

Conclusion: SOF Roles and Future Challenges

Chapter 12. World Order or Disorder: The SOF Contribution

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As the era of the ‘big footprint’ winds down and the U.S. relies increasingly on allies and partner nations, it is troubling that so many states are fragile or mired in seemingly never-ending conflict. Nearly 25 years after the Cold War, no fewer than 65 of the 193 member states of the UN are considered as ‘high warning,’ ‘alert,’ or ‘high alert’ by the 2015 Fragile States Index, while only 53 are rated ‘very sustainable’ through ‘stable.’ What this tells us is that the set of states capable of effective security partnership is quite small.

What’s the Problem?

State fragility or failure are endemic and invite a range of illicit actors, including international terrorists, globally networked insurgents, and TCOs. Their presence and operations keep states weak and incapable of effective partnership. Illicit organizations and their networks both engender and feed

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corruption that erodes state legitimacy and the confidence of the governed in the state as the legitimate guardian of the public interest. These networks penetrate the state, leading to state capture, and even criminal sovereignty. A growing number of weak, failing, captured, and criminal states are creating gaping holes in the global rule-based system of states that we depend on for our security and prosperity.

The last 10 years have seen unprecedented growth in interactivity amongst a wide range of illicit networks, as well as the emergence of hybrid organizations that use methods characteristic of both terror and crime. In a convergence of interests, terrorist organizations collaborate with cartels and trafficking organizations collude with insurgents. International terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, deprived of state funding for their operations, have adapted by engaging energetically in transnational crime to raise funds. Prominent criminal organizations like Los Zetas have adopted the brutal symbolic violence of terrorists—the propaganda of the deed—to secure their ‘turf.’ And networked insurgents, such as the FARC, or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, mutated from insurgency to both crime and terror.

The unimpeded trajectory of these trends—state capture, convergence, and hybridization—poses substantial risks to the national security interests of the U.S. and threaten international security. Illicit networked organizations are challenging the fundamental principles of sovereignty that undergird the international system. Fragile and failing states are at the same time prey to such organizations, which feed on them like parasites, and act as homes for them, incapable of supporting effective security partnerships. The Westphalian, rule-based system of sovereign polities itself is at risk of fraying over the long run, as fewer capable states survive to meet these challenges, and populations around the world lose faith in the Westphalian paradigm.

The Westphalian system is relatively new, and though well-tested and resilient over several centuries, its long-term survivability cannot be assumed. Alternative futures are imaginable. This chapter describes the phenomena I refer to as ‘convergence,’ the interactivity and hybridization of diverse illicit networks, and the conventional remedies employed by the international community to counter these trends. The chapter then examines dystopian visions of a world in which these trajectories go indefinitely unimpeded. It concludes by discussing emerging and disturbing new networks and patterns of interactivity and possible countermeasures to be explored.

Clash and Convergence

The conventional wisdom informs us that TCOs and international terrorist organizations are unlikely candidates for partnership. Criminals, driven by the venal pursuit of wealth in defiance of law, morality, or ideology, have little interest in the struggles, violence, or risks taken by international terrorists. The very last thing they desire is to be pursued by Navy SEALs or the CIA. International terrorists and insurgents, on the other hand, are driven by ideological or nationalistic motives, and repelled by the vulgar materialism and rampant greed of criminals. They have no desire to get on the radar of the DEA or other national or international law enforcement agencies. This logic is understandable, indeed rational, and may have prevailed in previous times, but the present chapter will argue that the evidence of extensive interconnectivity—if not explicit partnership—between TCOs, international terrorists, and globally networked insurgents is compelling. If the separation of these diverse types of organizations and networks was ever as completely hermetic as the conventional wisdom suggests, that separation is a quaint anachronism from a bygone era.

Yet there are still some who remain skeptical of these linkages despite a growing literature exposing such connectivity. Regardless of the nature of their motivations and relationships, evidence suggests these interactions have reached unprecedented levels. Recent research undertaken at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point reveals that, “criminals and terrorists are largely subsumed (98 percent) in a single network as opposed to operating in numerous smaller networks.”¹ The six degrees of separation that once may have divided people is a relic of the past—international terrorists, insurgents, and criminals are merely a telephone call from each other.

Though the evidence of their connectivity is now overwhelming, we remain largely in the dark regarding the nature of their agreements or arrangements. We lack the telephone intercepts or written documents describing these connections. Some relationships are better understood than others. For example, it is known that in 1998 Ayman al-Zawahiri’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization merged with Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, because the two organizations respectively wished for the new relationship to be known. Other relationships, such as between the FARC and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are opaque because neither organization has an interest in revealing the relationship. According to a DEA spokesman,

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roughly half of the Department of State's 59 officially designated foreign terrorist organizations have been linked to the global drug trade.²

Are they merging or working in partnerships? Are their partnerships simply 'marriages of convenience,' or 'one-time deals?' There is some risk in mirror-imaging—i.e., expecting these illicit networks and organizations to mimic the kinds of relationships we find among legal, formal organizations. We often hear that illicit organizations operate like ordinary businesses motivated by similar sets of incentives. I disagree with that characterization. There is a fundamental qualitative difference between companies motivated by the quest for profit through legal means, and organizations that cheat, extort, even murder to achieve their goals, whether those goals are monetary or ideological. Though terrorists, insurgents, and criminals may operate under codes of conduct, 'agreements among thieves,' or other informal rules of engagement, we should not expect to find codified relationships or agreements. They operate clandestinely under constant threat of exposure, capture, or death. Illicit networks and organizations operate outside of our paradigm.

Nothing New Under the Sun

Some argue that terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime have existed throughout history, and that their modern iterations represent nothing unprecedented. This seems naive—modern enablers such as information and communication technology, transportation advances, and fabulous volumes of money are game-changers. They permit illicit actors to avail themselves of lethal technology, military-grade weaponry, real-time information, and professional services of the highest quality, including legal, accounting, technological, and security services. Cartels and gangs, as well as terrorists, and some insurgents can now outman, outspend, and outgun the formal governments of the countries where they reside. Illicit actors can communicate across the globe in real-time, using widely available and inexpensive technology. The November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attackers used satellite phones, Internet communications, and global positioning systems, under the direction of Pakistan-based handlers.³ Furthermore international travel has never been easier or cheaper than it is today. Would-be terrorists, traffickers, launderers, even assassins can fly from continent to continent nearly undetected in the sea of traveling humanity. This was not the case in the past.

But How Big of a Problem is This?

Part of the challenge in understanding illicit organizations and networks is their purposeful opacity. Operating by definition and intention outside the vision of regulators or researchers, their activities and revenues are hidden. So how do we determine the magnitude of their operations, or the harm they cause? How do we know the value of their transactions? We extrapolate from extremely inexact evidence, such as seizures, arrests, convictions and the associated testimony of witnesses, often themselves members of such organizations and motivated to dissemble.

When estimating the dollar value of global illicit markets, many commentators rely on the now nearly 20-year-old International Monetary Fund (IMF) consensus range; the figures \$1 to 3 trillion, or 2 to 5 percent of global product have been circulating since 1998 when Michel Camdessus, then managing director of the IMF, gave that estimate for the amount of money laundered globally each year. Given what we know about global trafficking in drugs, persons, weapons, counterfeits, and other contraband, it seems unlikely that the dollar value of illicit trade has decreased over the past 20 years. Even at a mere 2 to 5 percent of global product, Camdessus described the magnitude of the problem nearly 20 years ago as “almost beyond imagination ...”⁴

Less difficult but more visceral to calculate is the cost in human lives of global terrorism. The year 2014 saw an increase of 35 percent in the number of terrorist attacks globally, with total fatalities rising to nearly 33,000 by some counts,⁵ not to mention non-fatal injuries, the destruction of families and communities, and the economic costs. These cannot be monetized, but few would deny that the opportunity cost of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has been huge. The Iraqi Freedom component of GWOT alone has been estimated to have cost as much as \$3.5 trillion, or nearly 6 percent of global product.

Simply for illustrative purposes, if we add these two sets of costs using these estimates—the global illicit market plus the costs associated with the Iraqi Freedom portion of GWOT—the sum is \$6.5 trillion, or nearly 11 percent of global product. Admittedly these estimates are notional and there is no claim to scientific accuracy, but they seem credible—and staggering. Just consider the opportunity cost if one-tenth of human activity is dedicated to transnational crime and terrorism. Then add to this the cost of networked

insurgencies to such countries as Afghanistan, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and South Sudan.

Why is this Our Problem?

Converging illicit networks pose a direct challenge to sovereignty, rendering states unable to effectively govern their territory or borders, let alone exercise a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, or provide other vital public services. A cursory examination of a few key states shows the toll illicit networks take on our national security interests. The cost is imposed at three levels: the inability of states to govern their populations and territories creates seedbeds for international terrorism, networked insurgency, and transnational crime, causing immense human suffering; state fragility and instability frequently have a regional spillover effect, sometimes penetrating key U.S. allies and partners; and growing feral regions serve as launch pads for attacks on U.S. national security interests, as well as potentially direct attacks on the homeland, such as occurred on 9/11.

Some of our most important national security partners and potential partners are states in critical condition largely due to the imprecations of illicit networks. Though Mexico's death rate has subsided considerably over the past two years, the wars between the narcotics cartels and the state authorities, and between the cartels themselves, are thought to have caused over 60,000 deaths between 2006 and 2012, or an average of nearly 10,000 per year. With our most populous immediate neighbor experiencing casualties like that, it is no wonder Mexico has been an exporter of insecurity. Mexican cartels today work hand-in-hand with the criminal gangs of Central America's Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—which as a result is experiencing some of the highest homicide rates in the world. El Salvador's official forensic unit estimates the homicide rate in 2014 at nearly 70 per 100,000. Despite their collaborative intentions these countries are under such duress that their security partnership contributions cannot yet inspire confidence. Indeed, last year 50,000 unaccompanied children from Central America made their way through Mexico seeking entry to the United States, presenting a significant foreign policy challenge.

Nigeria is a key potential security partner for the U.S. in Africa. The most populous African nation with the largest economy, and a major oil exporter, Nigeria could and should play a stabilizing role throughout the continent.

Nigerian forces were critical in staunching the civil wars that hemorrhaged West Africa in the 1990s and 2000s. Yet today Nigeria is hobbled by the burgeoning Boko Haram insurgency in the north, and the resurgent gang insurgency in the Niger Delta region. Moreover, the Boko Haram scourge has bled into neighboring Niger and Cameroon, and its shrouded connections with al-Shabaab in Somalia and AQIM in Mali threaten a continent-wide insurgency.

At various times both Iraq and Afghanistan have been spoken of as U.S. national and international security partners. Indeed as noted above, the United States invested trillions of dollars to bolster the capacity of these two partners, yet today it is hard to imagine either state as an effective security partner. Afghanistan today struggles to survive the combined attacks of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Haqqani networks, and now the Islamic State. Although the government of Afghanistan remains a partner in the sense that it welcomes U.S. engagement, its effectiveness as a security partner remains questionable. The future of Iraq is equally unclear as the Iraqi military fights the Islamic State, but depends on Kurdish and Shi'a non-state militias. As of this writing, it is impossible to say that either Afghanistan or Iraq has been stabilized such that it will not provide a base for terrorist groups planning attacks against the United States in the near future.

But Things are Getting Better, Right? Not!

The death spiral in Mexico appears to have subsided—for the moment. Colombia has recovered from its near-death experience at the end of the 20th century, and is today even an exporter of security. But these are isolated cases—proof of concept that effective remedial action can reverse the assault on sovereignty by converging illicit networks. In other regions things are getting worse, not better.

Above, I mentioned connections between Boko Haram in Nigeria, and both al-Shabaab in Somalia and AQIM in the Sahel region. Though the nature or extent of these connections is not transparent, what is clear is that when these groups desire to communicate, collaborate, coordinate, and collude, they are able to do so. Joint training, learning, and sharing of experience are certainly likely, if not yet joint operations. Moreover, the known connection between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda, and allegedly to the Islamic State, provides an Asia-Africa terrorism conduit, while the AQIM-FARC

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relationship extends the conduit from Africa to the Western Hemisphere. Converging illicit networks pose a direct challenge to sovereignty, rendering states unable to effectively govern their territory or borders, let alone exercise a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, or provide other vital public services.

The Northern Triangle of Central America, composed of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, has become a highway for traffickers, primarily of drugs from the producing areas of South America to the consuming areas of North America—but also of weapons, humans, and other illicitly traded commodities. Criminal gangs, originally formed in the prisons of California, have proliferated and metastasized throughout the sub-region, bringing with them their unique brand of tattooed violence, resulting in the world's highest homicide rates. In El Salvador, a 2012 truce agreement between the incarcerated chiefs of MS-13 and Calle 18, resulted in a substantial reduction in the homicide rate, begging the question, "Who exercises sovereign power in El Salvador?" How and with whom can we forge an effective security partnership?

Equally if not more disturbing than the growing power of non-state illicit groups is the collusion between such groups and rogue elements of sovereign states, such as Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, long known to support the Taliban and Haqqani networks. Iran's Quds Force, a special forces unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, has been both directly engaged in terrorist acts around the world, and supportive of other terrorist organizations. More ominously in 2011, the Quds Force attempted to smuggle an assassin into the United States for the purpose of killing the Saudi Arabian ambassador in a plot referred to as the "Iran assassination plot."⁶ The most disturbing aspect of this case was the attempt by the Quds Force to collaborate with the Los Zetas cartel organization in this effort. That this plan was intercepted by the vigilant DEA is extremely fortunate—at this particular moment in time, with the extreme tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and between Sunni and Shi'a throughout the Islamic world, the consequences of the intended assassination are difficult to imagine. One need only consider the consequences of a diplomatic assassination that took place in Sarajevo a century ago to put this into perspective.⁷ This effort by the Quds Force to collaborate with Los Zetas, now fully documented in U.S. case law, demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt, the potential collusion of terror organizations with criminal organizations.

There are in addition certain states apparently willing to tolerate and even directly engage in criminal and terror activity, utilizing the toolkit of international statecraft in the effort. Venezuela, for example, has utilized diplomatic pouch privileges, passport issuance, and a variety of other diplomatic tools to support criminal and terror activity.⁸ North Korea has long been known as a hub of illicit activity allegedly including smuggling, counterfeit trade, production of controlled substances, illegal weapons trafficking, and money laundering. Pyongyang's infamous Room 39 is thought to generate between \$500 million and \$1 billion per year from such illicit activities.⁹

Could Things Get Any Worse?

As comforting as it would be to believe things cannot get any worse, such faith would be naive. Today the Islamic State's assault on Syria and Iraq is being vigorously resisted by a coalition that includes many American partner countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, and Bahrain, among others. Imagine a world in which the U.S. had no capable partners. American troops would be required wherever and whenever a national security interest was threatened overseas. No partners in Central America would mean that should state failure in the region result in a threat to the control of the Panama Canal, U.S. troops would be required to restore or maintain safe transit through the canal. No capable partners in Africa would mean U.S. boots on the ground to combat al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and AQIM.

Already the world has closed in to an extent on the domain of freedom. Many countries in which it was safe for a Westerner to travel only a generation ago, are now off limits to prudent travelers. Among the 67 casualties of the Westgate Shopping Mall terrorist attack in Kenya in 2013, no fewer than 19 were foreigners of different nationalities. Likewise, the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, resulted in the deaths of 28 foreign nationals from 10 countries, out of the total of 164 dead. Though statistically such events should not necessarily deter anyone from visiting Kenya or India, taking appropriate precautions, they indicate a world in which it has become less safe for Americans to travel.

There is also the vital question of global trade and commercial activity. Total trade (exports and imports) accounted for 30 percent of U.S. GDP in 2013, supporting 11.3 million jobs.¹⁰ For the most part, we trade with our

partners. When a partner succumbs to the corruption and social morbidity of illicit networks, its economic capacity is diminished, rendering it a less valuable trading partner. Imagine the growth potential of a Central America free of gang violence and cartel trafficking.

Is There Any Hope?

If the 20th century was consumed by the global struggle between incompatible ideologies, fascism, communism, and democratic capitalism, the 21st century will be consumed by the epic struggle to create and sustain viable and effective states. Viable, effective states are the only form of collective governance that has a proven ability to contain and reverse a trajectory of growing entropy driven in part by illicit networks. States have successfully fought off powerful illicit adversaries in all regions of the globe, from Colombia in South America to the Philippines in Asia. Some authors have argued that the state itself is a significant contributor to growing global entropy, and that is likely true.¹¹ Yet effective, viable states have enabled great prosperity and security, and alternatives to state-based governance are few.

State building regrettably has been discredited over the past two decades.¹² Both the cost and difficulty inherent in a realistic approach to state-building have soured policymakers and budget-setters to the proposition of trying to stand up states. Indeed the epic state-building failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, where budgets were unprecedentedly large, have proven to many the futility of the effort and the concept. It is true that coalition efforts to build effective, viable states in Iraq and Afghanistan failed, and before that were the archetypal failures in Somalia and Haiti. These failures were not inevitable. There are numerous examples of successful state-building efforts, including South Korea, The Republic of China (Taiwan), Singapore, and Colombia (a successful case of state-rebuilding), among others. Many of these began their trajectory toward democracy with periods, even prolonged periods, of autocratic rule—a fact we must seriously consider.

We do know from considerable experience that state building is an arduous, labor-intensive, and time consuming task. There is extensive literature on the subject, and widely diverging views on how it should be done, but virtual unanimity regarding the intensiveness of the process.¹³ What does state-building consist of? Though far from a science—still more alchemy than chemistry at this stage—there are a few principles that draw wide agreement.

Above all, the state must establish a secure and stable environment for public and private life. Famously prescribed by Max Weber as the singular defining attribute of a state, “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”¹⁴ Importantly, Weber specified the legitimacy of the use of force. No state has or can enjoy a complete monopoly of the use of force—nor would we necessarily want it to. However for the use of force to be legitimate it must be sanctioned by the state. Historically the state use of force has been conceived as a responsibility to protect citizens from external aggressors, though in many cases the state itself has been an aggressor. This unpleasant reality has recently been addressed by a growing acknowledgment that the state’s responsibility for security extends beyond its own survival to its population—hence the emerging concept of ‘human security.’

Establishing a monopoly of the legitimate use of force in a territory is no mean feat, and cannot be accomplished by brutal methods without sacrificing the legitimacy that is essential to effective governance. There are numerous U.S. Government programs that provide assistance, training, equipping, mentoring, and other supports to partner governments, both military and civilian agencies, for the purpose of BPC. No amount of training and equipping, however, can substitute for the social contract between government and governed necessary to establish and sustain legitimacy. This must be achieved by our partners. In this our role can only be to help them identify methods, techniques, best practices (to the extent we know them), and lessons to enable their success. Controlling the use of force within sovereign territory, either directly or through delegation, is an essential function of a viable state.

The application of force in society must be bound by the rule of law, another critical responsibility of the state. The state must establish the rule of law and mechanisms for articulation, adjudication, and redress of grievances. Doing so provides methods for the resolution of social and other disputes within society, provides predictability necessary for commerce, and ensures the security of citizens. The rule of law is not just a question of constitutions or statutes, though they form the legal framework in any country. It also requires that citizens have access to the law and the institutions of justice, and that they are not excluded from legal recourse by cost, language, distance, or identity. Under a genuine rule of law, the state itself is also subject to the law and cannot operate outside the law or the legal

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system. This includes prohibiting and punishing corruption especially within government agencies both civilian and military.

In order to execute its required functions effectively and sustainably the state must invest in and upgrade human capital. It must create a reliable and competent civil service to administer official state functions and manage state assets. It must also provide a social and security environment conducive to education and public health. A professional civil service, including administrators, diplomats, and a range of support personnel necessary to operate complex systems is required to assume the full spectrum of governmental responsibilities.

The state must develop systems, human resources, and institutional mechanisms for raising revenue, securing state financing, and managing state assets. No state can operate effectively without a stable and predictable revenue stream sufficient to meet the costs of its obligations. There is controversy over what a state's obligations are and vast variation among states; but whatever obligations compose the social contract between government and governed must be within the financial means of the state. Taxation and regulation of commercial and financial activity is a responsibility only appropriate for the state. A banking system capable of interaction in the global financial network is beyond the capabilities of the private sector.

The degree to which the state must or should be involved in commercial activity is debatable, and indeed subject of wide historical debate that has generated large and powerful intellectual and political schools of thought on the subject. There is, though, a degree of consensus on the state's responsibility with respect to creating an environment in which citizens' economic needs are met. The debate is over the balance of responsibility for meeting those needs within a conducive environment. According to the prevailing contemporary wisdom, the state should enable individual economic and commercial innovation, bearing only a modest responsibility beyond that through taxation and limited redistributive programs.

Critical to state sustainability is an inclusive national narrative promoting citizenship. While not the exclusive responsibility of the state, typically only the state has access to the nationwide communication systems required to disseminate strategic messaging about national issues. The drafting and adoption of a national constitution can contribute to an inclusive national narrative, as can elections. These can be divisive, but the craft of statesmanship is being able to manage and utilize such formal processes in support of

the national interest. The willingness of citizens to pay taxes to the state is contingent upon an inclusive national narrative and a social contract that citizens accept. An effective state penetrates most aspects of public life, including education, public health, commerce, and dispute resolution among many others. It can use those platforms to further the forging of an inclusive national narrative. This requires high standards of leadership, without which no state will succeed in any case.

The state must also create accessible mechanisms for interaction between civil society and the state. Robust civil society encourages associative behavior conducive to social capital and enables citizens to pursue their interests equitably amidst the competing interests within any state. The state cannot form or create civil society, but it can communicate and interact transparently and responsively with civil society organizations. Furthermore it can provide and secure the political space needed for their operations.

While this is merely a notional short-list of state responsibilities and functions (of which there are many more), and described in a summary manner, my intent is to emphasize the centrality of the state to sustaining the rule-based world order. A world without order is a frightening prospect that recalls Hobbes' characterization of the natural state of mankind before government is established as "every man against every man," and a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

SOF to the Rescue

What does all this have to do with us? SOF have unique capabilities and strengths that can help meet the sovereignty challenges facing our partner states. In many of these states the military is the institution most respected by citizens, and considered most capable. In some cases, armed forces as a subset of the population are better educated than nonmilitary cohorts. They typically consist of individuals who have made a commitment to serve the country. According to retired Admiral Dennis Blair, "The great majority of officers first put on the uniform to protect their country and its citizens ..."¹⁵ The armed forces importantly have the critical mass necessary to accomplish ambitious goals that extend throughout the state.

What is often lacking in our partner states is a collegial and congenial relationship between citizens and their own armed forces. Armed forces are frequently cantoned away from the general population, and form an isolated

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community within their own society. SOF are trained to work with civilians, and can tap that strength, working with their counterparts to build skills required to work effectively with civilians. Linda Robinson, of the RAND Corporation, writes that one strength, “is developing and working alongside indigenous forces to combat terrorists, insurgents, and transnational criminal networks through an orchestrated set of defense, information, and civil affairs programs.”¹⁶

While supporting partner armed forces and law enforcement agencies in neutralizing key criminal, insurgent, and terrorist leaders, SOF can also help these armed forces build bonds with society at large. Robinson states:

special operations forces may engage in nonlethal activities such as dispute resolution at the village level, the collecting or disseminating of information, or civil affairs projects such as medical or veterinary aid and building schools or wells. Persuasion and influence are part of many of these operations, and the long-term effect is to build relationships and partnerships that endure.¹⁷

What she doesn’t write, but is consistent with the principle of BPC, is the value of transferring the skills associated with civilian-military relationships to our partner forces. Helping our partners build relationships and their own civilian-military partnerships that endure is one of the ways in which SOF can help meet the challenge of strengthening states.

A Lot to Lose

The Westphalian system of autonomous, sovereign states, interacting according to a set of universally understood norms and rules have always been at best an aspiration—never fully accomplished even in Europe, let alone the world beyond. Yet the concept of a rule-based system of sovereign states has contributed to a world in which successfully consolidated and integrated states have flourished. In the 367 years since the Peace of Westphalia established this rule-based system based on sovereign equality, the world has experienced an unprecedented surge across a range of quality of life indicators; life expectancy has surged from below 40 to over 70 years; per capita GDP increased from around \$600 to over \$10,000 per year; literacy has increased from less than 10 percent to over 80 percent of the global population.

It may be that other organizing principles for political activity are superior to the Westphalian state, but such alternatives are not evident. Throughout previous millennia political life was governed by such governing structures as tribes, clans, fiefdoms, kingdoms, empires, cities-states, and religions. These organizing principles did not prove to be effective or competitive in the modern world, and in most regions gave way to state structures. In the 20th century Vladimir Lenin tried to establish a political order based on economic class, with catastrophic effect.

For lack of a better alternative, the rule-based system of states in which the U.S., among many others, has flourished in recent centuries, is well worth saving. Its current condition should be a matter of profound concern among any interested in the 'long-term.' Converging illicit networks threaten that system, and must be countered if the system is to survive the current generation intact. The first step must be to recognize and acknowledge the nature and magnitude of the threat.

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