piecemeal, uncoordinated efforts have little likelihood of success and could actually achieve the opposite of the desired result.

A method for addressing a Hezbollah-TOC nexus is to look at the threat presented in “threat rings.” These rings are not geographic in nature, but rather should provide cognitive recognition of the threats, their sources of strength and capabilities, and how



they are used and applied in different stages of operations. These “threat rings” start with the outermost, the “Engagement” ring, then move to the middle “Interdiction” ring, and

finally the inner “Intercept” ring. These rings serve as lenses for all government agencies

⁴ (Miscik 2010, 132)

to consider their role in preserving national security. Each of these rings are separate yet fluid, and should be seen as linked while considering specific actions to be taken at each level.

Through a Center of Gravity analysis, and corresponding identification of Critical Vulnerabilities, methods of approaching (or attacking) the problem can be identified.

The focus of effort in the Engagement Ring is use of non-military capabilities, with specific focus on enabling and prompting the host nation to take action. The middle ring is “Interdiction.” This focuses upon stopping the threat as it transits between havens or to the United States (or an Ally). In most cases these interdiction activities will be intelligence driven, with actions taken by either military, intelligence or law enforcement capabilities. These actions could—and hopefully will become—actions taken by host nation intelligence and security forces. Host nation interdiction efforts can be enabled and/or facilitated by U.S. elements through a variety of means, including Security Force Assistance (SFA), Building Partner Capacity (BPC), as well as law enforcement exchanges—Engagement Ring types of activities. While DOD or DOJ elements are conducting operations, or supporting host nation activities, local and regional DOS elements would be facilitating host nation support. The inner ring is the “Intercept” ring—the final line of defense within the United States or its immediate borders (sea or land) where military, law enforcement or intelligence capabilities will be used to prevent an imminent attack.

The example of SFA and BPC initiatives providing a baseline for military or law enforcement direct action illustrates the fluid nature of the separate levels while also

exhibiting that actions in different rings can and will be taking place at the same time and in the same space.

This is significant as any attempt to address the nexus between TOCs and Hezbollah needs to be as fluid and dynamic as the organizations themselves. Efforts taken without understanding their relationship to, and impact upon, other aspects of the strategy are likely to negatively impact the overall effort. Such an example is the U.S.'s use of drone strikes against Al Qaeda targets. While few doubt the immediate effect of the strikes in killing terror agents, there is significant debate surrounding the overall effect of the strikes. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen are actually counterproductive to the overall endstate of destroying Al Qaeda and its affiliates.

Engagement Ring

The Engagement ring, which is by far the most significant of the three rings, is where U.S. influence and power focuses upon threat prevention. This ring has two basic elements. First, the efforts of the international community must be galvanized. This includes the absolute requirement to address of the existing system of international law as it pertains to ungoverned or ineffectively governed spaces and non-state groups. These efforts, from the U.S. perspective, must be conducted with an understanding of long-term implications and be within the constraints set forward by the Constitution.⁵ The second

⁵ Please see (Jon Kyl 2013) and (Alexander Hamilton 2010) for a full discussion of this issue. In discussing international law, American practitioners must be mindful of James Madison's comments in Federalist Number 46, (Madison) "...the ultimate authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone,..." In attempting to make international law that is more responsive to non-state related

element of this ring, are the multi-faceted actions that the U.S. itself will take towards a state or non-state actor in order to co-opt or eliminate a potential threat. These elements require a significant degree of host-nation support to be successful. The U.S. and international partners can engage Hezbollah and TOCs from extra-national positions, but to have a lasting solution, the effort requires domestic support. Admittedly, in both the cases of Lebanon and the Northern Triangle, local governments have limited ability to affect either Hezbollah or the TOCs. Properly applied U.S. and international aid and support, can alter this scenario.

The first issue for address in the Engagement Ring is the inability of current international law to address non-state actors. Non-state illicit groups enjoy a relative “no man’s land” regarding international law. “Mezzanine⁶ rulers generally lie beyond the scope of international law, arguing that they are subject only to the laws of their host state, however powerless its government is to enforce them.”⁷ This “operating area” for terror and TOC groups is the oft-mentioned “ungoverned spaces” and is a result of the international standard, that nation states are responsible for activities that take place within their borders. As has been seen repeatedly since the end of the Cold War, the standards of international law have struggled to adjust to the dynamic caused by the rise of non-state actors. “International law, which remains based on the Westphalian model of nation-states, has not kept pace with this challenge.”⁸

concerns, U.S. agents must recognize the potential for such tenets to be used against U.S. interests in the future.

⁶ Authors Michael Crawford and Jami Miscik in their Foreign Affairs article, “The Rise of Mezzanine Rulers” describe non-state groups, specifically mentioning Hezbollah as the preeminent example, as those groups who attain power by interjecting themselves between a state’s population and the government. They use the term “Mezzanine” to describe this concept.

⁷ (Miscik 2010, 128)

⁸ (Miscik 2010, 123)

Recognition of the need for adapting international law, with specific regard to national sovereignty of the weak or failed state, has been slow. This is due to a lack of recognition of the threat presented by terror and TOC groups. “The international community was not much troubled by the inability of some states to control all of their own territory when the consequences were only local, but ungoverned space is now being exploited by mezzanine actors to launch transnational terrorist attacks, interfere with international transportation, or destabilize governments, with devastating results for international peace and stability.”⁹ The events of 9/11 have brought global recognition to this new threat, but as ungoverned spaces continue to develop, and illicit groups continue to occupy them, the international community has demonstrated very little consensus or ability to combat the threat.

The Westphalia inspired system of international law, while hampering effective action against terror and TOC groups, may simultaneously be emboldening them. A “[F]actor that has favored mezzanine rulers is the increasing scrutiny governments have to endure from foreign media and the international community, which tends to make them more risk averse. Mezzanine rulers, on the other hand, are subject to limited accountability, domestically and internationally, and therefore are inclined to take greater risks.”¹⁰ By taking the governments of weak states to task through interstate pressure and other means, the international community is unwittingly weakening, and restraining the actions of, the body most in need of support. Conversely, the message sent to the illicit group is one where the formal state government is accountable, not the illicit group itself, for any actions taken. The final element to this dysfunctional approach has to do with the

⁹ (Miscik 2010, 129)

¹⁰ (Miscik 2010, 128)

situation when the host state has no ability to influence the actions of the resident illicit groups. This dynamic is evident in Lebanon, where Hezbollah enjoys freedom of action outside of Lebanese government control, and the Northern Triangle where cartels and gangs operate virtually unrestrained.

The fractured and piecemeal approach taken by the international community towards illicit non-state groups provides another seam, which prevents effective problem address. Even the close relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom does not allow for a like perspective of the threat. While the U.S. lists Hezbollah as a terror group, the U.K. only lists Hezbollah's military wing as a terror group, leaving its other elements unfettered to conduct operations.¹¹ This lack of international consensus on even threat definition or categorization leads to uncoordinated individual actions, resulting in limited effect. "The disparity between countries' domestic counterterrorism legislation helps Hezbollah because it inhibits a consistent, unified Western response to its activities."¹² Considering this, it is imperative that the United States work with its Allies, as well as those nations that share common interest regarding the malign influence of Hezbollah, to identify the specific threat that it presents. "When trying to foster support from allies, the U.S. must frame the Hezbollah in the way it shows how it effects our allies' interests.... This is the quick path to invigorating our South American allies in the fight against Hezbollah."¹³

Despite divergence regarding counterterrorism policy and action, criminal activity is regarded similarly on both sides of the Atlantic. "So while there is no common understanding between the United States and the United Kingdom on whether or how to

¹¹ (Miscik 2010)

¹² (Miscik 2010, 125)

¹³ (Miryekta n.d.)

engage Hezbollah or even how to classify Hezbollah and its various component parts, there is no ‘gray area’ as to whether drug trafficking is illegal.”¹⁴ This common understanding could provide opportunity for expanded discussion between the United States and others to address the concerns that Hezbollah presents as it operates with and among TOCs.

Further, while countries may struggle to agree on the depths of the issue presented by this nexus, by breaking the concern into smaller pieces (and presumably agreeing upon those smaller components), unified action could be taken. An international approach to climate change is instructive. “Faced with fiendishly complex issues, such as climate change, transnational networks of government officials now seek incremental progress by disaggregating those issues into manageable chunks and agreeing to coordinate action on specific agenda items.”¹⁵

Addressing the nexus between Hezbollah and TOCs will require Americans, Europeans and other partner nations to recognize the need for evolved thought. “The destabilizing nexus of transnational crime and terrorism has proved so intractable because policy-makers continue to think about crime in terms of traditional paradigms.”¹⁶ Those that construct policy and strategy must first recognize the need for review of existing concepts for both content and structure. A strategy for counterterrorism and a separate strategy for international criminal organizations by themselves will not provide a bridge for an interagency, much less an international plan to address the problem. Similarly, compromise in trans-Atlantic perspectives will be necessary to ensure progress in addressing the terror-TOC nexus through international efforts. “American policy-makers

¹⁴ (Levitt 2009)

¹⁵ (Patrick 2014)

¹⁶ (Shelley 2005)

in the post 9/11 world have focused almost exclusively on terrorism, whereas their European counterparts have focused much more on transnational crime.”¹⁷ Current global thinking and paradigms have been insufficient in addressing the rise of non-state illicit groups. To reduce them, new perspectives and approaches are necessary.

Critically, these discussions must include others in Asia and Africa, and specifically Central and South America. International law (and often action) has traditionally been the purview of the West. With terror groups coming predominantly from Asia (Mid-East) and Africa, and TOCs frequently coming from “non-traditional” (in the sense of global influence) Western states, it is imperative that the U.S. and Europe recognize that other nations will play the determining role in mitigating and defeating this emergent concern. This is illustrated through the belief that the best way to address militant Islamist groups is through the lens of Islam. “Militant Islamist Ideology can be fought only by using *Islamic* argumentation and exposing Militant Islamist views as narrow and doing a disservice to the legacy of Islam.”¹⁸

Once an international consensus for action is established, the international community will then need to take action. Significantly, many of the tools for action are already in place and will require little in the way of additional resources. As has been discussed previously, Hezbollah’s rise and status are in large part due to their highly effective media operations. Information, and the manipulation of it, has been a key component to their success. Additionally, international scrutiny of Lebanon, and tacit

¹⁷ (Shelley 2005)

¹⁸ (Aboul-Enein 2010, 12) Italics in original. This concept is supported by a personal discussion with a Lebanese officer who attended the JFSC who suggested that the key to defeating Hezbollah was to “separate it from Shi’ism.” Instead of addressing the Lebanese population with the desire of destroying the reputation of Hezbollah, the goal should be to expose the truth of Hezbollah as an apostate entity, one that uses the mantle of Islam to cover illicit activities.

acceptance of Hezbollah's non-military elements, have aided Hezbollah's rise. Thus, a strong first step would be to reverse the current dynamic. "Subjecting mezzanine rulers to greater international scrutiny is one way the West could do more. This would expose mezzanine rulers to outside influences and force them to justify their actions."¹⁹ This could then be reinforced through an information campaign designed to discredit Hezbollah, ideally with the help of regional partners, with particular focus upon Islamic principles. "A carefully directed information campaign by the West could help cast a harsh light on the darker workings of mezzanine rulers. The deliberate erosion of the mezzanine actors' myths and cult of resistance will be vital to success."²⁰ A third element of the effort would be to reinforce the capability, and importantly the legitimacy of Lebanon, in its services and relationship to its population. "An important way to combat threats emanating from weak and fragile states is to strengthen legitimate government and the rule of law to alleviate pressures that lead to instability."²¹

Admittedly, attempting to degrade or dismantle Hezbollah is a daunting task as it enjoys a well-entrenched political and popular position within Lebanon and the sponsorship of Iran. While targeting its military forces in itself is a challenge, as demonstrated in 2006, direct military action is likely to be to the benefit of Hezbollah due to its social standing and skill in information and media use. Further, as Hezbollah has assumed more organizational elements it has increased its resiliency. "By mixing religion, ideology, social welfare, politics and occasional violence, Hezbollah has gained legitimacy with local communities and developed sophisticated institutional practices, which give it strength and resilience. The movement is at once a religious organization, a

¹⁹ (Miscik 2010, 132)

²⁰ (Miscik 2010, 132)

²¹ (Shultz 2010, 1)

political party, and a paramilitary force.”²² Since Hezbollah is at once religious, political and paramilitary, any efforts directed against it will require an integrated approach that addresses the total capability of the organization. Finding and targeting its weaknesses, while compromising or minimizing its strengths, will be the keys to their demise.

Hezbollah’s weaknesses are difficult to identify. What is clear, however, is that Hezbollah draws its strength from two sources, a portion of the Lebanese population, and Iran. With this understanding, the U.S., through international partners, should begin the effort to degrade Hezbollah’s standing in Lebanon and the international community. This effort is essentially an information campaign designed to expose the truth of Hezbollah, first to the international community (to gather support), and then to the Lebanese population from which Hezbollah enjoys local support. This overall effort would sit squarely within the scope of the Department of State as it would lead the effort to gather international support against Hezbollah. Additionally, it would be the DOS that would drive the effort to address the international legal components, which allow Hezbollah and other transnational illicit groups vast freedom to operate. Finally, DOS would be required to continue the international effort isolating Iran, preventing Iranian support to Hezbollah.

Specific actions against Hezbollah within Lebanon would include a wider array of U.S. federal capabilities. The DOS would lead the effort, gaining access through the non-Hezbollah agents within the Lebanese government. These other capabilities would also be focused on compromising Hezbollah’s social standing by providing alternatives to their social outreach programs while using an enhanced information campaign to

²² (Miscik 2010, 124)

discredit Hezbollah while bolstering the legitimate aspects of the Lebanese government. These programs would be agricultural, educational, and importantly, religious²³.

While many efforts will necessarily be directed against Hezbollah inside of Lebanon, there are ongoing external efforts that could have a crippling effect. U.S. financial targeting of terror groups is a well-known practice, with most attention paid to attacking Al Qaeda's financial network. Hezbollah also has an illicit financial network, one that has been found to stretch into the Western Hemisphere. "One such scheme involved the [Lebanese Canadian Bank] allowing Hezbollah-related entities to conduct transactions as large as \$260,000 per day without disclosing any information about the transaction."²⁴ These actions must be continued and increased, with an expanded scope to include other banking centers such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Cayman Islands. Specifically when tracking Hezbollah's money trail in the Western Hemisphere there is the chance that there will be a financial intersection (as it comes to investigative trails) between Hezbollah and TOCs. Similarly, given the known use of the UAE as a haven for Iranian (not to mention other illicit groups, such as opium kingpins in Afghanistan) funds, there is good reason to believe that where Iranian assets are hidden, Hezbollah's assets may be present as well.

Perhaps the most important aspect of a program to defeat Hezbollah would be to drive a wedge between the religious beliefs of the population and Hezbollah's actions. If the actual agenda of Hezbollah and the non-Muslim actions it has taken were to be effectively exposed, it is likely that the result would be a serious compromise in their

²³ These efforts would be conducted by Lebanese elements with the support of USAID, Department of Agriculture, Department of Education and other federal agencies as able. Additionally, international partners, particularly Muslim nations and NGOs would be of great value in this effort.

²⁴ (Press Release, U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York 2011)

local base of support. Simply put, the effort should center upon removing the veneer of Shi'ism from Hezbollah; make it apostate. While this effort essentially centers on changing the narrative, specifically in regards to Hezbollah's religious standing, there are grounds to believe it possible. As has been learned repeatedly in recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Islamist insurgents have proven adept at promoting their narrative of religion. While effective in garnering support, this narrative is in contrast to true Muslim doctrine. "Today Militant Islamists have been so proficient in the use of the media that the meaning and contributions of Islamic civilization have become lost not just in mainstream Western discourse but tragically in the Muslim world itself."²⁵

The elements of a strategy designed to reduce Hezbollah are similar to those that would be used against TOCs in the Northern Triangle. As in targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon, many of the same societal dynamics exist in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. "In these conflict regions, crime groups see business differently but also citizens see them as a major force in a large shadow economy. They provide goods and services as well as jobs not provided by the legitimate economy. Therefore, many citizens do not see crime groups in post-conflict regions as purely 'bad' but as groups that perform needed economic services for their community."²⁶ However, the application will vary considerably as the cultural and regional dynamics require a separate analysis due to difference. Most notably, while religion is central to defeating Hezbollah, religion in Central America, although a strong element of Latin culture, is unlikely to play the same role as it would in the Levant.

²⁵ (Aboul-Enein 2010, 9)

²⁶ (Shelley 2005)

While the TOCs lack the centralized capabilities of Hezbollah, the societal dynamics that exist in the Northern Triangle lend themselves to similar approaches. As previously discussed, the social program aspect of TOC operations compromises the legitimacy of local governance while also providing a safe base of operations. Like efforts against Hezbollah, actions designed to dismantle TOC networks must be international and comprehensive. A central theme must be to restore the legitimate ruling capabilities of the local government(s). Similar to a campaign against Hezbollah, the effort will center upon an information campaign designed to compromise the local popularity of the TOCs. Also like against Hezbollah, the strategy must be comprehensive, and as diverse as the target. The U.S. has had success with such complex efforts in the past, most notably in Colombia. “The strategy required attacking every vulnerability of the trafficking organizations at every step of the process...”²⁷

The successful U.S-Colombian counter-TOC model is seeing a revision and revival in current anti-cartel efforts in Mexico. The struggle to diminish and destroy the Mexican Cartels is well publicized, due to the relationship of the conflict to the United States as well as the massive death toll as the cartels fight government forces. Despite challenges with widespread corruption and tenacious cartel resistance, the Mexican government has seen positive progress. “Calderon’s initiatives have begun to destabilize the cartels, and many cartel leaders are now on the run.”²⁸

Perhaps as encouraging as the efforts of the Mexican government are the recent indications that segments of the Mexican population itself are no longer tolerating the cartels and their activities. In recent years, “The lawlessness spawned by Mexico’s drug

²⁷ (Bonner 2010)

²⁸ (Bonner 2010)

wars has contributed to the spread of self- defense groups,...”²⁹ This is encouraging due to the willingness of local populations to take action against illicit groups. Interestingly, this rise in vigilante justice appears to have come from a “tipping point” not unlike what was seen in the 2006, “Al Anbar Awakening.” Like in Al Anbar, it appears that cartel actions against the local population, as opposed to the government, pushed the people into action. “Narcotraffickers as a rule usually keep things under control in their territories, but lately they’ve been getting involved in extortion and murders, and that’s not right. The drug problem is for the state to resolve, but kidnapping and robbery touches us.”³⁰ There is concern, however, that if this vigilantism is taken too far it will further erode the tenuous rule of law in Mexico. Recognizing that a central component of defeating TOCs is the restoration of legitimate government authority, these concerns should be given strong consideration. Despite this, the fact that local populations in Mexico are taking action against cartels is a positive indicator that could be capitalized upon in a wider effort to dismantle the TOCs operating in those areas. Simply, vigilante actions against TOCs indicate potential receptiveness of information and other efforts (such as economic development, anti-corruption campaigns and other government-social programs) aimed at destroying the cartels and the restoration of legitimate governance.

Interdiction Ring

The focus of the Interdiction Ring is to stop the flow of Hezbollah or TOC assets as they transit between way points or are within operational areas. In this ring, Direct Action (DA) is introduced to the overall effort—with close attention paid to the impacts it may have on Engagement efforts. Significantly, DA comes in many forms. Most

²⁹ (Espach 2013)

³⁰ A group leader in “Tierra Colorada” as quoted in (Espach 2013)

dramatic is the use of special forces, other military, law enforcement or intelligence personnel to *kill or capture* terror or criminal agents. Drones and precision munitions (air dropped or guided missile) are also used for DA missions.

In conducting direct action missions, the difference between kill and capture is significant. This difference is in the risk to U.S. and Allied personnel, the intelligence value of a target, the messaging to other illicit group members and supporters, and the perceptions aroused by local, international and domestic audience.

Terrorist groups can meet their demise in a number of ways, and the killing of their leaders is certainly one of them. Abu Sayyaf, an Islamist separatist group in the Philippines, lost its political focus, split into factions, and became a petty criminal organization after the army killed its leaders in 2006 and 2007. In other cases, however, including those of the Shining Path in Peru and Action Directe in France, the humiliating arrest of a leader has been more effective. By capturing a terrorist leader, countries can avoid creating a martyr, win access to a storehouse of intelligence, and discredit a popular cause.³¹

Intelligence collection, the potential for martyrdom, and local sentiment must be taken into account in both the immediate mission, how it relates to the overall strategy, and its impact upon the local government. The relationship between U.S. direct action and its impact upon local governments has been significant in recent years. U.S. actions have often upset local populations and strained relations with the local governments. Pakistan is such an example, where both manned DA (Abbotabad and Osama Bin Laden), and numerous drone strikes have been unpopular with the population. This has resulted in Pakistani governmental criticism and condemnation of the U.S. and its counterterrorism activities within Pakistan.

³¹ (Cronin 2013)

This situation with Pakistan is instructive: How does the U.S. (or any other nation) target terror agents in a sovereign nation without drawing a backlash that could breed sympathy for the terrorist cause? Direct action interdiction missions have a premium requirement for effective application of international law. Like the challenges faced in conducting engagement, proper application of international law, and the corresponding legitimacy provided when operating within its mandates, will be critical in carrying out interdiction efforts. That international law struggles to deal with non-state groups complicates the issue greatly. Without effective elements of international law and international support, DA operations will remain highly contentious and divisive while being fodder for the media-information savvy.

This is particularly the case in targeting Hezbollah. Hezbollah has maintained a low-terror profile in recent years, making DA targeting by U.S. agents virtual “no-go terrain.” Additionally, the political standing of its senior leadership gives it an air of legitimacy that is recognized by U.S. allies, making the targeting of figures such as Nasrallah and unacceptable prospect. Thus, as DA against Al Qaeda leadership has proven effective in degrading the organization, Hezbollah presents a significantly different challenge, which requires a well justified approach in international law and associated consensus.

This targeting and international law concern is particularly acute with the use of drones. Drones, while particularly effective at hitting targets and keeping U.S. military and intelligence personnel safe, have become a highly contentious issue. Due to their remote nature and belief that they cause unacceptable “collateral damage,” namely the deaths of relations and bystanders to the targets, the use of drones has come into question.

Legal, ethical and most importantly, legitimacy, questions have made the use of drones a lightning rod of criticism of the United States from international and domestic audiences. The U.S. employment of drones in counter-terror or counter-criminal operations must be well coordinated with host nations and well justified both in the immediate targeting but also in a comprehensive view of the overall strategy. “Drone strikes must be legally justified, transparent and rare. Washington needs to better establish and follow a publicly explained legal and moral framework for the use of drones, making sure that they are part of a long-term political strategy that undermines the enemies of the United States.”³²

While a tactical system, the drone has become a weapon with strategic effect. These strategic impacts, however, are often greater *against the user than the intended targets*. Thus, the U.S. must carefully consider each use of drone strikes and its overall impact on the strategic endstate. This broad-view strategic calculus will often result in changing the mission timing, or change the mission objective from kill to capture, in order to garner the desired immediate and second order effects, or to mitigate negative backlash.

From the perspective of effects, the question of employment of drones is; do the tactical results (killing of intended targets and “collaterals”) outweigh the second order effects and strategic backlash of their use? A key to mitigation of negative effects is the use of and with domestic forces—ideally enabled by SFA and BPC activities conducted in the Engagement Ring. With use of these domestic (and other international forces) the U.S. will continue to strengthen a partnership, increase foreign security capacity and diminish terror and criminal capabilities. Working with and through foreign partners has already proven effective and should be a cornerstone of Interdiction Ring activities.

³² (Cronin 2013)

“That is because a crucial element in the success of U.S. counterterrorism has been the close collaboration with allies on issues of terrorist financing, the extradition of terrorist suspects, and, most important, the sharing of vital intelligence.”³³

Targeting of terror and illicit groups will also be done through financial means. By definition this is an Interdiction Ring effort, although it should be done continuously throughout all rings of this strategy. Of particular emphasis, information and intelligence collection is likely to be greatly aided through the capture of terror and criminal agents. The impact of financial targeting and interdiction cannot be over-stated. In the case of TOCs, their primary purpose is financial. With Hezbollah, funds are critical enabling aspects to their operations. Without financial resources, their political, paramilitary, information/media and social projects will be found lacking for capability and operational range. Without its social and media programs, Hezbollah’s messaging to the people of Lebanon will be compromised, allowing for other agents, such as the Government of Lebanon or other international partners, to increasingly influence the Lebanese population.

Such an opportunity to influence is exactly what the Engagement Ring activities are designed to capitalize upon. This exhibits the critical nature of a coordinated relationship between the rings of the strategy. Along with financial interdiction efforts, DA missions should be considered similarly. There is no doubt that DA can have a great effect upon illicit groups by killing leaders and facilitators. Capturing them can have an even greater effect as they could be of significant intelligence value, enabling follow-on operations. Great care must be taken in both the selection and prosecution of DA targets.

³³ (Cronin 2013)

This is particularly the case for the use of drones, but also applies to manned aircraft and special operations forces. However, DA should not be viewed as an end in itself. “You can kill or capture enemy leaders. You can set back their organization. But I found that those kinds of blows were never decisive. The problem is, they give you the illusion of activity and the illusion of progress. In reality, terrorism is a symptom of wider problems.”³⁴ Direct action, like financial interdiction, can be effective in preventing imminent or future attacks or efforts and degrading capabilities, but should also be viewed through the lens of providing operational space and opportunity for other efforts—particularly ones that will enable address of causal issues.

Interception Ring

The Interception Ring represents the “last line of defense” against a terror attack. This element of the strategy also includes activity against TOC groups. The concerns, however, between the two groups necessarily take on different degrees of attention. With TOC groups, interception efforts are continuous status quo activities, and are primarily considered law enforcement issues within the United States and our Allies. With terror activities, the concerns are greater. The terror threat also brings other agencies into the forefront, such as the intelligence community.

Interception activities take place on both U.S. territory and in international spaces. This ring is the most geographic of the three rings as its focal point is the prevention of illicit activity on U.S. soil (although efforts to protect U.S. interests abroad could be considered part of the Interdiction Ring). Although focused on protecting the U.S., many

³⁴ Interview excerpt with GEN Stanley McChrystal, USA (Ret.). (Stanley McChrystal 2013)

efforts within this ring will take place in nations and space immediately adjacent to the U.S., in Mexico and Central America, Canada and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

As one would expect, many of the International Law considerations that are primary considerations in the Engagement and Interdiction Rings do not apply on domestic actions. However, non-state actors, particularly terrorists have challenged the appropriate application of domestic law. Although domestic law becomes a primary element in Interception Ring activities—such as law concerning posse comitatus, privacy and individual rights—international law obviously still comes into play when taking action in neighboring states or in the international commons of the Atlantic and Pacific. Here, perhaps more importantly than in other regions, early engagement activities are critical to success. As engagement activities take place, both capabilities and *relationships* are developed. These relationships, between the U.S. and neighboring nations, are critical in the successful interception (as well as interdiction) of terror and criminal agents.

A key point to this relationship is the ability to extradite criminals and terrorists from foreign nations to the United States for prosecution. This is critical in early stages of engagement as host states often lack effective judicial systems—due to compromise by TOC and terror groups. As foreign security, governance, and judicial capabilities mature, local governments will then be able to handle illicit agents themselves. Until then, illicit actors need to have fear of accountability. International relationships that provide for extradition to the United States can provide that fear of accountability. As before, the successful campaign against the Colombian cartels is instructive, “...extradition is vital.

Trial and imprisonment in the United States was the only thing that the Colombian drug traffickers truly feared.”³⁵

Countering the nexus of Hezbollah and TOCs will require a multiagency and multinational effort that is both comprehensive and integrated. The dynamic nature of Hezbollah and their TOC partners necessitates an equally dynamic strategy to dismantle and destroy them. Most significant in this effort are the indirect and non-violent efforts that will go against the sources of strength and reducing the operational freedom and reach that these organizations now enjoy. Addressing the root causes of Hezbollah’s or TOC strength is the only way to achieve a lasting result. Other actions, such as direct or financial action can provide windows of opportunity, through gathering of information and intelligence or disrupting operations. These opportunities must be capitalized upon aggressively by going after the underlying sources of strength, the local populations and operating areas of both Hezbollah and the TOCs.

³⁵ (Bonner 2010)

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Beyond its recent success and growth in the Levant, Hezbollah also maintains a strong presence in Central and South America. This illicit activity has helped to facilitate a nexus between Hezbollah and TOCs, particularly in Central America's Northern Triangle where Mexican Cartels and regional gangs have gained control over large portions of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. With these cartels and gangs comes trafficking expertise, specifically into the United States. This growing relationship between TOCs and Hezbollah should raise great concern to the U.S., especially considering Hezbollah's close relationship with Iran. The Hezbollah-cartel/gang nexus presents a unique threat to the United States largely due to the, "...porous southern border of the United States and abutting Mexico will be increasingly under the sway of hostile TOC groups, some of whom are closely aligned with state actors such as Venezuela and Iran that are overtly antagonistic to U.S. interests and goals."¹ This relationship takes on even greater concern when factoring the compelling discussion of Iran's nuclear aspirations, with all of its attendant dynamics. "Further, the standoff with Iran over its nuclear program, and the uncertainty of whether Israel might attack Iran drawing the United States into a confrontation, only heightens concern that Iran or its agents would attempt to exploit the porous Southwest border for retaliation."²

Due to the advanced development and capability of Hezbollah, many have concluded that its leadership will avoid direct involvement in an attack against U.S. soil. While this perspective bears merit, Hezbollah's capability provides it with options such

¹ (Farah, Central America's Northern Triangle: A Time for turmoil and Transitions 2013, 90)

² (McCaul 2012, 3)

as the use of a proxy or other indirect approaches that could damage the United States. Gangs and cartels may provide just such vehicles. As seen with the recent assassination attempt against the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Iran's agents (which Hezbollah is a primary member) have demonstrated a willingness to take action within the United States. Compounding the concern concerning is the willingness of TOC agents, as was seen in the Zeta's role in the assassination attempt, to serve as the terminal actors in acts of terror in the United States.

The global reach of Hezbollah and TOCs illustrate a vast capability, which expands the threat aperture. "Latin American networks now extend not only to the United States and Canada, but outward to Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Asia, where they have begun to form alliances with other networks."³ This reach offers great functionality for all concerned, whether for illicit crime or terrorist activity, or both.

In the face of the threat presented by a functional relationship between Hezbollah and TOCs, the United States should develop a strategy that not only recognizes this nexus, but also sees these organizations, and those like them, as similar. Although U.S. strategies to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime exist, there is little recognition that terror groups, specifically Hezbollah, have developed working relationships with TOCs.

In such a strategy, the primary focus should be upon addressing the causes and root factors and strengths of these groups, rather than a focus upon elimination of leadership. The first element of the strategy should be to *Engage* the host nation and international community as a whole in order to develop a common understanding of the

³ (Farah, Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Criminalized States in Latin America: An Emerging Tier-One National Security Priority 2012, 3)

threat and develop international legal consensus for action. With this consensus, U.S. and international efforts can begin to address the causal factors that enable Hezbollah and TOCs to operate freely and effectively. Critical to this effort is an effort to build the capability and capacity of local governments to confront these illicit groups while also building and preserving their legitimacy with their domestic populations. Once the governments of these nations are seen as primary guarantor of security and services, with the illicit group(s) discredited and considered illegitimate (or apostate), the effort will have passed the “tipping point” of the struggle.

A strategy against the threat presented by a nexus of Hezbollah and TOCs must have its focus and preponderance of effort outside of the United States. This is not only because it is desirable to engage this threat outside the U.S., but more significantly because any lasting and truly effective strategy to defeat this threat must address the root causes and base elements of the threat. Furthermore, the primary mechanism of success will not be the U.S. actions themselves, but rather the actions of our international partners. This relationship is critical to success in this endeavor, for both the U.S. and our current and potential partners. “The demand for international cooperation has not diminished. In fact, it is greater than ever, thanks to deepening economic interdependence, worsening environmental degradation, proliferating transnational threats, and accelerating technological change.”⁴

While terrorism and TOCs are a great concern of the United States, even in the face of a WMD attack, they are not existential. In other nations, such as Lebanon, Mexico and those of the Northern Triangle, the threat posed by Hezbollah and TOCs is grave, and could lead to state failure. The threat to these nations is total, as these groups

⁴ (Patrick 2014)

all facets of society and governance. The existence of the narco-state then, in turn, presents a threat to the United States and other stable nations, as well as to the entire international system. “By seeking to embed themselves irrevocably in a country’s political system and win exclusive control over a segment of the population, mezzanine rulers jeopardize domestic stability. When they resort to terrorism, piracy, insurgency, or other means to advance ideological, ethnic, or nationalist agendas, they pose a threat that goes well beyond the borders of the host state.”⁵

The primary utility of U.S. actions will be as enablers to our partners. These enabling actions come primarily in the form of support and development activities that help a nation to gain and/or maintain capability and legitimacy, in the face of illicit actors such as Hezbollah and TOC groups. Direct action, when appropriate is another enabling activity that gains the host nation and other international actors opportunity—either to inject a developing capability or to hold off or reduce the threat for a period. It must be emphasized that DA is rarely an end in itself, but rather should be seen as an enabling component of a root cause focused strategy.

Getting to the “tipping point” will require significant *Interdiction* and *Interception* efforts, both in prevention of imminent attacks, but more significantly in disrupting the activities of illicit groups and killing and capturing key leaders and operatives. These actions will enable information collection and intelligence generation that can lead to further DA operations while presenting opportunities for the introduction of *Engagement* efforts and time for them to take effect with target populations.

For a strategy of this nature to work, it will require firm direction from the Chief Executive, along with vigilant supervision, specifically to ensure that the multi-agency

⁵ (Miscik 2010, 123)

coordination is taking place. This multi-agency approach is critical and must be closely followed due to a natural tendency of agencies to focus on individual “ownership” of elements of strategy, losing sight of the wider picture and the broad implications, both good and bad, of isolated actions.

This proposed strategy, with all of its attendant elements, while centered upon Hezbollah and Central American TOCs, should serve a wider purpose. The recent growth and success of these groups should serve as both an immediate concern and a long-term warning to the United States and the West. “Any single one of these movements can be dismissed as anomalous, but taken collectively as a phenomenon, they represent a unique long-term challenge to governments, Western policymakers, and the precepts of international law.”⁶ The model that they have established will almost certainly be emulated, particularly in the case of Hezbollah. While international criminal organizations have been dismantled and destroyed in recent history, such as the case with the Colombian drug cartels, the Westphalian world has yet to effectively recognize, let alone deal with and eliminate, a non-state group with the breadth and capability of Hezbollah. In building the national and international capacity to destroy or make irrelevant a non-state, terror, political, social, media/information and criminal group such as Hezbollah, the U.S. and international community will go far in facing emergent challenges of the 21st Century.

⁶ (Miscik 2010, 123)

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VITA

Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Zeman was born in Berwyn, Illinois, on 28 November 1971. He grew up in Rockport, Massachusetts and is a graduate of Boston University (BA History, '93). He has served as Marine Corps officer since his commissioning in May 1993.

Upon completion of The Basic School and Infantry Officer's course in 1994, Lieutenant Colonel Zeman report for duty as Weapons Platoon Cmdr, Co G, 2d Bn, 6th Marines in August 1994. While with 2/6 he participated in Operation SEA ANGEL and completed a LF6F deployment with 26th MEU (SOC).

In May, 1996 he reported to 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, where he served as a platoon commander, Alpha Company XO, Bn S-3A, and eventually deployed as a part of 24th MEU (SOC) to the Mediterranean Sea as the Force Reconnaissance Detachment Commander (and MSPF Commander).

In August 1999 Lieutenant Colonel Zeman was transferred to Okinawa, Japan and served in the III MEF G-5 as the MEF Theater Engagement Officer.

Returning to the states in July 2000, Lieutenant Colonel Zeman was posted as the Marine Officer Instructor, College of the Holy Cross NROTC program, in Worcester, Mass. While at this posting, he completed a rotation as a Platoon Commander at Officer Candidates School.

In September, 2003 Lieutenant Colonel Zeman was assigned to 7th Marines where he served as the Regiment's Assistant Operations Officer and Executive Officer of 3d Bn, 4th Marines. In each of these billets he completed combat tours as part of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

In 2006 Lieutenant Colonel Zeman was selected as the Commandant of the Marine Corps' Fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and diplomacy at Tufts University where he earned a Master of Arts degree in International Relations.

Upon completion of the Fletcher Fellowship, Lieutenant Colonel Zeman was assigned to the Strategic Initiatives Group in Headquarters, Marine Corps as a strategic analyst. In this post he worked a wide variety of topics including strategic-political portfolios on Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, and published an article, "Tribalism & Terror" in the *Small Wars & Insurgencies Journal*.

In 2009, Lieutenant Colonel Zeman volunteered for duty with Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan (MEB-A, Oct '09 to Apr '10) where he served as the MEB Operations Liaison to the British Task Force Helmand and Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Executive and Operations Officer for the stand-up of the 215 Corps of the Afghan Army.

From July 2010 to July 2012 Lieutenant Colonel Zeman served as Commanding Officer, Headquarters Battalion, Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center/Training Center, Twentynine Palms, California where he commanded and led over 1500 Marines. In July 2012 he was reposted as the Training Center's G-3 Plans & Training Officer.