Transnational Organized Crime
An Insidious Threat to U.S. National Security Interests

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Over the past several years, U.S. officials have begun paying more attention to the insidious threat of transnational organized crime in the western hemisphere and its potential effect on U.S. national security. While senior officials who are on the front lines tasked to stop the negative trends are calling for increased vigilance and support to end these destructive developments, competing priorities on U.S. policymakers are resulting in unfocused efforts to develop a whole of government approach against these criminal elements. The U.S. intelligence and law enforcement communities have had some successes against these bad actors, but as a whole, criminal elements continue to grow in power and resources, and concerning anecdotal information indicates, terrorist groups may be using some of the same criminal middlemen to help them move funds, goods, and people as the transnational organized crime (TOC) groups are using. The time has come for a serious government wide implementation of the administration’s TOC strategy, before we face a tragedy in the homeland that is supported or perpetrated by these transnational criminal elements. Because the threat crosses intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and military jurisdictions and is truly global, a new U.S. government paradigm is needed to insure a focused effort against the problem. This requires one focal point with the authority to put an operational plan together that crosses all stovepipes and can work domestic and international issues – the bad actors do not care about borders and they cross our organizational seams. It also makes sense to start this work closest to home – in Latin America. This article will lay out the nuances of the burgeoning relationship between criminal elements and terrorist groups in the western hemisphere in an attempt to inspire the U.S. national security establishment to take action.

There is no doubt that transnational organized crime, especially in the western hemisphere, has grown over the past ten years. This growth is an unintended consequence of open borders, globalization, and technology that allows individuals to communicate, and to move funds, goods,
Terrorists and insurgents will increasingly turn to crime and criminal networks for funding and logistics, in part because of U.S. and Western success in attacking other sources of their funding.²

Transnational criminal activity is among the most concerning soft threats to U.S. national security. It undermines our financial institutions, our laws, and our national morals. The money alone involved in this activity easily corrupts small governments; and it can corrupt large corporations and larger, more stable governments if left unchecked. Over time, the simultaneous phenomena of globalization and success against state sponsors of terrorism have resulted in terrorist groups and transnational organized crime groups relying on the same middle men, or facilitators and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to make their activities happen. Thus, we are seeing a convergence that transcends ideology and is weighted in the practical. This convergence of criminal elements with terrorist groups could make both groups more powerful.

Again, this is not a new phenomenon and it is a trend national security professionals have been pointing out for years, especially in Latin America. Ambassador Taylor described
this convergence trend to Congress in October 2001. He spoke about the Triborder Region (Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay) as an area where Hezbollah was heavily involved with criminal activities to include document forg- ing, money laundering, contraband smuggling, and weapons and drug trafficking. According to a report written for the Brazilian security agencies in 2001, organized crime networks were increasing their influence in the triborder area of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina back then. These criminal groups, according to the report, offered aid to Middle Eastern terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad, which totaled $261 million. The report claimed these criminal groups are active in Paraguay and along the drug trafficking route from Colombia to the United States and Europe. The report noted that most of these clandestine operations take place in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, considered a regional center for drug trafficking and arms smuggling. The transactions mostly involve bartering drugs for weapons from Colombian armed rebel groups.

In a similar vein, in 2009, then National Security Advisor General James L. Jones, USMC, Ret. warned of the TOC threats to international security and urged immediate international action, saying:

In a world full of transnational threats, transnational crime is in an ascendant phase... This lethal nexus of organized crime, narcotrafficking, and terrorism is a threat...

To address the growing threat, in 2011 the Obama White House issued a strategy to counter transnational crime. The strategy says that, international—or transnational—organized crime has expanded dramatically in size, scope, and influence and that it poses a significant threat to national and international security. In the introduction to this strategy, President Obama writes:

...criminal networks are not only expanding their operations, but they are also diversifying their activities, resulting in a convergence of transnational threats that has evolved to become more complex, volatile, and destabilizing. These networks also threaten U.S. interests by forging alliances with corrupt elements of national governments and using the power and influence of those elements to further their criminal activities.
Director of National intelligence, James Clapper recently declared before a Senate committee that transnational criminal organizations, particularly those from Latin America, were an “abiding threat to U.S. economic and national security interests.” He also highlighted the intelligence community’s concern that these groups may develop ties with both terrorist organizations and foreign governments.\(^\text{13}\)

Over the past ten years that we have been discussing the convergence of crime and terrorism, the relationships have become more complicated and seemingly entrenched. According to the 2015 U.S. National Security strategy, the increasing interdependence of the global economy and rapid pace of technological change are linking individuals, groups, and governments in unprecedented ways. The strategy explains that these phenomenon “create shared vulnerabilities, as interconnected systems and sectors are susceptible to the threats of… transnational terrorism and crime.”\(^\text{14}\) As national security specialist Doug Farah points out, “As relationships consolidate, the recombinant criminal-terrorist pipelines become more rooted and thus more dangerous.”\(^\text{15}\)

Senior officials have gone further. During his testimony before congress earlier this year General John Kelly, USMC said:

*In my opinion, the relative ease with which human smugglers [from Central America] move tens of thousands of people to our nation’s doorstep also serves as another warning sign: these smuggling routes are a potential vulnerability to our homeland. As I stated last year, terrorist organizations could seek to leverage those same smuggling routes to move operatives with intent to cause grave harm to our citizens or even bring weapons of mass destruction into the United States.*\(^\text{16}\)

However, resources focused on transnational crime and the area of the world where most of the criminal activity that directly affects the U.S. takes place, Latin America and the Caribbean, continue to be cut. Implausibly, senior decisionmakers consider Latin America as a low threat environment, even as the President sets out a strategy and numerous senior officials lay out the national security threat that emanates largely from this region.

To be sure, the idea of TOC/terrorist convergence remains controversial. The naysayers of this threat are largely characterized by those who want the threat to go away. They point out the lack of consistent information or events that prove there is ongoing convergence. However, as Farah explains, “the clandestine nature of criminal and terrorist activities, designed to be as opaque as possible,… [means] whatever is known of specific operations along the criminal-terrorist pipeline, or whatever combinations of links are seen, represents merely a snapshot in time, not a video of continuing events.”\(^\text{17}\)

While there may be limited evidence of true convergence (the FARC in Colombia is a clear example of convergence of terrorism and criminals), the preponderance of activities that we can identify shows terrorists imitating the criminal behavior they see around them, borrowing techniques such as credit card fraud and extortion. Louise Shelley and other specialists in this area refer to this phenomenon as activity appropriation, “a shared approach rather than true interaction.”\(^\text{18}\) Additionally, terrorist groups are using some of the same middlemen as TOC groups to obtain the
revenue and logistical support they need. This will be laid out later in this paper.

As far as activity appropriation goes, what we are seeing is a nexus of activities as opposed to a nexus of organizations. Activity convergence occurs when terrorists use criminal activities or criminals use terrorist tactics in pursuit of their respective political and economic ends. For a myriad of reasons, TCOs and terrorists are using the same methods and, in some cases, the same individuals to sustain their organizations, make money, and support their activities.

**A Clear National Security Threat**

In January 2010, the U.S. government concluded that between 1995 and 2009 transnational organized crime had expanded dramatically in size and scope. The core of this activity takes place in the northern areas of Latin America where proceeds from drug trafficking are making criminals rich or, in some cases, allowing them to feed their families. Illicit activities such as drugs, arms, contraband, and human trafficking are nothing new, however, their scale and associated violence as a result of globalization have made these transnational crimes a national security concern. The UN has stated that organized crime threatens peace and human security, violates human rights, and undermines economic, social, cultural, political, and civil development of societies around the world. Furthermore, the vast sums of money involved can compromise legitimate economies and directly impact public processes by “buying” elections through corruption.

The vastness of U.S. borders make them vulnerable to anyone or anything that is determined to cross them. Illicit traffickers make their living by learning U.S. border vulnerabilities and helping their customers use those weaknesses to move their goods through the borders. Last year, almost half a million migrants from Central America were apprehended on the U.S.-Mexico border. Most paid middle men to help them get to the U.S. The repercussions of weak border control go beyond migration issues. ISIL has directly identified this as a U.S. vulnerability. In 2014, ISIL adherents posted discussions on social media calling for the infiltration of the U.S. southern border. The May 2015 issue of Dabiq, the English language ISIL periodical, highlighted the possibility of ISIL moving WMD materials through global drug trafficking routes into the U.S. from Mexico.

Over time, and with the advent of a globalized world, organized crime has diversified, gone global, and reached macro-economic proportions. Illicit goods may be sourced from one continent, trafficked across another, and marketed in a third. Transnational organized crime permeates government agencies and institutions, fueling corruption, infiltrating business and politics, and hindering economic and social development. The UN says that it is undermining governance and democracy by empowering those who operate outside the law. There is no reason to think that this cannot happen in the U.S.. Fighting these illicit networks is no longer about drugs, counterfeits, weapons, terrorists, or insurgents. It is about defending the integrity of the system of viable sovereign states and the fundamental structure of global order.

TOC networks are a threat; not a force on force threat, but one that is more insidious and transcends borders. These borderless groups infiltrate government institutions to create, for themselves, space from which to carry out illicit activities. “TOC networks insinuate
themselves into the political process in a variety of ways. This is often accomplished through direct bribery; setting-up shadow economies, infiltrating financial and security sectors,..., and positioning themselves as alternate providers of governance, security, services, and livelihoods.” These networks threaten to destabilize governments not by direct means, but through behind the scenes attempts to gain space to develop their illegal businesses. Moises Naim talks about how criminal elements are gaining political influence as well as wealth and connecting remote places of the planet with the most cosmopolitan cities in his book, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy*. This money and power is what threatens U.S. national security. There is not a clear military threat, but a threat that is more concerning, a slow corruption of our systems and morals, that if left unchecked, will make us vulnerable to the whims of undemocratic powers and erode the institutions, rules, and laws that we hold dear. What makes this threat even more concerning is that others – state and nonstate anti-American actors – could undermine U.S. institutions. This is the fight that some governments in Latin America are facing today.

**The Lure of Transnational Organized Crime Profits**

Illicit trafficking is estimated to be a $6 trillion industry. In its 2010 report, *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that the smuggling of persons from Latin America to the United States generated approximately $6.6 billion annually in illicit proceeds for human smuggling networks. The White House estimates in its 2011 *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime* that money-laundering accounts for $1.3 trillion to $3.3 trillion—or between two and five percent of the world’s GDP. Bribery from TOCs adds close to $1 trillion to that amount, while drug-trafficking generates an estimated $750 billion to $1 trillion, counterfeited and pirated goods add another $500 billion, and illicit firearms sales generate from $170 billion to $320 billion. This totals some $6.2 trillion—10 percent of the world’s GDP, placing it behind only the United States and the European Union, but well ahead of China, in terms of global GDP ranking. Other estimates of global criminal proceeds range from a low of about four percent to a high of 15 percent of global GDP. The value of cocaine trade alone to criminal networks in Latin America is more than the gross domestic product of every country in the region except Brazil. These estimates are at least four years old and trends show transnational organized crime groups and networks have been growing in power and wealth since these figures were published.

The effect of transnational organized crime groups on Latin America is devastating; public insecurity is pervasive there. TOC collaboration is especially important in vulnerable countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, where government institutions are threatened by criminal syndicates. To further complicate the criminal landscape in the region, add the role of gangs. In nearly every country in the region, polls have shown that the population considers personal security as its number one concern. Across Latin America, murder rates are generally higher than they were ten years ago and the region has the highest murder rate in the world. El Salvador is currently experiencing the highest homicide rates.
it has had since its civil war, thanks largely to gang wars.

The lines between transnational gang activity and organized crime are increasingly blurry. While most street gangs lack the organizational structure, capital, and manpower required to run sophisticated global criminal schemes or to penetrate state institutions at high levels, a few (such as the MS-13 and the M-18) have become more highly organized. Analysts argue that some gangs in the region may be evolving into “third generation” gangs that are “internationalized, networked, and complicated structures.” In other words, they cross borders. They are directly tied to the same northern tier states in Central America that are exhibiting increased illicit trafficking activity and these gangs have direct links to the U.S.

Today, MS-13 and M-18 engage in a variety of criminal activities, and are largely unaffected by law enforcement in Latin America. They continue to expand and refine their violent criminal activities. Although the actual percentage of homicides that can be attributed to gangs in Central America remains controversial, the gangs have unquestionably been involved in a broad array of criminal activities. Those activities include kidnapping, human trafficking, and drug, auto, and weapons smuggling. Gangs are involved in extortions of residents, bus drivers, and business owners in major cities throughout the region. Failure to pay often results in harassment or violence by gang members. In 2010, gangs reportedly killed 130 Guatemalan bus drivers and 53 bus toll collectors. In October 2012, the U.S. Treasury Department put MS-13 on its list of designated Transnational Organized Crime Groups pursuant to Executive Order 13581. The Supreme Court in El Salvador has even labeled any gang that tries to take power from the state – including the notorious MS-13 – a terrorist group; earlier this year, the Salvadoran government called on its military to secure bus drivers after gangs shut down the bus system.

Protestors took to the street of Medellin with giant banners, voicing their outrage against the FARC.
in San Salvador by threatening violence against the busses.

The Nexus: The Facilitators

Over time, it is only natural that those involved in disparate activities across the illicit universe will begin to establish working relationships. What the transnational organized crime groups and terrorists have in common is the need for support mechanisms to accomplish their activities. These are individuals or small groups who specialize in areas such as document fraud, and moving goods or money. Understanding these networks or supply chains helps us understand the links between TOC and terrorist groups. Major crime groups such as Mexican cartels or Colombia’s FARC contract with smaller, local criminal organizations, or vetted individuals that move goods across borders, dispatch legal support, or perform a myriad of other activities needed to run the big organizations these groups oversee. Increasingly, terrorist groups also need assistance in laundering money, obtaining travel documents, etc. The individuals involved with these activities are important elements of the network, in some cases, the glue that keeps the network moving, but little is known about them. These pipelines, or chains of networks, are adaptive and able to move a multiplicity of illicit products (coca, weapons, humans, and bulk cash) that ultimately cross U.S. borders undetected thousands of times each day. The actors along the pipeline form and dissolve alliances quickly, occupy physical and cyber space, and use both highly developed and modern institutions, from the global financial system to ancient smuggling routes and methods. They are middlemen who have little loyalty to one group and often have no aspiration to develop their organization into a major trafficking network. They make a living by moving goods.

Also connecting the converging threats are legitimate players such as accountants, attorneys, notaries, bankers, and real estate brokers, who cross both the licit and illicit worlds and provide services to legitimate customers, criminals, and terrorists alike. The range of licit-illicit relationships is broad. At one end, criminals draw on the public reputations of licit actors to maintain facades of propriety for their operations. At the other end are “specialists” with skills or resources who have been completely subsumed into the criminal networks. For example, TOC networks rely on industry experts, both witting and unwitting, to facilitate corrupt transactions and to create the necessary infrastructure to pursue their illicit schemes, such as creating shell corporations, opening offshore bank accounts in the shell corporation’s name, and creating front businesses for their illegal activity and money laundering. Business owners or bankers are enlisted to launder money, and employees of legitimate companies are used to conceal smuggling operations. Human smugglers, human traffickers, arms traffickers, drug traffickers, terrorists, and other criminals depend on secure transportation networks and safe locations from which to stage smuggling activity or to store bulk cash or narcotics for transport.

The conventional view has been that there are mutual disincentives for terrorists and TCOs to associate. It might be time to re-examine that analytical assumption. Terrorists can tap into the global illicit marketplace to underwrite their activities and acquire weapons and other supplies vital to their operations. Criminals, in their search for profits, will turn
almost anywhere for revenue. The net effect is a crime-terror nexus.

Historically, traditional criminal organizations had specific geographic purviews. This resulted in a sense of nationalism that made working with terrorist groups particularly abhorrent. The new, contemporary transnational terrorist organizations are missing that nationalistic component in their organizations, thus they are more willing to work with whoever will help them make money. This presents a particularly troubling trend among the contemporary TCOs. Also, as states go after the leadership of these TCOs, the groups tend to break up, leaving room for less capable leaders to take over as well as disrupting the tight command and control (C2) that had kept discipline within the TOCs. With less discipline, it is more likely that we will see a criminal organization supporting a terrorist group to move people, money, or goods.

**Where the TOCs and Terrorists Meet**

The presence of all these “bad actors” means, ultimately, there will be a “nexus” between international terrorist organizations and criminal networks. Nexus does not mean the two are working in concert toward a common goal. In most cases, they are not, except for the immediate goal of moving a person or goods or making revenue. The threats are different. In its simplest form, a threat is defined as capability plus intent. Illicit trafficking groups do not currently possess the intent to attack the United States. That is not to say, that TOCs are not dangerous. These organizations possess the firepower to do serious harm if they believe their illicit operations are being hindered and I already laid out the insidious, soft power threat that they pose to our nation. However, given the diffuse nature of both types of networks, transnational criminals could wittingly or more likely unwittingly facilitate terrorist activities. The most likely conduits for this activity are the facilitators who help both TOCs and terrorists move goods and money. They are the nexus between the two organizations.

Terrorists and insurgents increasingly are turning to transnational organized crime to generate funding and acquire logistical support to carry out their actions. The terrorist and extremist groups derive much of their drug-related income from taxation levied for protection of drug growers, laboratories, clandestine landing fields, and transport of drugs or precursor chemicals through “controlled” territory. As of November 2011, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had linked 19 of the 49 organizations of the State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations to the drug trade. The Department of Justice reports that 29 of the 63 organizations on its FY2010 Consolidated Priority Organization Targets list, were associated with terrorist groups. Farah argues that drug trafficking organizations and terrorist groups in the western hemisphere are increasingly using the same intermediaries to obtain arms, launder money, and move illicit products across borders via “terrorist-criminal pipelines.” According to him, these connections are most often temporary associations based primarily on necessity, which are constantly shifting and evolving. Both Hezbollah and drug cartels rely on experts who can easily transfer and legitimize illicit funds internationally and these “super-fixers” (as Farah refers to them) or facilitators as I previously referred to them are driven by economic incentives.

In 2008, U.S. and Colombian authorities dismantled a cocaine smuggling and
money-laundering organization that allegedly helped fund Hezbollah operations. Called Operation Titan, the enforcement effort uncovered a money laundering operation that is suspected of laundering hundreds of millions of dollars of cocaine proceeds a year and paying 12 percent of those profits to Hezbollah. Operation Titan led to more than 130 arrests and the seizure of $23 million.

According to official U.S. Government statements, Hezbollah derives financial benefits from a global commercial network of licit and illicit businesses that not only generates revenue for the organization, but also provides numerous outlets through which illicit funds can be laundered, disguised, and moved. In February 2011, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) designated Lebanese Canadian Bank SAL as a financial institution of primary money laundering concern pursuant to Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act (31 U.S.C. 5318A). In its public notice on the Section 311 finding, FinCEN described the Lebanese Canadian Bank SAL as, “routinely used by drug traffickers and money launderers operating in various countries in Central and South America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East” and asserted that Hezbollah profited from the criminal activities of this global illicit financial network.

On December 15, 2009, Oumar Issa, Harouna Toure, and Idriss Abelrahman were indicted on two counts for their role in a conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute cocaine and conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization (USA v. Issa, 2009). The men were linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and were attempting to work with the FARC to smuggle Colombian cocaine to Europe via West Africa. They were actually dealing with undercover agents, whom they believed to be members of the FARC. A confidential human source was introduced to Issa and began a series of meetings that would lead to the arrest of Issa and two accomplices. The confidential human source identified Issa as a member of a criminal organization that operated in Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali (USA v. Issa, 2009; Markovic, 2011). The indictment stated that the informant met with Issa on September 14, 2009 in Ghana. This meeting was used to plan the logistics of transporting cocaine for the FARC via West Africa to North Africa, with the final destination being the Canary Islands. During this meeting Issa stated that the shipment would have protection provided by AQIM and that they would be able to easily circumvent scrutiny at customs checkpoints in Mali. After this date, there were several phone calls made to arrange the logistics of transporting the cocaine, arranging transfers to Issa through Western Union in Togo. This case illustrates the murky world of facilitators, criminals, and terrorists.

At the pinnacle of the facilitator echelon there is Victor Bout. He is often referred to as one of the world’s most prodigious illicit network facilitators or super fixers—individuals who can help move illicit goods for a price. At one point, he is alleged to have owned an international network of 30 front companies and a fleet of cargo planes. He was an arms trafficker, notorious for his ability to transport practically anything anywhere. Prior to his arrest and eventual conviction in 2011, Bout was widely believed to have had a hand in a range of international contraband smuggling and sanctions-busting activities in Latin America, Africa, southwest Asia, and elsewhere. Both the United Nations and the U.S.
government sought to freeze his assets and Belgium issued an arrest warrant for him in 2002 for crimes related to money laundering and diamond smuggling. He has also been accused of illegally transporting arms to the FARC, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda, while legally providing air freight transport around the world. He was caught in Thailand in 2008 in a DEA sting operation after attempting to sell surface-to-air missiles, AK-47s, ammunition, C-4 plastic explosives, and unmanned aerial vehicles to U.S. confidential sources purporting to be members of the FARC. Bout was ultimately extradited to the United States in November 2010, convicted in November 2011 on four counts, and sentenced to 25 years in prison in April 2012.41

Another key example of the role of a facilitator as the link between criminal groups and terrorist groups is the story of Ayman Joumaa. In January 2011, the U.S. Treasury Department designated Joumaa as a drug kingpin and in June 2012 labeled him as a specially designated global terrorist. In November 2011, the U.S. filed charges against Joumaa. The indictment included details of Hezbollah’s far-reaching network of criminal activities in Latin America and around the globe. According to testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, the DEA investigation of Ayman Joumaa indicated that Hezbollah leaders were involved in smuggling cocaine from South America. Ayman Joumaa was charged with shipping tens of tons of cocaine through Mexico from Colombia to the United States over at least eight years.42 Former DEA senior official Michael Braun stated that the Ayman Joumaa affair was yet another example of how Hezbollah obtained funding through criminal activities. According to the
indictment, Ayman Joumaa had close relations with Hezbollah and was a middleman between Hezbollah and various drug cartels. The indictments went on to say Joumaa coordinated cocaine shipments in connection with the Mexican cartel los Zetas and laundered as much as $200 million per month through bank accounts with Lebanese Canadian Bank SAL and other financial institutions. His South and Central American drug trafficking operations shipped cocaine to the United States as well as to West Africa for further distribution to Europe. Joumaa reportedly paid undisclosed fees to Hezbollah to facilitate the transportation and laundering of narcotics proceeds. For example, for bulk cash movements through Beirut International Airport, Joumaa paid Hezbollah security to safeguard and transport cash. Joumaa also reportedly used trade-based money laundering (TBML) schemes to help conceal and disguise the true source, nature, ownership, and control of the narcotics proceeds. Such schemes involved Asian suppliers of consumer goods as well as used car dealerships in the United States. As part of the U.S. car sales scheme, for example, Hezbollah owned and controlled funds are transferred from Lebanon to the United States via banks, currency exchange houses, and individuals in order to purchase used cars. The cars would be shipped to West Africa and sold for cash. Cash proceeds, in turn, would be transferred to Lebanon through Hezbollah-linked bulk cash smugglers, hawaladars, and currency brokers.

None of the individuals described above appear to be terrorists, but they are associated with terrorist groups. Neither do they fit the definition of a transnational criminal organization. They are the individuals who lead specialty groups to assist other criminals, terrorists, and insurgents in getting what they need. Not all of the middle men are as powerful as a Victor Bout. Most are not. They are an accountant, a lawyer, a money mover, or an individual who has access to transporters who can move people and goods. Most just make a living for their family but some, over time, emerge like a Bout. Powerful and rich.

We are seeing the emergence of the middle men as the most important connecting point between transnational organized crime groups and terrorist groups. Referred to by Doug Farah as the “super fixer.” He describes a small group of super fixers and enablers who allow networks to function and who facilitate global connectivity among illicit networks, including linking criminal and terrorist groups. Not loyal to any single entity or network, they are valuable to multiple, even competing networks. Among the fascinating attributes of these individuals, is their ability to survive regime changes and political upheavals. For them, there is no ideological hurdle to overcome, only business to be done. The importance of super fixers to geopolitics is only likely to increase in the coming years.

The other important component for these super fixers, is the ability to do business in Latin America. You will note, all the above examples have a Latin American nexus. This is because government institutions in Latin America are still developing. It is also because important financial institutions and markets for the illicit goods (drugs) are nearby in the U.S.

Conclusion

The U.S. faces national security threats from borderless groups who are making enormous sums of money, and who conduct their business, raise funds, and look for safe environments wherever they can. By far, the most
concerning of these groups are terrorist organizations which are intent on harming the United States. Also of concern are TOCs that, due to their vast sums of money, are able to act with impunity and undermine governments. Finally, there are those individuals who facilitate the activities of both facilitators and, more concerning, the extremely powerful and rich super fixers who could grow powerful enough to influence governments and terrorists alike. At the most extreme, allowing the current trends to fester and grow increases the likelihood transnational organized crime organizations and terrorist organizations could merge. At the least, it increases the importance and thus the power of “super facilitators” whose personal wealth could easily top that of the majority of the nations in the world given current trends. In addition, allowing these networks and individuals to develop unchecked, threatens the fabric of fledgling democracies and could weaken even strong global democracies.

What is needed is a new paradigm to help us better understand and counter these threats that cross our borders daily. The U.S. government should appoint a leader of an interagency fusion center that can cross traditional policy, law enforcement, and intelligence lines to forge information from all these worlds and then use appropriate U.S. leverage – law enforcement, financial, regulatory, covert, or diplomatic – to stop these trends. This fusion center must be able to work domestically and internationally to follow the “bad guys” wherever they may go. This idea will take new organizational constructs and relationships that are not wedded to parochial U.S. institutional structures. The paradigm must consist of information sharing among all agencies in the U.S. and among its partner nations. Stove piping information helps the enemy. The U.S. government must develop a new prism from which to confront this new type of enemy that has no borders.

In addition, there must be a clear signal from the highest levels of the policymaking community that combatting these dangerous trends is a national security priority. Operators and intelligence professionals have warned the public of the threat for years. The administration has completed the first steps by laying out the issue in the 2015 National Security Strategy and by issuing a Transnational Organized Crime Strategy in 2011. What is needed now is the hard part, corraling all the needed expertise into a focused, comprehensive plan with real deliverables, the power to meet those deliverables, accountability for those deliverables, resources to implement the strategy, and metrics that measure success against this enemy. PRISM
Notes


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


17 Farah (2012).


21 Ibid.


24 Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (2013).


29 Farah (2012).

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


42 U.S. v Ayman Jormaa: Case #1:11-cr-00560-TSE (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia).


45 Miklaucic and Brewer (2013).